



MONASH University

The emergence of social media and the green public sphere in Vietnam

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A thesis submitted for the degree of *Doctor of Journalism* at
Monash University in 2019
(School of Media, Film, and Journalism, Faculty of Arts)

Abstract

This research investigates the emergence of social media and the green public sphere in Vietnam. It explores the multifaceted impacts of social media on green perspectives on politics, economics and society; and discusses five themes relating to the green public sphere in Vietnamese context: (i) why social media enables the formulation of the green public sphere; (ii) how social media and Vietnamese journalism has covered green issues; (iii) the roles of different groups of stakeholders in the green public sphere in Vietnam; (iv) political changes; and (v) changes in journalism under the impacts of the green public sphere.

The empirical research involved analysis of seven significant green events, taking place from 2009 to 2018, during the emerging prominence of Facebook in Vietnam. The events examined chronologically are: a blogging campaign against bauxite mining; media coverage of the Song Tranh 2 Hydropower Plant; online protests during a measles outbreak in 2014; social media usage at the Boo Fashion company; the Save Son Doong campaign; protests against the felling of 6700 trees in Hanoi; COP21 on climate change; and, finally, the sea pollution disaster caused by the Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Company.

Methodologically, the research adopted a qualitative approach. A content analysis of selected news articles and Facebook posts along with in-depth interviews with journalists, bloggers, activists, businesspeople and non-governmental organisations' staff were drawn on to compare the different usages of media in addressing the green issues.

The primary findings of the research are that the conditions underpinning the green public sphere in Vietnam are the national policy of openness toward global social networks, the impacts from international agents and the young

generation's adoption of advanced media technologies. The unprecedented freedom of expression in the public sphere through social media encourages political pluralism and opposition forces that challenge the legitimacy of the ruling Party in Vietnam's one-party state. The research argues that journalists have been playing the role of 'non-political politics' stakeholders by bringing green issues into public debates using both mainstream and social media. The intellectuals are leading stakeholders in the formulation of the green public sphere. The green public sphere is based on connected collective actions which have been impeded by governmental intimidation and legislative barriers since June 2018. The growing importance of developments in the legal system for media governance from 2018 has fostered the return of the intellectual-based green public sphere. Overall, the developing public sphere was a dynamic phenomenon, developing over time in different sub-spheres and eventually in 2016 on Formosa issue, prompting a clampdown that led the protesters to revert to using print media with all its strengths and limitations. Non-political politics had become political during the development of the green public sphere.

Theoretically, the research contributes to knowledge of media politics in general, and knowledge of journalism, new media and green politics in Vietnam in particular. It uses Habermas's theory of the public sphere as a framework to analyse the formation of the green public sphere and ideological transition in Vietnam in the context of global integration.

This written document has two components: a book manuscript and an exegesis. The book manuscript is a long-form journalistic work, presenting the empirical analysis, the research findings and overall discussion. The exegesis discusses the scholarly aspects of the research, including the literature review, methodology and evaluation.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Publications

1. Mach, L. T. 2019. The Rise of Professional Facebook Content Generators in Vietnam: A Fake News Campaign against the Betibuti Founder. In: Chiluwa, I. E & Samoilenko, S. A (eds.) *Handbook of Research on Deception, Fake News, and Misinformation Online*. Pennsylvania, USA: IGI Global, pp.209-225.
2. Mach, L. T. & Nash, C. 2019. Social media vs. Traditional Vietnamese journalism and social power structures. *Asian Journal of Journalism & Media Studies* No.2, pp.1-14, https://doi.org/10.33664/ajjms.2.0_1
3. Mach, L. T. 2019. Vietnam. In: Merskin, D. L. (ed.) *The SAGE International Encyclopedia of Mass Media and Society*. USA: SAGE (forth-coming)

Acknowledgements

The accomplishment of my research is possible because of the critical and encouraging supervision of Professor Christopher Nash. I am immensely grateful to Chris for his persistent intellectual support throughout my career and my doctorate candidature at Monash University. Thank you for your special knowledge and experience of the Vietnamese political and media context, which gave me the chance to discuss intensively with you research about Vietnam.

My sincere thanks also to my associate supervisors, Professor David Holmes and Dr Andrew Johnson, for their invaluable input. David always provided sharp feedback that helped me to improve the theoretical framing of my work. Andrew was an advisor in language and writing, a privileged resource for candidates like me, who are using English as their second language.

I would like to thank Dr Suzanne Eggins at Textwork company, and Dr Guenter A. Plum at Functional Edit Company, for their proof-reading service.

Thank you, my research participants, whose names cannot be listed here since protecting participants' privacy and confidentiality is part of my ethical research commitments. I very much appreciate your data, stories and especially your trust when you provided me with opportunities to join and observe your network to do research.

To the academic community at the School of Media, Film, and Journalism in the Faculty of Arts at Monash University, I am grateful to you for nurturing me intellectually in this excellent learning environment.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to my family. Your unconditional love and support have made me capable of fulfilling my goals.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Declaration	v
Publications.....	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Table of Contents	viii
List of Figures	xiii
List of Photos.....	xiv
List of Tables.....	xv
List of Acronyms	xvi
Component 1 Book manuscript.....	1
Chapter 1 Introduction: evolution of the green public sphere in Vietnam	2
1.1. Four milestones in contemporary Vietnam.....	2
1.2. The meanings of 'green'	8
1.3. <i>Doi Moi</i> and green issues.....	13
1.4. The media and green issues.....	20
1.5. Conceptualisation of the green public sphere.....	29
1.6. Structure of the book	36
Chapter 2 The Vietnamese media landscape.....	39
2.1. Vietnamese journalism	39
2.1.1. Ideology.....	39
2.1.2. Structure.....	50
2.2. Social media in Vietnam.....	58
2.2.1. From Yahoo! 360° to Facebook.....	59
2.2.2. User-generated content	62
2.3. Comparison.....	64
2.3.1. Vietnamese journalism versus social media	64
2.3.2. Contrast in social power structure	66
2.4. Spectrum of journalists' engagement with social media.....	70
2.4.1. Social media influencers	72
2.4.2. Hybrid media producers	73
2.4.3. Social media refuters	75
2.5. Paid commentators	76
2.5.1. Government-based commentators	76
2.5.2. Business-based commentators	77
Chapter 3 Blogging against bauxite mining: the birth of the green public sphere.....	79

3.1. Vietnam's bauxite projects	79
3.1.1. Environment	81
3.1.2. Security	83
3.1.3. Threats to indigenous culture.....	84
3.1.4. Economic objections.....	85
3.2. Opposition from the elites	86
3.2.1. Non-anonymous and non-violent movement.....	86
3.2.2. Intimidation.....	92
3.3. Media about the bauxite projects.....	94
3.3.1. Journalism	94
3.3.2. Social media	94
3.4. The bauxite public sphere	99
Chapter 4 Journalists and the green public sphere around Song Tranh 2 ...	102
4.1. Song Tranh 2	103
4.2. How journalists covered Song Tranh 2.....	105
4.2.1. BRT	106
4.2.2. QRT	108
4.2.3. VTV.....	110
4.4.4. VFEJ.....	111
4.4.5 Tuoi Tre.....	112
4.3. Journalistic practice on green issues.....	113
4.3.1. Self-censorship.....	114
4.3.2. Resistance against Facebook	116
4.3.3. Professional developments in environmental journalism	118
4.3.4. Journalists and the green public sphere	120
Chapter 5 The measles outbreak and the beginning of the Facebook public sphere	122
5.1. Public scrutiny of the public health sector	122
5.2. Media about the measles outbreak	126
5.2.1. Sample for content analysis	126
5.2.2. Theme of positivity in the mainstream media	127
5.2.3. Theme of negativity and criticism on social media and comments	128
5.2.4. Mainstream media duplication of the social structure of power	130
5.3. The rise of Facebook in the measles outbreak.....	131
5.3.1. Facebook goes mainstream	131
5.3.2. Facebook for online mass protests.....	133
5.3.3. Facebook for public mobilisation.....	135
5.3.4. Facebook embedded in government communication strategies	135
5.4. The emergence of non-political politics	136
5.4.1. Short-term and long-term influence of the public sphere	136
5.4.2. Social media-based opposition forces	137
5.4.3. Some weaknesses of the social media-based activism	138
Chapter 6 Boo fashion company and the commercialisation of green issues	141

6.1. Wear Young Live Young.....	142
6.2. Using social media at Boo and in the business sector.....	147
6.3. Green appeal versus greenwashing	153
6.4. The business sector and the green public sphere	162
Chapter 7 Local responses to global initiatives.....	166
7.1. Save Son Doong.....	166
7.2. Social media's role in taking green issues beyond geographic boundaries	170
7.3. International agents in the green public sphere	173
7.4. Criticism of international agents in the green public sphere.....	176
7.4.1. Poor localisation and adaptation	176
7.4.2. Resistance of the local power	178
7.4.3. Inconsistency at the international level	181
7.5. Criticism of the use of social media for activism.....	185
Chapter 8: 'Man-for-tree' and the maturity of the social media-based green public sphere	188
8.1. The context of the tree public sphere	188
8.2. Development of the tree public sphere.....	193
8.3. Horizontal power structure of Man-for-Tree.....	199
8.4. The evolution of the green public sphere	202
8.4.1. Inclusive activism	202
8.4.2. Network of the green public sphere.....	203
8.4.3. The politicisation of green issues.....	204
Chapter 9 Formosa and the politicisation of the green public sphere.....	207
9.1. Vietnamese media's coverage of the Formosa marine life disaster	207
9.1.1 Journalism.....	207
9.1.2. Social media.....	216
9.1.3. New forms of documentation	218
9.2. The involvement of political groups in the fish death public sphere.....	220
9.2.1. The political parties	220
9.2.2. The religious groups.....	221
9.2.3. The civil society organisations	223
9.3. The evolution from non-political to political politics	226
Chapter 10 Discussion and conclusion	230
10.1. Chronological summary of the green public sphere 2009-2018	230
10.2. Impacts of social media on the discursive process.....	233
10.2.1. Changes in journalism.....	233
10.2.2. Rationale for the changes in journalism	237
10.3. Key features of the green public sphere	239
10.3.1. Stakeholders of the green public sphere.....	239
10.3.2. Connective collective actions	243
10.3.3. How Vietnamese government responses to the change.....	244
10.4. Arguments, justification and clarification	248

Component 2 Exegesis.....	253
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	254
1.1. A brief overview	254
1.2. Research originality	264
1.3. Research significance	265
1.4. Scope of the research.....	267
1.4.1. The author's position	267
1.4.2. Research time and space.....	268
1.5. Structure of the exegesis.....	271
Chapter 2 Literature review.....	273
2.1. The public sphere	273
2.2. The green public sphere	278
2.3. Research questions	282
Chapter 3 Methodology	283
3.1. Content analysis	284
3.2. In-depth Interview	291
3.3. Some lessons learnt for future research	294
Chapter 4 Evaluation	299
4.1. Why social media enables the formulation of the green public sphere in the Vietnamese context?	299
4.2. How social media and Vietnamese journalism has covered the green issues?.....	301
4.3. What are the roles of different groups of stakeholders in the green public sphere in Vietnam?.....	304
4.4. What are the political changes in Vietnam under the impacts of the green public sphere?	307
4.5. What are the changes in Vietnamese journalism under the impacts of the green public sphere?	309
Chapter 5 Conclusion	312
5.1. What I have done so far?	312
5.2. What's next?	318
Bibliography.....	321
Appendices	335
Appendix A: Consent form for blogger and Facebook participants and journalists (English)	335
Appendix B: Consent form for blogger and Facebook participants and journalists (Vietnamese)	337
Appendix C: Explanatory Statement for blogger and Facebook participants (English)	339

Appendix D: Explanatory Statement for blogger and Facebook participants (Vietnamese).....	342
Appendix E: Explanatory Statement for journalists (English)	346
Appendix F: Explanatory Statement for journalists (Vietnamese)	349
Appendix G: Explanatory Statement for organisations (English)	353
Appendix H: Explanatory Statement for organisations (Vietnamese).....	356
Appendix I: Questions for semi-structured in-depth interviews (Vietnamese)	360
Appendix J: List of research participants for in-depth interview	364
Appendix K: Codebook for content analysis	367
Appendix L: Number of news articles and social media posts for content analysis.....	374
Appendix M: Timeline of the green issues and events, and their location in Vietnam 2009-2018	375
Notes	383

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Word cloud ‘The conceptualisation of green in the Vietnamese context’	9
Figure 1.2: Vietnam GDP 1986-2016 (WB&FRED)	15
Figure 2.1: Two news articles about the same topic on VnExpress Online Newspaper on 25/3/2015	47
Figure 2.2: Management levels of journalism organisations in Vietnam.....	51
Figure 2.3: Top social media platforms in Vietnam at January 2018 (We-are-social and Hootsuite)	61
Figure 3.1: The Central Highlands of Vietnam where the bauxite projects are located (In Southeast Asia inseasia.com)	81
Figure 3.2: Portrait of Phan Chau Trinh, which has been used as the profile picture for the Facebook Page Bauxite Vietnam (screenshot taken on 11th February, 2019).....	91
Figure 4.1: A section on the main dam of Song Tranh 2 Hydropower Plant (The photo was taken on 24th February 2017 in Tra Doc Commune, Bac Tra My District, Quang Nam Province, Vietnam)	105
Figure 5.1: The number of ‘organic likes’ on the Facebook page ‘Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health in April–May 2014 (page admin/s)	134
Figure 5.2: Confidence vote for the Minister of Health in 2014 and 2018 (Source: Vietnam National Assembly, 2018)	137
Figure 6.1: The expansion of Boo Green activities from 2014 to 2017	158
Figure 6.2: Revenue of Boo Fashion Company from 2014 to 2017.....	158
Figure 7.1: Number of visitors to Oxalis’ website from March to August 2015 (https://oxalis.com.vn)	173
Figure 8.1: Demographic analysis of the Facebook users who ‘liked’ the page Man-for-Tree, at May 18, 2015 (admin of the page)	192
Figure E1.1: Word cloud ‘The conceptualisation of green in the Vietnamese context’	259
Figure E1.2: Top Facebook-using countries in January 2018 (Statista, 2018)....	260
Figure E1.3: Facebook usage penetration in Vietnam from 2015 to 2022 (Statista.com in January 2018).....	269
Appendix M, Figure 1: Green issues that arose during the prevalence of Facebook in Vietnam 2009 – 2018.....	375
Appendix M, Figure 2: The locations of green issues in Vietnam from 2009 to 2018	376

List of Photos

- Photo 6.1: Do Viet Anh (far right), CEO of Boo Fashion Company, at a seminar on awareness of climate change in Hanoi in 2013 (Photo courtesy AJC).....144
- Photo 9.1: Three versions of the cover page of Tuoi Tre Cuoi issue no. 547 (Le Nguyen Huong Tra, former journalist of People's Police newspaper, May 17, 2016).....209
- Photo 9.2. The article in Nha bao va Cong luan (left-hand photo) used a photo taken from an article about fish death in Tianjin, China (right-hand photo) (Dao, N.D., 2016).....211
- Photo 9.3. The photo of a photoshopped 'red-tide' published in Nhan Dan newspaper (<http://www.nhandan.com.vn/khoa-hoc/moi-truong/item/29385902-thuy-trieu-do-xuat-hien-o-nghe-an.html>)212
- Photo 9.4: Formosa's Eco-park, with two furnaces of the thermal power plant (right) and the coking plant (central).....228

List of Tables

Table 2.1: Types of sources on Tuoi Tre and VnExpress	45
Table 2.2: Number of articles using official reports on Tuoi Tre and VnExpress	48
Table 2.3: Contrast between Vietnamese journalism and social media	65
Table 2.4: Contrast in social power structures of Vietnamese tradition and social media	70
Table 3.1: Articles on VnExpress and Tuoi Tre, and essays on the anti-bauxite blog about building roads to the bauxite projects (as of March 2017)	97
Table 5.1: Number of positive, negative and neutral comments about the measles outbreak 2014 in the selected newspapers and Facebook page.....	128
Table 5.2: Information sources in the VnExpress and Tuoi Tre coverage of the measles outbreak in April–May 2014	130
Table 6.1: Social media pages of Boo fashion company as of July 2018	149
Table 6.2: Boo store and staff numbers from 2014 to 2017	159

List of Acronyms

COP21	UN's Climate Change Conference of the Parties in 2015 in Paris
CPTC	Party's Central Propaganda and Training Commission
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
EVN	Vietnam Electricity Corporation
INDC	Intended Nationally Determined Contributions
MOH	Ministry of Health
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VINACOMIN	Vietnam National Coal-Minerals Industries Group
VTV	Vietnam Television
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Component 1 Book manuscript

Chapter 1

Introduction: evolution of the green public sphere in Vietnam

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the context of the evolution of the green public sphere in Vietnam. The chapter starts with insights into the four milestones in the history of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam from the 1945 to 2018, in which *Doi Moi* or the economic reform marks a significant turning point in the development of the country. The chapter then discusses the conceptualisation of 'green' in the Vietnamese social and cultural context. The dilemma between economic development and the emergence of green issues has been largely covered by the new media, particularly with the rising popularity of Facebook, while it has been neglected or given only one-sided, top-down reporting by state-run journalism. The chapter discusses the theory of the green public sphere, developed from the Habermas' classic theory of the bourgeois public sphere, as the framework for the analysis of the green public sphere throughout the book. The final section of this chapter briefly sets out the structure of the book, with ten chapters presented chronologically covering green events from 2009 to 2018.

1.1. Four milestones in contemporary Vietnam

On June 12, 2018, in Hanoi, Vietnam, the National Assembly of Vietnam voted to pass legislation on Cyber Security. From that moment, Vietnam entered the era of the controlled internet, shutting down the opportunity for this one-party country to connect to the global information flow. As regulated by the *Cyber Security Law 2018*, data produced by Vietnamese internet users will be kept within the Vietnamese territory, and anti-state content will be removed from

the internet within 24 hours. The internet in Vietnam will become an intranet, with internet service providers and content generators required to be registered and controlled by governmental authorities.

In a meeting with Hanoi voters on June 17, 2018, Mr Nguyen Phu Trong, the leader of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), stressed the need to have the Cyber Security law ‘to protect the [CPV’s] regime amidst the development of technology’.¹ Meanwhile, the UN Human Rights Office for South-East Asia, in a statement on its social media pages, expressed concern that the Cyber Security law contained a number of provisions that were in contravention with Vietnam’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Clare Algar, Amnesty International’s Director of Global Operations, commented about the Cyber Security Law:

In the country’s deeply repressive climate, the online space was a relative refuge where people could go to share ideas and opinions with less fear of censure by the authorities. With the sweeping powers, it grants the government to monitor online activity, this vote means there is now no safe place left in Vietnam for people to speak freely.²

The Cyber Security Law put an end to the era of internet and social media neutrality, the foundation for public participation towards democracy in Vietnam. That era lasted nine years, from the announcement of the closing down of Yahoo!360° blogging service on July 13, 2009, to the beginning of internet control by the Cyber Security Law on June 12, 2018. These nine years played a pivotal role in the process of democracy in Vietnam, and witnessed two historical phenomena. First, the rise and prevalence of Facebook as a locus for the free flow of public opinion, meaningfully contributing to changes in the policies and performance of the whole nation, and the national public sphere.

Second, the increasing seriousness of conflicts and tensions relating to the environment, climate change, and sustainability, or ‘green issues’, due to the poor management of industrialisation and rapid economic reform.

This book represents a journalistic investigation into the evolution of the green public sphere from 2009 to 2018. It analyses the role of Facebook in the formation of public opinion on the changes in various aspects of politics, socio-economics and culture in Vietnam, particularly its influence on the redesign of Vietnamese media landscape and journalism. It assesses the engagement of journalists, intellectuals, businesspeople, scientists and many other stakeholders in generating and fostering the free flow of public opinion to solve green issues. The book provides journalists and the engaged audience with an approach to reflexivity and self-assessment and a review of the justifications and quality of the arguments for the use of social media in developing movements to address green concerns.

The following section provides a brief introduction to the historical background of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, laying the foundation for further understanding of the green public sphere from 2009 to 2018. Vietnam’s history is witnessed from the four remarkable revolutionary milestones in 1945, 1975, 1986 and 2018.

1945: Vietnam proclaimed its independence and sovereignty in 1945, putting an end to the Vietnamese monarchy (938–1945). Before the monarchy, Vietnam had endured a millennium under Chinese colonisation (111BC–938AD), with long-term impacts of Chinese domination on Vietnamese culture. In 1925, Mr Ho Chi Minh established the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League. This league then merged with the Communist Party of Indochina and the Communist Party of Annam to form the CPV in 1930. The CPV founded the League for the Independence of Vietnam to start activism against the French colonisation and

the Japanese occupation of Vietnam. After the activists' victory on September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh delivered the *Independence Declaration* at Ba Dinh Square in Hanoi, proclaiming the start of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh was elected as President in the 1946 election and held this position until 1969 when he passed away. In 1954, Vietnam defeated France in a nine-year war from 1945 to 1954. The country was then divided into two separately administered zones: the communist-led Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North and the US-supported Republic of Vietnam in the South.

1975: The war between the North and the South, known as the American War in Vietnam and the Vietnam War in the rest of the world, ended in 1975 when the Northern communist forces entered Saigon (the former name of Ho Chi Minh City) in the South, and the Southern government surrendered. After the reunification, the National Assembly renamed the country 'the Socialist Republic of Vietnam'. The CPV became the leading political party of the reunified country. As legislated in the Constitution of the reunited Vietnam, the CPV is the leading force of the State and society, acting on Marxist-Leninist doctrine and Ho Chi Minh's ideology, governing its members and organisations by democratic centralism. In line with this model, the CPV retains the right to make any decision in any CPV unit. The discussion, arguments and debates that lead to final decisions are the privilege of the communist members in governmental organisations, and public participation is excluded from the decision-making process. The working class, then, carries out the decisions without any further arguments. The CPV's ideologists believe that democratic centralism would control potential conflicts and create the sustainability in organisations.

1986: Near-starvation in the early 1980s was the catalyst for the CPV-initiated *Doi Moi* policy, or economic reform, which envisioned Vietnam becoming an industrial and modern country by 2020. With this decision,

Vietnam negotiated to join the global market, established diplomatic relationships with the countries in the former communist bloc and normalised the country's relationship with its former enemy countries. To join the free trade agreement and to encourage foreign investors, Vietnam committed to the unlimited and unrestricted connection to global information and communication systems. Consequently, Vietnam opened the market for foreign media and began to connect to the internet on November 19, 1997, without any official technical or legislative barriers like those of its neighbouring country, China.

The first two decades of *Doi Moi* saw a miraculous economic growth, leading to many achievements in education, public health, culture and so on. From the 2010s, however, this sustainable growth has been severely threatened by environmental stresses. Vietnam is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change, envisaging the loss of the vast agricultural lands in the Mekong Delta. In big cities, high densities of emissions-heavy motor-vehicles and poorly planned urban construction have resulted in dangerous levels of air pollution.³ Heavy industrial zones along the coast failed to fulfil their environmental commitments, and the Formosa-related sea disaster in 2016 was an example of the environmental traumas. In the third decade of *Doi Moi* Vietnam also experienced a sudden surge in the number of Facebook users. The concerns and tensions of environmental issues led people to take advantage of Facebook as a free and open public space for activism. Initially, the protests were non-political because the major concerns were pollution, home-relocations, public health and so on. Gradually, however, the movements evolved to become political as the public started to use Facebook to request government resignations and suggest interfering in policy implementations and as a forum to practice further public participation in policymaking. Democratic centralism, the foundation stone of the CPV's ideology, was seriously challenged, pushing the CPV's legitimacy to

the edge of rupture. Furthermore, the generation gap between the increasing number of Vietnamese ‘Millennials’, those who were born after *Doi Moi* and had become global citizens, and the ageing ‘old Vietnamese’ who had experienced the Vietnam war, led to many social clashes in values and beliefs. When social media became a convenient locus for expression, it nurtured the practice of ‘*auto-chui*’, the unreasonable instant expression of dissidence on social media. This triggered conflicts and instability, causing difficulties for development.

2018: The Vietnam National Assembly enacted the *Cyber Security Law 2018*, requiring that the data of internet users be physically kept within Vietnam and accessible to the government. On the one hand, the Cyber Security law was expected to control the wave of increasing anti-state content on Facebook, and consequently support democratic centralism as well as the CPV’s leading role. The aim was to reduce the practice of using social media for thoughtless ‘*auto-chui*’ and anonymous character assassinations. On the other hand, the Cyber Security law was contrary to Vietnam–WTO and Vietnam–EU commitments to unlimited, uncensored and unrestricted connections to international telecommunication services, including the internet. After the Cyber Security Law, the Vietnam National Assembly introduced an extraordinary and controversial bill on Special Economic Zones that allowed foreign investors, mostly Chinese, to lease Vietnamese islands for 99 years. The Cyber Security law prevented people from using Facebook to express their concern and anger about this proposed legislation. With this law, the right to decide on economic policies reverted to the hands of the CPV. After three decades negotiating to join the global market, the CPV imposed a strong force to make a pivotal change in economic reforms. The Special Economic Zones were expected to become ‘the labs for experiments in institutional reforms’, signalling the end of the first phase of *Doi Moi*, and the beginning of a possible new phase of economic reform.

On the threshold of Vietnam's latest historical milestone, this book analyses the emerging social media and the green public sphere in Vietnam. It examines the conditions in Vietnam in the third decade of *Doi Moi*, from 2009 to 2018, that have led to the new phase of Vietnamese development. The book addresses two prominent phenomena of this period: the use of social media and its role, application and impact in the evolution of green issues. Changes in green issues, furthermore, influence politics, socio-economic factors, culture and many other aspects in Vietnam. The book investigates these changes particularly from the angle of journalistic practice. The theory of the public sphere, introduced by the sociologist Jürgen Habermas and developed by other scholars, provides a framework within which to understand how, and in which circumstances, public opinions on normal daily issues can trigger revolution and promote political, social and economic changes. The book serves as a reflexive journalistic report on Vietnamese society and the media industry in the transition to the new phase of *Doi Moi*.

1.2. The meanings of 'green'

According to Torgerson (1999, p.3-4), 'green' is a metaphor that refers to ecology, picturing interdependent and dynamic relationships between human life and nature. Green issues arose together with industrialisation and with the official emergence of 'green' parties in various countries. Early green concerns were primarily focused on air and water pollution before expanding to a wide range of environmental issues, including toxic waste, acid rain, and ozone depletion etc. Green issues are often related to new industrial processes and consumer products (Torgerson, 1999, p.67). By the 1980s, the term 'sustainability' or 'sustainable development' entered green discourse as the watchword(s) for environmentalism. As Green Parties in some countries gained prominence, they identified themselves as going beyond a narrowly construed environmentalism with its concerns focusing more broadly on the protection of

life, nature and the environment, peace, human rights, workers and women's movements, and the Third World. Ecological rationality, therefore, cannot cover all green concerns.

To explore the concept of ‘green’ in the Vietnamese context, the top ten names of organisations were picked up from the results of a Google search of the term ‘Vietnam green’. In July 2016, the top ten green organisations in Vietnam were: Green Vietnam Import–Export Company, Get Green Vietnam, Green Fingers Vietnam, Vietnam Green Building Council, Keep Vietnam Clean and Green, Vietnam Green Technology Company, Green ID Vietnam, Live Green Vietnam, Green Action Plan Vietnam, and Vietnam Green Generation Network. The ‘about us’ and ‘vision–mission’ sections of these organisations’ websites indicate how these ten organisations conceptualised themselves. The text analysis with keywords in ‘about us’ and ‘vision–mission’ statements identifies the frequency of the terms associating with *green*.

The word cloud in figure 1.1 indicates the primary terms used to identify the green organisations, including: environment, environmental fields, sustainable, climate change, disasters, young people, community, waste, water and products.



Figure 1.1: Word cloud 'The conceptualisation of green in the Vietnamese context'

The most fundamental meaning of green in Vietnam is the **environment**, with the underlying areas such as natural resources, water, pollution treatment and living in harmony with nature. The second connotation of green is **sustainability**, with the related topics of environmentally friendly energy and technology, recycling, smart consumption and lifestyles. The third implication of green is **climate change**, which can be mentioned by reference to natural disasters and the resilience capacity of the affected community. These three main connotations of green in the Vietnamese context are similar to the use of the green metaphor in other countries.

The secondary terms in the word cloud can be categorised into three themes of vocabulary that associates with the concept of green. The words in each theme are listed in alphabetical order:

1. Theme of **actions** to advocate the concept of green: biking, control, educating, encouraging, harmonising, helping, living, promote, protecting, recycling
2. Theme of **critical stakeholders** who engage in the concept of green: children, clubs, communities, consumers, generations, groups, individuals, mothers, lovers, network, victims, volunteers
3. Theme of **niche-aspects** of the environment: catalyst, energy, nature, landscape, pollution, process, quality, resilience, technologies, treatment.

Green in Vietnam also refers to the younger generation, which is not observed in the conceptualisation of green in other countries. For instance, the Green Import–Export Company trades products for children; Green Fingers Vietnam and Green Action Plan Vietnam target young communities. When mentioning the well-known Green Summer Campaign (*Chien dich mua he xanh*), Vietnamese

people understand that this is voluntary work by young people. While green parties in many Western countries raise concerns about women and workers' right, in Vietnam the green concern is about children, young people and young volunteers.

This analysis helps clarify the meaning spectrum of the metaphor 'green' in the Vietnamese context, which in turn helps in identification of the issues, events, conflicts and case studies that relate to the green concept in Vietnam. To explore green issues, it is necessary to explore the developments linked with the key themes of the environment, sustainability, climate change, and other sub-themes like actions stakeholders are engaging in, and niche-aspects of the environment, sustainability and climate change.

As the green sphere is embedded within the environment, sustainability and climate change, the coverage of green issue is not merely restricted to reporting about natural disasters. In this book, green issues are discussed through the analysis of a series of case studies about concerns towards nature, the environment, peace, pollution and the role of individuals, organisations and government in combating the conflicts between ecological preservation and the industrialisation and modernisation of the country.

A seminar entitled 'Environmental Justice', organised by the Human Rights Space on 15th February 2017 in Hanoi, indicated two particular green-related concepts that were fading out of Vietnamese public discourse. The first concept is Green – Clean – Beautiful (*Xanh – sach – dep*). This slogan was introduced to the Vietnamese public through a project funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in 2011, promoting the 3Rs for re-use, reduce, recycle. However, the project failed to convince people to sort their garbage. As a result, the slogan of the Green – Clean – Beautiful project dropped from visibility in public service announcements and news coverage. The system of

different garbage bins quickly vanished soon after the launch of the project and the old system of one-for-all garbage bins returned. The second related topic which has been rarely mentioned in public documents after 2010 is deforestation. This does not mean that deforestation is no longer an issue in Vietnam but that, since the national forests have been largely destroyed and there are no real forests left to be deforested,⁴ the topic of deforestation no longer receives much coverage. The theme of ‘forest fire’ was observed to appear on media coverage during summer 2019. However, during 2009-2018, the topic about ‘forest’ did not get much coverage.

The Environmental Justice seminar in 2017 also noted an alarming escalation in conflicts around waste discharge locations. During the industrialisation process, while an industrialised region might flourish with increasing employment and investment opportunities, another region might be full of cancer victims because their areas were selected as the dumping sites for the waste discharged from the industrial zones. This caused environmental inequality, conflicts, and injustice. For example, the most discussed green issue in Vietnam in mid-2017 was the movement against the dumping of the industrial waste mud from Vinh Tan coal-fired power station to the seabed of Binh Thuan province. The Formosa disaster of 2016 was also a typical case of this type of conflict. Immediately after it was discovered that Formosa had discharged untreated wastewater into the sea, hundreds of tons of Formosa solid industrial waste were found to have been dumped in a farm owned by the director of Ha Tinh provincial Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DONRE).⁵

Briefly, in the Vietnamese context, green issues include environmental, sustainability and climate change issues. Green also means health, the young, safety and cleanliness. Urban cleanliness and deforestation are no longer categorised as green issues because of repeated failed attempts to solve these

problems. Conflicts around the dumping sites for industrial waste were recorded as an emerging phenomenon during the decade from 2009 to 2018.

1.3. *Doi Moi* and green issues

The CPV has been the sole political party of the country since national reunification on April 30, 1975, after the Vietnam war. The CPV applied the policies of a centralised planned economy, in which the governmental sector played the most significant role and the private sector was not allowed to participate in the market. The Vietnamese economy relied heavily on donations from countries of the communist bloc, particularly the former USSR and China. Inflation galloped in the early 1980s and reached its peak at 774.7% in 1986,⁶ after a currency exchange in September 12, 1985. This was in fact a cash withdrawal from the market. Mr Ta Ngoc Tan, a well-known professor of journalism, recalled in an interview I conducted with him in March 2018:

After the war, Vietnam imported 20 million tons of Coix lacryma-jobi grains, intended for cattle raising, but eventually, it was distributed as food for people. Food was distributed in the governmental stamp-based scheme. Other utilities, such as clothes, bicycles, fuel, and even coffins for dead people, were provided via a lucky draw distribution system. Everyone had to find the alternative ways to find food: planting vegetables, raising pigs. The hungry nation urged the Party to change, otherwise the starving people would change the Party.

Mr Tan was a member of the CPV's Political Bureau from 2006 to 2012, a member of Vietnam National Assembly from 2007 to 2011, the Vice President of the CPV's Ideology Committee and Vice President of the Vietnamese Journalists Association. He contributes to the construction of the CPV's doctrine, and *Doi Moi* is one of his focused topics of research.

In this situation, the CPV decided to launch *Doi Moi*, or the economic reform, at the sixth Congress in 1986. This reform saw Vietnam switch its economy from being State-subsidised and centrally planned to be market-oriented. The Vietnamese term *Doi Moi* has since been included in many English dictionaries and has been used in its non-translated Vietnamese form in many publications. *Doi Moi* is distinguished from the *perestroika* reform in the former Soviet Union. While the primary goal of *perestroika* was political restructure, *Doi Moi*'s primary target was economic growth, further engagement with the global market, and a refusal to depart from communist ideology.

Before *Doi Moi*, Vietnam had suffered from five decades of warfare. It was an extremely poor country and relied entirely on foreign aid while the whole nation faced serious food shortages. After *Doi Moi*, Vietnam became the second-largest rice exporter. Vietnam recorded the second-fastest economic growth rate, which consistently exceeded 10% until it slowed down during the second decade of *Doi Moi*. Even so, it has retained its momentum and is still growing at approximately 6.7% in 2018. International economic reports use dramatic terms to describe the bright economic prosperity of Vietnam: 'Dawn of a new market', 'Vietnam rising', 'The new Asian dragon', 'Awakening the dormant dragon'. More importantly, *Doi Moi* has helped the CPV strengthen its leading political role in the country after the collapse of other communist bloc countries. After the end of World War Two, Vietnam had become linked with the Soviet Union and countries such as East Germany, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Albania, Hungary, Bulgaria and so on in the Communist bloc, who shared an adherence to the ideology and practice of communism.

Figure 1.2 illustrates the World Bank's data on the growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for Vietnam from 1986 to 2016, retrieved from the Economic Research website of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.⁷

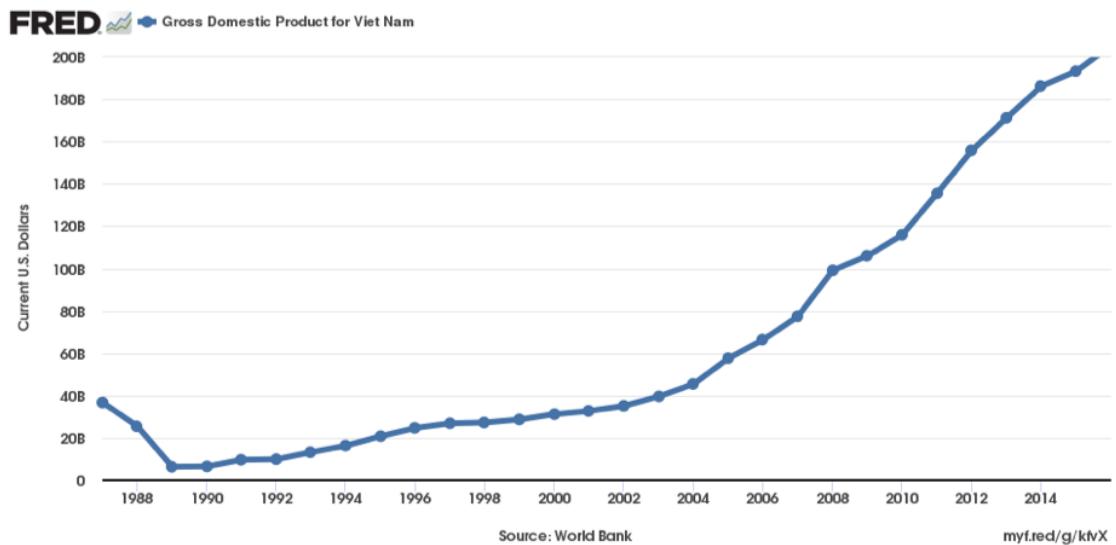


Figure 1.2: Vietnam GDP 1986-2016 (WB&FRED)

Vietnamese GDP fell to its lowest point in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin wall, in 1990 when the Cold War ended, and in 1991 when the USSR dissolved, triggering the systematic collapse of the communist bloc. With Vietnam no longer able to benefit from foreign aid from the bloc, the country started to normalise its relationship with the USA in 1991, joined the WTO in 2006, and negotiated to sign a Free Trade Agreement with many foreign markets. Vietnam's GDP reached over 200 billion USD in 2016, and the World Bank envisaged an increase of 6.8% in 2018.⁸

The German sociologist and political economist, Max Weber, in his book *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation* discusses three models of institutionalisation of authority: rational-legal authority (for example, people vote to choose the leader and form authority), traditional authority (leadership status is hereditary as in a monarchy), and the model of charisma (a person with charisma can constitute an authority and attract followers). In his book, he asserts that 'the economic mode of provision [is] most appropriate to a system of rational-legal authority precisely because it is the most mobile' and 'most easily dissociated from the individual's status in the other' (Weber, 1964, p.64). As a result, economic development has formed a strong foundation on which

the CPV claim their rational-legal authority. The astonishing rate of income growth has also helped the CPV to stress the leap from pre-*Doi Moi* to post-*Doi Moi*, and prove the legitimacy of their leadership.

The CPV regards *Doi Moi* momentum as the foundation of its continued legitimacy. In such circumstances, industrial assets become icons for *Doi Moi* and the communist regime in Vietnam. Formosa is one such icon for *Doi Moi*. Recognising the significant increase in steel demand for industrialisation and urbanisation in Southeast Asia, the Taiwanese Formosa Plastics Corporation invested approximately 22 billion USD⁹ from 2008 to 2016 to establish the Formosa Steel Plant in Vietnam. On their website,¹⁰ the Formosa Steel Plant claims to be the biggest heavy industrial centre in Southeast Asia, located in the Vung Ang industrial zone, Ha Tinh Province, on the Son Duong deep-water port of Vietnam, the gateway from Southeast Asia to the Pacific Ocean. In this book, the short name 'Formosa' is a substitute for the long name Formosa Steel Plant in Ha Tinh province of Vietnam, not the former name of the country Taiwan. As scheduled, Formosa started production in April 2016.

Since April 6, 2016, a massive dying-off of marine life occurred in four coastal provinces: Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Thua Thien-Hue. It was suspected that Formosa had discharged toxic chemicals into the sea because a local diver discovered a giant Formosa underwater discharge pipe system. In June 2016, Formosa admitted that an unplanned power cut had stopped the function of wastewater treatment. As a result, the untreated waste containing heavy chemicals, including cyanide, had been discharged directly into the sea. Formosa promised to compensate 500 million USD to the coastal residents of the four provinces.

On April 24, 2016, channel 14 of Vietnam Television Corporation—a television channel specialising in weather and the environment—broadcast a

conversation between Journalist Bui Lan Anh and the Deputy Head of Formosa's External Relations Department,¹¹ Chou Chun Fan. Mr Chou said:

It is impossible to build a plant without any impact on fish and shrimps. Of course, we try to build a plant that meets the Government's requirements. It is normal that if you gain something you must lose something. When we use this area to build our plant, the soil here is no longer good for growing rice. Between the two we must choose one, whether I want to catch fish and shrimps, or I want to build a modern steel industry?

In a tropical country with 3260 kilometres of coastline, where many generations live near and source their livelihood from the sea and where fish products are one of the indicators of national identity, the shocking question 'Between the two we must choose one: fish or steel?' was answered by demonstrations in the large cities with the theme 'I choose fish'. Online and offline movements escalated to the Occupy Town Hall event in April 2017, when thousands of people sat in the town halls of the four provinces to protest against Formosa.

Apparently, the rapidly growing market economy has had to pay a toll in the third decade of *Doi Moi*. To take full advantages of the Vietnamese government's incentives for foreign investment, many international corporations have brought to Vietnam their old-fashioned, low-technology production lines, which do not meet the requirement of environmental standards in their home countries. This has made Vietnam a 'pollution paradise' for foreign companies and has resulted in many environmental problems. According to Yale University's Environment Performance Index (EPI) reports, Vietnamese air quality was ranked 123rd among 132 countries in 2012. The World Air Quality Index monitors the increasing concentration of air pollutant PM2.5 particles in Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam, a city with high-density

housing, petrol-burning motorbikes, construction sites and industrial zones. The air visual apps ranked Hanoi the poorest air quality index city during the last week of October 2017.

Vietnam has unique geographical features with over 3200 kilometres of coastline, more than two thousand long rivers and two deltas. These features place the country in vulnerable situations if the globe gets warmer and water levels rise. In a report released by the World Bank in 2009 (Dasgupta et al, 2009, p. 385), Vietnam was ranked among the top countries likely to be severely impacted by climate change. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) even envisaged the loss of the whole of the Mekong Delta, one of the two river deltas and the rice production areas in Vietnam, that would result to the collapse of food sovereignty because of the loss of agricultural productivity across the whole nation (2008).

Vietnam's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) to combat climate change were developed by the MONRE and submitted to the parties to the UN's Climate Change Conference of the Parties 21 in 2015 in Paris (COP21). According to the INDC, the Vietnamese government envisions a scenario of temperature increases of below two degrees Celsius. However, the visions of many sectors and industries in Vietnam do not align with this national plan. For instance, the Vietnam Electricity Corporation (EVN), a state company, released a development plan to increase the percentage of coal power as a source in the production of electricity from 49.3% in 2020 to 55% in 2025 (Tinh, 2017). This would of course increase the average temperature and destroy the country's ambition in response to global warming.

Similarly, poor performance in management and governance in many areas has worsened environmental issues. In the employment list released during the university entrance examination season, June–July 2017, Environment

Engineering ranked among the five jobs with the poorest employment possibilities. This was justified as follows:

The economic conditions are still tough, environmental governance remains in poor performance and has not yet attracted due attention from the environment managing organisations. As a consequence, the business sector does not see the need to recruit environmental engineers. Learners in environmental engineering are often unemployed or have to work in the other fields after graduation. (TOPLIST, 2017)

This quotation reflects public distrust of the capacity of environment governance nationwide. Ortmann's study (2017) highlights the uncontrollable state of environment issues in Vietnam:

Even as the Vietnamese government devoted much effort to developing and reforming environmental institutions and a sophisticated legal framework for environmental protection, the decline of the natural environment continued unabated'. Ortmann concludes that this is exemplary of the common situation for developing countries, where 'institutions often fail to be effective despite significant institutional development. (pp. 1-2)

By the end of the third decade of *Doi Moi*, there has been a shift from economy-centric to environmental consideration in national decision-making and policy-making. In 2016, the Vietnamese Prime Minister, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, claimed: 'Vietnam does not sacrifice the environment for economic development which harms the people'.¹² The leader of Communist Party in Hanoi city, Hoang Trung Hai, stated: 'We would rather be poor than be unsafe rich'.¹³ 'Fish or steel?', the question that emerged during the sea disaster, then, became a

metaphor indicating an ideological struggle between 'environment or economic growth'.

Aside from poor technical management during the industrialisation process of *Doi Moi*, the change in cultural values has also contributed to the shift from an economics-centric to an environment-centric agenda. This is discussed in Inglehart's book *Human values and belief* (2008, pp. 7-12). Inglehart asserts that:

'Industrialisation and modernisation required breaking certain cultural constraints [...] economic accumulation (for individuals) and economic growth (for societies) became top priorities for an increasing part of the world's population and are still the central goals for much of humanity. But eventually, diminishing returns from economic growth lead to a Postmodern shift'.

In the Postmodern view, many new concerns emerge. The most prominent concerns of post-economic development are advanced industrial societies, environmental protection (p.13), and the pursuit of human well-being (p.12) that leads to new norms of behaviour and performance. This cultural shift captures Vietnamese society after *Doi Moi*, with radical changes in various aspects of life that are analysed throughout this book.

1.4. The media and green issues

It was dawn on May 1, 2016, in the church of Dong Yen parish, Ky Phuong Commune¹⁴, Ky Anh District, Ha Tinh Province, Vietnam. Citizen journalist NAT put on a labour safety apparatus to disguise himself as a local worker for the Formosa industrial plant, which was just one kilometre away. A Catholic priest helped him to climb up and escape through a church window. He crawled across the roofs of the surrounding houses, then jumped into a small van which was prepared by the local parishioners, in readiness for a silent escape from the Commune.

At the same time, a taxi booked by the parishioners entered the church's main gate. A young man of NAT's height, dressed in NAT's clothes and carrying his backpack, walked out of the church, got into the taxi and took the opposite route to the van, followed by the plain-clothes policemen who had been encircling the church for several days to arrest him.

The policemen were searching for NAT because he was the only reporter left in the area where the local authority had imposed a *nobody in, nobody out* mandate from April 29, 2016. Tuan was neither a professional journalist nor a freelancer. He was a local NGO officer, advocating civil participation or the right of people to participate in policymaking. He had come to Ky Anh District right after news broke of the marine disaster that caused the massive death of fish from the April 6, 2016. He stayed in the fishing village of Dong Yen parish in Ky Anh to co-ordinate the charity dispensing of rice to the starving residents, most of whom worked for fishing boats but could not catch any fish due to the sea disaster in early April 2016.

NAT recalled:

When I first came, I saw journalists in all corners of Ky Anh investigating the massive marine death and waiting for answers from Formosa. Suddenly, from Friday, April 29, all the journalists left, Ky Anh became a deserted, and quiet place. I guessed the media obeyed some guidance from the government to hold back their reports. And if you search the newspapers some days after April 29, 2016, the governmental media was mute about the massive death of fish.

Determined to stay in the village to wait for more rice donations, Tuan became a reluctant reporter. He used a small iPhone SE, a less expensive generation of iPhone, to capture the photos of the dead fish drifting onto the beach, the

abandoned boats and the worried fishermen. Then he uploaded the photos and videos on his Facebook page. As the photos and videos went viral, people started to follow his Facebook page to see more images of the fish death phenomenon that they were no longer able to see on governmental media.

NAT said in an interview with the author:

From this chance of being a sole reporter from within the centre of the disaster, I would say Facebook is the only remaining space for freedom of expression in Vietnam. Without Facebook, the national and international public cannot know the truth about the disaster. (NAT, 2017)

NAT is a social activist working for the Vietnamese Overseas Initiative for Conscience Empowerment (VOICE), a non-profit and non-governmental organisation promoting people's participation in politics in Vietnam. He became one of the key activists in the marine disaster caused by Formosa in Vietnam. As a 9x, the generation that was born during the 1990s, NAT is tech-savvy, has a keen ability to connect to international peers and a desire for self-expression. He earned a first-class honours bachelor's degree from the National Academy of Public Administration, which is affiliated with the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, the leading institution for political science in Vietnam. He had internships in the Philippines, Australia, and Europe before joining VOICE. When the marine disaster occurred in 2016, he regularly posted on his Facebook page images, videos and stories about the victims in the fishing villages. In the same year, he coordinated two visits by a Taiwanese parliamentary delegation and the international media to the affected areas. He contacted international lawyers' groups to prepare for the possibilities of a lawsuit by the fishermen against the company, Formosa. Although he never claimed himself to be a professional reporter, his Facebook page became a focal

point for news about life in the vicinity of the disaster. From April to the end of 2016, NAT had 67 Facebook posts about the marine disaster. Each post attracted over a thousand interactions, including likes, shares and comments. His Facebook page expanded its readership after each post and became the bulletin about developments in the marine disaster.

At noon on May 1, 2016, a delegation led by the newly appointed Minister of Information and Communication, Truong Minh Tuan,¹⁵ entered the Vung Ang port, in Ky Anh District, Ha Tinh Province, Vietnam, just a few kilometres from the church where NAT had fled from. Minister Truong Minh Tuan was accompanied by the Minister of Health and many press-carded journalists. Their lunch in a local seafood restaurant was well broadcast and reported by the governmental television stations and newspapers. A journalist from the *Ho Chi Minh City Law Newspaper*, Nguyen Duc Hien, who is known by his social media account name as Bo Cu Hung (Daddy of Hung), posted on his Facebook page that for the lunch he ate five squids caught alive from Vung Ang seawater. Months later, when it was identified that the toxic wastewater released from the Formosa industrial plant in Vung Ang had caused the death of the marine life, the lunch became an icon of the journalists' blind faith in the government. Nguyen Duc Hien, particularly, risked his health and professional reputation to 'prove' the safety of seafood caught in the marine disaster area. From 'the Daddy of Hung', Hien acquired the new nickname 'five squids' journalist'. The day before, on April 30, 2016, Vietnamese newspapers had been filled by the images of the leaders of Da Nang city swimming at My Khe, the local beach. The photos of top leaders and top journalists swimming in the sea and eating seafood were like tranquillisers, being used to calm down the public, whom the massive death of the fish had driven to panic. The messages delivered by government media were more tourism promotions than warnings against the polluted sea water.

The massive death of the fish was covered from a sharply contrasting perspective. NAT depicted the massive hunger in fishing families, the panic of the fishermen and divers and conflict between the church and the local authorities. However, governmental reporters reiterated the safe conditions for tourism and aqua product exports. The citizen journalism reflected the viewpoint of the laypeople, with vivid stories broadcast live from their community, while the government journalism served as the mouthpiece for the ministries. The citizen journalism employed Facebook, YouTube, and personal devices as its delivery platforms. In contrast, government journalism used the heavily invested infrastructure and administration system. Moreover, specific press-card journalists in senior positions propagated the government's line via both journalistic publications and personal Facebook accounts. This pattern of opposition between citizen journalism and government journalism was repeated in many other social conflicts during the mid-2010s in Vietnam.

Doi Moi triggered this opposition between mainstream journalism and social media. Since the CPV maintained their ideological position unchanged despite *Doi Moi*, they strictly controlled many aspects of Vietnamese journalism, making journalism a propaganda tool and mouthpiece for the government rather than an open forum for the public. Social media, however, was free of technical and ideological barriers—at least before the 2018 Cyber Security law. To facilitate further global market integration, the Vietnamese government repeatedly expressed commitments to free access to internationally-based websites and social media. In an interview I conducted with him in March 2018, Ta Ngoc Tan said:

After *Doi Moi*, we can access the international websites that we cannot do before, including BBC, RFA, VOA, and many other media products that are owned by our former enemies.

As indicated earlier, Vietnam's access to the World Trade Organisation meant a commitment to connect Vietnam to international telecommunication services, including international internet, on an unlimited and unbanned spectrum. In the process of negotiation to access a Free Trade Agreement with the EU, Vietnam committed to allow EU companies to have the best possible access to the Vietnamese market in four crucial sectors, of which telecommunications is a major part. In terms of connecting to the global telecommunication service, Vietnam's commitment with the EU went beyond its commitment to the WTO and other free trade agreements that Vietnam had concluded. These commitments were the opposite of the Golden Shield policy or the National Public Security Work Information Project which was imposed by China, its neighbour and fellow communist country, which restricted people in mainland China from approaching the international online media.

When covering green issues, Vietnamese mainstream journalism often blacks-out green issues as demanded by the authority. The Party has long held the belief that publishing news of damages or loss of life or materials caused by bad weather, floods, cyclones, or drought could lower Vietnam's image in the eyes of the outside world (Palmos, 1995). Reports of natural disasters were heavily censored until the foreign radio broadcasters, such as the BBC or RFA, carried reports from international agencies monitoring natural disasters. Coverage of environmental catastrophes could halt the development of tourism and foreign investment and industrial access in the damaged areas. Suppression of news about the massive death of fish along the central coastline of Vietnam was an example of this belief. In a press conference about the causes of the phenomenon, the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environment refused to respond to a journalist from *Thanh Nien* newspaper because 'asking the question [about the toxic metals in wastewater from Formosa, the steel

factory] could do harm to the country' (Thanh Nien newspaper interviews the Deputy Minister of MONRE on April 27, 2016).¹⁶

Paradoxically, during the *Doi Moi* period and further international integration, the Party realised that the coverage of environmental problems could help an international audience become aware of the problems Vietnam was experiencing and could increase financial or technical aid from overseas. Palmos (1995, p.5) recorded a turning point in the Party's special media conference in 1988 when delegates realised that foreign aid from both government and private sources was flown into Vietnam after natural disasters. After that, coverage of these disasters was highlighted in all government media. From that time, floods, hurricanes and earthquakes have been being reported. The Party-led media system, as a consequence, may report some 'natural' disasters, while ignoring other environmental disasters, depending on the Party's views about each disaster. These views are sometimes very confusing because the Party is not always clear about what should be reported. The common formula for unclear situations in reporting environmental problems is to produce coverage about the positive side of the problems. For example, during the early phase of the marine disaster, when the toxic metals had not yet been detected from Formosa's wastewater, the bright side of the disaster was reported, such as: city leaders in Da Nang swam at the local sea, and the Ministry of Health (MOH) leaders and journalists ate squid caught from Vung Ang Industrial zone water. In the later phases of the disaster, the water and squid were found to be extremely poisonous due to the untreated toxic wastewater containing heavy metals being discharged from Formosa's facilities.

As of January 2018, Vietnam had over 55 million Facebook accounts. Significant evidence shows the link between using Facebook for activism and participating in real-life activism. A total of 97% of Vietnamese-accredited journalists own Facebook accounts; 10% of them are using Facebook to

participate in offline activism.¹⁷ Many activist-journalists emerged during the Formosa disaster, including Huynh Ngoc Chanh—a former journalist with *Thanh Nien* newspaper – and Bach Hoan—a former journalist with Vietnam Television. Not only did these journalists publish investigations and commentaries on their Facebook pages; they also actively participated in online and offline protests for the environment. Many of them then stepped down from their high positions in the media or quit their jobs.

From April to June 2016, at least 30 news articles about Formosa and the disaster were removed from online newspapers¹⁸. Government officials repeatedly provided alternative narratives for the causes of the disaster, such as ‘red tide’¹⁹ or ‘water blooming’²⁰ or ‘an earth layers crush’ before it was made clear that Formosa had discharged toxic water. In response to the officials’ anticipated causes, evidence-based fact-checking was conducted by scientists, the media, and the public, turning Facebook and blogs into forums for fact-checking and fact-releasing. The peaceful protests were underreported or were labelled as a ‘reactionary movement against the Party and people.’ In the Occupy Town Hall movement in April 2016, along with protesting against Formosa, people in Ha Tinh province initiated a boycott of Vietnam Television (VTV). In this practice, green issues were linked with the problems of freedom of expression. The protests against polluters were combined with a rejection of government journalism and the adoption of social media, particularly Facebook and YouTube. Thus, social media users play an influential role in the green movement as well as in the historic changes in Vietnam.

Fake news is a concept that arose during the Presidential election in the US in 2016, when unverified negative information about the Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton was published in the format of news and went viral on social media.²¹ Fake news also arose during the marine disaster in Vietnam and triggered public scrutiny of both mainstream media and social media. While the

mainstream media reported the unverified causes of the disaster and made false assertions that the seawater was safe and was being cleaned up, social media became a forum for fact-checking the government's disaster claims. For example, the photos of reddish strips of water and the videos of red liquid discharging into the sea from a sewer pipe, which were initially published on Facebook during February and March 2017, were revealed as having been filmed a long time before and far from the disaster vicinity. The fake news phenomenon challenged the validity of the news generated on social media. On one hand, social media distributed authentic, uncensored news, leveraging the public awareness of and participation in environmental issues.

On the other hand, the complexity of detecting falsehood thwarted social media's claims to present quality evidence for decision and policy-making processes. In addition, emotionally framed arguments spread on social media initiated 'post-truth politics', in which political decisions 'rely unabashedly on emotion or opinion-based appeals rather than policy-or fact-based discussion' (Romano, 2017, p. 52). Social media, therefore, offers both opportunities and threats for the formulation of awareness, attitudes and actions towards green issues.

It has been observed that the green movement in Vietnam has a distinguishing feature as it is based on arguments that are generated and circulated on social media. The emergence of Facebook and the increasing seriousness of green issues make it urgent for research to investigate the dialectic relationship between them and the green revolution that has erupted thanks to social media. This book reflects the positions of Vietnamese journalists, Facebook users and the engaged audience as they use journalism and social media to create changes in environmental issues, resulting in turn in changes in Vietnamese politics, socio-economics and culture. This book is a timely record of

a significant period in Vietnamese history and in its journalism, politics and society.

1.5. Conceptualisation of the green public sphere

The concept of the green public sphere is investigated throughout this book. It is in fact a combination of two concepts. First, as discussed earlier, in the Vietnamese context the concept of green is associated with the issues of the environment, climate change and sustainability. Second, the concept of the public sphere, introduced by Jürgen Habermas, a German sociologist and philosopher and theorist of the Frankfurt School²². He describes the public sphere as a confrontation towards authority and the formation of democracy through rational and free communication. Constructing the public sphere is a standard of democracy in which the public have the free access to information, rights to form political organisations and deliberation (Gitlin, 1998, p.168). The public sphere does not directly govern but influences the government in an indirect fashion through the communication of opinions and by cultivating debates and disagreements (Torgerson, 1999, p. 161).

Habermas's book was published in Germany in 1962 and was translated into English in 1989 as *The Structural Transformation of Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. In this volume, Habermas describes the bourgeois public sphere as the fundamental driver for transition to a democracy in Europe in the 18th century. The bourgeoisie was an emerging middle-class of rich businessmen, who came together to discuss and debate the rules imposed by feudalism (Habermas, 1989b, p. 27). With the development of the Enlightenment (the European intellectual movement in the 17th and the 18th century), people had more opportunities to meet at bourgeois salons, balls, banquets, theatres, libraries, coffee-houses, and so on, where they freely exchanged opinions critical of the authorities. Habermas writes of this space as:

a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to this domain is open in principle to all citizens who may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicise their opinions freely. (Habermas, 1989a, p. 231)

The opinions and arguments expressed in this space expanded both in quantity and quality until they confronted the authorities, including the Established Church and the monarchy. This confrontation was then converted into movements, and escalated into many revolutions in Germany, Great Britain and France in the 17th and 18th centuries (Habermas, 1989b, p. xvii).

By the 19th century, the power of money and class had grown to a new status that Habermas termed ‘re-feudalism.’ This new power dominated the debates and hindered open and rational discussions. Moreover, once the public gain some early achievements in the debates, they often shifted their concerns toward economics, business, and consumption. For this reason, the bourgeois public sphere was contaminated and had faded by the 19th century (Franklin et al., 2010, pp. 220-221). However, when the authorities manipulated the physical public spaces that had been used for exchanging opinions, the mass media emerged. At that time independent from politics and business, the mass media represented a forum for objectively facilitating the circulation of free public opinions and gradually it took on the role of shaping the public sphere. From the late 20th century, the internet and social media, with their wide range of sources and views, have marked a mushrooming in the expression of public opinions and confronting arguments that has led to another wave of the public sphere.

The central task of this book is to apply the notion of the public sphere to analyse what was happening in Vietnam in the period from 2009 to 2018. In

Habermas's description of European society in the 18th century, the bourgeoisie gathered since they recognised their shared interest in doing so and in advancing their businesses. Similarly, in Vietnam, during 2009 to 2018, the public gathered in social media groups and pages to express their concerns about green issues. For example, the parents of children suffering from measles during the measles outbreak in 2014 used Facebook to inform each other of new measles cases and to mobilise fundraising for medical equipment for children in hospitals. During the protests against tree felling in Hanoi in 2015, the protesters gathered to draw treemaps and protect the trees. While the bourgeois in Habermas's descriptions used physical places, such as ballrooms or coffee houses, to exchange opinions, the Vietnamese people took advantage of social media as a free and open virtual public space to deliver their ideas. The challenges to feudalism and capitalism in the classic theories of the public sphere are similar to the challenges to the one-party state with its policies prioritising industrialisation.

One of the characteristic conditions in the public sphere in Vietnam is that the emerging social media operates as an opposite force to mainstream journalism. Journalism in Vietnam is controlled by the CPV and serves as the mouthpiece for CPV organisations. To this end, journalism promotes consensus, harmony, positivity, and achievements to create a sustainable environment for carrying out the CPV's vision of industrialisation and modernisation, which is analysed in detail in chapter two of this book. By contrast, reporting on social media first and foremost addresses the public interest. This can be seen particularly in Nguyen Anh Tuan's story of staying in Ky Phuong's church to report on the massive death of fish, when he identifies himself as the 'reluctant reporter'. While the press-carded reporters did not fulfil their professional duties, citizen reporters stepped in and adopted the assignment of serving the public's interests in expression and information. This helped the victims of

green traumas tell their stories. It also helped the public know about the situations, giving them evidence and data on which to form quality and critical opinions, arguments and debates. In turn, these public opinions played a role in the decision and policy-making processes. Social media, in this way, stimulated democracy in the one-party country.

The use of social media challenges the professionalism of journalism in Vietnam. Journalism should be ‘the production of contemporary facts and records’ and should describe ‘the contemporary modalities that produce history as maps of meaning for the present’ (Nash, 2016, p. 225). However, the propaganda function of Vietnamese journalism means that it reports environmental disasters in ways that reinforce the legitimacy of the CPV. The story in the fishing village on May 1, 2016, is an example for this practice. The reporters stopped reflecting on the facts of the polluted sea water and, more seriously, some reporters produced the illusion that the seafood was safe. In this case, journalism produced ‘alternative facts’, a term coined by KellyAnne Conway, the spokesperson of the President of the USA, Donald Trump, referring to facts that the authority wants the public to know. This book will argue that journalism in Vietnam failed to provide facts and meanings during the green traumas. In this situation, social media rigorously played the roles that journalism should have played by recording the contemporary, providing evidence in photos and images, interviews and stories from the grassroots, and then constructing the foundation for understanding the meaning, forming knowledge, and influencing the political realm.

The same points apply to the accountability of journalism. Journalism shares its powers with social media in challenging the authorities to answer the public, and in fact-checking the answers. When the Deputy Minister of MONRE refused to answer the reporter from *Thanh Nien* newspaper, social media users kept asking and repeating the reporter’s question until the MONRE replied in a

press conference. The authenticity of the present and the past is another typical characteristic of journalism. However, with quite a few technological aids, social media can produce more understanding of the time and space, or the contexts for knowledge. This book will suggest that the public sphere in Vietnam does not only challenge the leading role of the Party, but also challenges the professionalism of journalism, leading to a sharp separation between the mainstream, state-run journalism and citizen social media reporting. As a result, audiences of different types of media construct different, and sometimes opposite understandings, knowledges, and beliefs, causing serious social conflicts.

The evolution of the green public sphere in Vietnam resonates with that in China. Yang and Calhoun, in their paper analysing the green public sphere in China, conclude that:

the constitution of a Chinese green public sphere depends crucially on citizens and citizen organisations and on their creative use of the internet, alternative media, and the mass media. (Yang & Calhoun, 2007, p. 230)

In that paper, Yang and Calhoun argue that the green public sphere in China started from the technological perspective on green issues, and used the well-structured platforms of books, scientific journals, journalists' fora, scientific websites, and so on. The green public sphere in China focuses on technical and communicative angles, and Yang and Calhoun argue that it should be described in more neutral terms such as 'public space' or 'social space' rather than the 'public sphere' (Yang & Calhoun, 2007, p. 213).

In Vietnam, since social media was open and much less controlled than state-run media, it has become the primary platform for the public sphere in general and the green public sphere in particular. Initially, the green public

sphere in Vietnam dealt with non-political issues, such as the construction of mines or cable cars, the cutting down of trees, the measles outbreak, the fish market, and so on. In its dynamic development, the green public sphere has evolved to implicate politics, including demands for government resignations and legislative changes. In particular, the protests against the Cyber Security law and the legislation on Special Economic Zones are typical political movements.

The green public sphere in Vietnam from 2009 to 2018 developed in multifaceted dimensions. It started from public health issues, in the measles outbreak. It was also initiated by concerns about consumption of daily commodities, such as clothes and coffee for youth in Boo fashion company. It arose also from within the community of trekkers and cave discoverers, many of whom did not ever plan to travel to Son Doong cave, but who still signed a petition to stop construction in the Son Doong area. Yet again, it began in the small emotional social media post of a housewife, which then attracted the involvement of 22 think-tanks from various Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), to protect trees in Hanoi. From public health, consumption, tourism, conservation, youth, women, global-local community, and many other dimensions, the green public sphere emerged. These multifaceted green issues transformed to gradually influence politics, democracy and the state and to produce changes within the CPV.

As Calhoun concludes 'A public sphere adequate to a democratic polity depends upon both quality of discourse and quantity of participation' (1992, p. 2). The green public sphere is dependent on the quality of public opinions about green issues, opinions which have been expressed in the state-controlled mass media and journalism, and more importantly, on social media. Facebook and other platforms have come to compete with journalism in offering spaces for rational-critical discourse. However, social media has advantages in stimulating

a greater openness to free popular participation. In addition, the quantity of participation can be examined through the increasing engagement of the informed public in green issues. Concepts of the public sphere stress ‘the issue of rational, critical debate and the questions of from whence it came, whether it was ever reality as much as ideal, and why it declined’ (Calhoun, 1992, p. 3). With this theoretical guidance, the book investigates this green public sphere in Vietnam by analysing the conditions that initiated it in 2009, the people and organisations that became involved in green debates, the capacity of each key stakeholder in these green debates, the impacts of the arguments on policies, changes in politics and democracy, and the conditions that caused a contamination of the green public sphere in 2018.

The most prominent public sphere in Vietnam during the prevalence of social media between 2009 and 2018 was the green public sphere. It challenged the legitimacy of the one-party state and redefined the professionalism of journalism in Vietnam. To some extent, the green public sphere reshaped the politics, culture and society of Vietnam, and pushed the country to an historic decision in the dilemma between economics and the environment. With data from journalism and social media, and stories told by journalists, Facebook users, scientists, activists, and the engaged public, this book captures and analyses the real-time evolution of the green public sphere in Vietnam. As a journalistic book, it reflects public interest in the green public sphere, a topic not openly discussed in Vietnam due to political restrictions. It captures the real-time and the real space of the developments in the green public sphere. The book is useful for journalists, environmental activists and the public who engage in the green public sphere, including scientists, people in NGOs and the business sectors, people working in and concerned about freedom of expression and environmental issues in Vietnam. By contributing to the insights and knowledge of the green public sphere, this book itself involves the development

of the green public sphere. In this way the book contributes meaningfully to both knowledge and practice of the public sphere.

1.6. Structure of the book

Having set out the background to the political, social-economic and cultural background in this chapter, in Chapter Two I discuss the Vietnamese media landscape. The chapter first analyses the mainstream media, or the government-controlled system of journalism in Vietnam. It investigates professional performance of Party-accredited journalists, revealing a detailed picture of journalistic ideology, management policies, the structure of control and how journalists struggle with their professional sense of journalistic duty and the policy priorities of the CPV. In the second section, the chapter analyses the development of social media from Yahoo! 360° to Facebook and highlights the most influential social networks in Vietnam. The third section investigates how mainstream journalism changed under the impact of social media and analyses the spectrum of social media engagement among journalists. The final part of Chapter Two reviews the ways in which the government and business sector has interfered with social media through paid content, paid commentators and cyber troops. Chapter Two constructs the foundation for the understanding of the developments of the green public sphere, which is then analysed chronologically through the case studies in the subsequent chapters of the book.

Chapter Three, *Bauxite and the intellectuals*, defines the role of intellectuals as the initiators for the early green public sphere. This is the first case of social media usage to create a public sphere around sustainability in the anti-bauxite mining movement in Vietnam. From the movement against the bauxite projects, blogs became the alternative media where the public could develop a consensual approach to green issues. The chapter reviews the ways by which

the government imposed technical restrictions in response to the early green public sphere.

Chapter Four, *Song Tranh 2 and the mainstream journalists*, deals with the case of a hydropower plant constructed on Tranh River. The chapter discusses Vietnamese policies on electricity in the pursuit of industrialisation. It includes experts' views on the policies about coal thermal power, hydropower and alternative power plants in Vietnam. With the stories of professional activities told by the journalists working in BRT, QRT, VTV, *Tuoi Tre*, VFEJ, who reported on the topic of the building of the Song Tranh 2 power plant, this chapter examines the engagement of journalists with the green public sphere before the interference of social media.

Chapter Five, *The measles outbreak and the beginning of Facebook activism*, analyses the measles outbreak of 2014 as a turning point for the growing public sphere. From this event onwards, social media started a new form of online call-out of state and Party authorities, and mainstream media began to pick up on sources from social media. Collective and connective actions that emerged on Facebook during the measles outbreak in 2014 are analysed to assess the impact of social media on public media usage, politics and society.

Chapter six, *Boo Fashion company and the commercialisation of the green issues*, evaluates the engagement of the business sector in the green public sphere, taking Boo Fashion Company as an example. Boo Company Ltd differentiates itself by taking a green approach to doing business. This chapter evaluates the adoption of green concepts in a Vietnamese business context and the adaptations by the business sector in communicating green messages to local consumers.

Chapter Seven, *Save Son Doong: the local responses to the global initiatives*, analyses the social media strategy of the Save Son Doong campaign and how

the Quang Binh provincial authorities reacted to the protest. This example leads to a more extensive review of Vietnamese preparations for the COP21, as the local responses to international initiatives. The chapter uncovers the interactions between local, national and international communities in constructing the green public sphere.

Chapter Eight, *6700 trees and the CSOs*, depicts the dedication of civil society organisations in the green movement. It analyses the massive protests against the felling of 6700 trees in Hanoi, denoting the first apparent triumph of the green movement in changing policies and practices in environmental issues.

Chapter Nine, *Formosa the historical green disaster*, uses the Formosa sea disaster to benchmark and compare mainstream media and social media coverage of a massive fish kill caused by industrial pollution. The chapter anticipates a degradation of green conditions, leading to the more serious future conflicts and complexity in the green public sphere.

Chapter Ten, *Discussion and conclusion*, reaffirms the new media landscape with the prevalence of Facebook and its influence on the mainstream media in Vietnam. The chapter assesses the roles of different stakeholders in the green public sphere. It points out the restraints on developments, as well as anticipating the future of the green public sphere in Vietnam. This chapter emphasises the contribution of this research in generating further knowledge about social media and the green public sphere in Vietnam and in transitional countries. ■

Chapter 2

The Vietnamese media landscape

Vietnamese media experienced extreme turbulence between 2014 and 2018. During that time, the CPV and the State, by law, still controlled journalism; however, the media landscape had been drastically re-shaped under the pressure of social media. Social media, particularly Facebook, had been mushrooming beyond CPV control. Quite a few journalists who had previously been government press-carded information officials started using social media to publish un-censored content. New social media-based organisations emerged, creating a pluralism in social structure that challenged the monopoly of the CPV in Vietnamese politics. In this milieu, journalists and the public participated in public discussions producing greater variation in opinions, ranging from the professionally articulated opinions of the mainstream media to individuals' non-professional posts and comments on social media. The increasing complexity and developments in the media landscape, therefore, provided the context for the generation of public opinion and the formation of the green public sphere. This chapter discusses and compares the core characteristics of mainstream journalism and social media in Vietnam. It then analyses the spectrum of journalists' professional practices on social media. The final section of the chapter highlights the government's use of social media to interfere in the public sphere.

2.1. Vietnamese journalism

2.1.1. Ideology

A report by the organisation Reporters Without Borders in 2018 ranked Vietnam 175th out of 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index, above

China, Syria, Turkmenistan, Eritrea and North Korea. This poor ranking resulted from the fact that in the previous year Vietnam had been the world's second-biggest prison for citizen journalists (bloggers) after China. The arrested and imprisoned citizen journalists had been reported because they had generated content that violated Articles 79, 88 and 258 of the *Vietnamese Penal Code*, which respectively bans taking advantage of freedom to violate state interests, anti-state propaganda, and actions aimed at overthrowing the government (RSF, 2017).

The Vietnam press sector has always refuted its low ranking and the other reports about Vietnamese press freedom made by the Reporters Without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Amnesty International, and Human Right Watch. It has been claimed that the ranking and reports are merely 'slanderous and ill-intentioned fabrications that go against the reality in Vietnam' (Quan-Doi-Nhan-Dan, 2002). Vietnamese media officials do not consider citizens without press cards to be journalists or reporters, and they are thus not counted in the barometer of the RSF ranking. This conceptual gap stems from difference between ideologies toward journalism in Vietnam and in Western countries.

The following sections detail the structure of Vietnamese journalism and present a conceptual framework that helps to navigate the position of Vietnamese journalism in comparison with global journalism. This provides the background context for analysing the roles of journalism in the green public sphere.

Journalism in Vietnam is based on a Marxist-Leninist prototype developed in the erstwhile Soviet Union. The Communist Party, the ruling party in Vietnam, claims Leninism and Marxism as the foundation of the Party's doctrine. Journalism is defined as 'the device for social control, managed

exclusively by State and Party' (Pike, 1970, p. 4), intended to 'support the legitimacy of the Communist Party and its rightful hold on society' (Cain, 2014, p. 90). It is noted that 'the mission of press is to serve the people by serving the government' (Shafer, 2006, p. 21). The consequences have been that the media houses have defined themselves as the mouthpiece of the government organisations they are affiliated with. The CPV leader in 2001–2011, Nong Duc Manh, repeatedly asserted that the role of journalism was to hold on to the Party's ideology, to become the voice of the Communist Party and the State, and to be the vanguard in preserving and developing Marxism, Leninism and President Ho Chi Minh's thoughts, in part by controlling the information to determine the orientation of public opinion.

In contrast to the Vietnamese state, Western journalism affirms that 'journalism's first obligation is to the truth' (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 49) and that this commitment makes journalism different from other forms of communication. Huu Tho, a Vietnamese journalism commentator, in his textbook for journalism education and training *The jobs of journalists*, states:

Since journalists are the spokespeople for the Party, the first and foremost truth for journalists is the Party's truth. (1997, p. 25)

This 'Party-first' policy tightens censorship until self-censorship becomes second nature for journalists and topics that could be considered harmful to the power of the party are blacked-out on mainstream media (Marr, 1998, p. 3).

Although Vuving (2010, p. 376) recognises that the mainstream media has gained significant autonomy vis-à-vis the State (particularly financial semi-autonomy with profits from advertising), Vietnamese media practice is still under overt control. For instance, the media houses are the mouthpieces of the State's organisations; 'freelance journalist' is a non-existent concept because all

practitioners of journalism need to be affiliated with one of the media houses and have to meet the State's requirements to obtain press-cards issued by the Ministry of Information and Communication (MIC). Senior leaders of each media house are appointed by the State and need to attend weekly meetings with representatives from the Party's Central Propaganda and Training Commission (CPTC) for setting the news agenda to ensure they co-operate with the Party (Press Law issued from 2003). Further, the import and export of media productions are restricted, creating a barrier to in-depth, accurate coverage (Palmos, 1995, p. 26). In such a milieu, journalistic practice in Vietnam is not far from Herbert Marcuse's idea (1969, pp. 95-137 cited in Cain 2014, p. 90) of 'repressive tolerance', that is, some conditions of tolerance serve the domination by the state. Thus, the role of the press in Vietnam's one-party but increasingly pluralistic system is both a 'propaganda mouthpiece and a watchdog', which can be understood as a state-sanctioned watchdog under state authority (Cain, 2014, pp. 90-91).

In an interview with *Tuoi Tre* newspaper in 2007, the former Minister of Information and Communication, Mr Le Doan Hop, used the metaphor of right-hand traffic to coin the term 'the right-side press' to refer to the mainstream media. He promised 'to create a smooth right-hand side for the media wheels to go'. Responding to the Minister's metaphor, the well-known Vietnamese Fields Medal recipient mathematician, and University of Chicago Professor Ngo Bao Chau, commented on his Facebook account: 'Walking to the sides is the job of the sheep, not of free people'. From this response, the public became familiar with the two new media terms: 'the right-side press' (*bao chi le phai*) for the Party's and state-owned media and 'the left side press' (*bao chi le trai*) for blogs, Facebook and other social media platforms that are not owned and controlled by the State.

The words ‘free press’ have a different connotation in Vietnam than they do in western democracies. A former Vice President of the Vietnam Journalists Association holds the view that the Party never advocates the Western-style free press because the Party believes the west’s focus on sensation, violence and controversy could damage national unity after thirty years of a war that divided the country. The press in Vietnam is free in a sense that it is free to play a positive role in building the Socialism—the ultimate goal of the CPV (Palms, 1995, pp. 1-2).

One of the roles of journalism is to maintain peace and social stability by promoting good people, good deeds. Huu Tho, a well-known teacher of journalism in Vietnam, asserts:

For the cause of transition to socialism, journalism should emphasize good examples and advanced developments to encourage the revolutionary of people. (1997, p. 117)

He suggests two reasons why reflecting the good is a distinguishing characteristic of journalism in socialism. First, journalists should constantly confirm in their journalistic work that the essence of socialism is good. Second, the proletariat can see the benefits they could obtain when they learn from good examples, which helps to achieve the Party’s goal in business development (Tho, 1997, pp. 115-117). As a result, success, achievement, positivity, encouragement and agreement are elements for sound coverage likely to boost development in Vietnam.

Hallin (1989, pp. 116-118) emphasises the presence of three spheres of discourse in the media: (i) the sphere of consensus (containing reporting on which there is a widespread agreement); (ii) the sphere of legitimate controversy (a middle ground where reporters feel the need to be objective, balancing several views on which there remains disagreement), and (iii) the

sphere of deviance (covering outlying views deemed not worthy of consideration). During the late 1970s, before the economic reform in *Doi Moi* policy, the sphere of controversy hardly existed since a consensus was quickly achieved among the elites, who were influenced by the heavy hands of patriarchy and hierarchy (as discussed in chapter three) and so were easily disposed to obey the senior leaders. Together with the pluralisation of Vietnam society from the 1990s, the sphere of controversy has been enlarged. However, minimising the expression of controversy is still a common exercise in Vietnamese journalism.

To reduce the occurrence of controversy, Vietnamese newspapers often publish one-dimensional articles. This can be observed from a content analysis of the news articles about bauxite mining, the 6700 trees issues and the measles outbreak as published by *Tuois Tre* and *VnExpress* online newspapers (see table 2.1). The number of primary definers, whose opinions set the initial framing of the events, is 36.3% of the total sources, over twice the number of counter definers (16.1%), whose opinions are opposite to those of the primary definers. The majority of the sources, 41.1% have no conflict with the opinions of the primary definers; instead they share stories and evidence to support the primary definers. Just 6.45% of the sources express other opinions.

Two concepts need to be elaborated here. First, in Hall et al.'s terms, the primary definers of topics are:

credible individuals and institutions granted media access to enable their initial framing of events which are assumed to be within their area of competence: for instance, experts, official sources, courts, leading politicians, and senior religious figures. (Hall et al., 1978, cited in Nash, 2016, p. 188).

Table 2.1: Types of sources on Tuoi Tre and VnExpress

Coverage		Types of sources		
	Primary definers	Counter definers	No conflict	Other opinion
Bauxite	35	10	17	1
Measles	53	36	97	22
6700 trees	47	14	39	1
Total	135 36.3%	60 16.1%	153 41.1%	24 6.45%

By giving someone the positions of primary definers, the media give them chances to set ‘interpretation’ which then ‘commands the field’ in all subsequent treatment’ and establishes ‘the terms of reference within which all further coverage or debate takes place’. When covering the opinions of such sources, the mass media become the secondary definers. Second, counter-definiers are described by Hall et al. as:

[those] who can sometimes gain access to the media to argue their case, but typically they do so on the terms already established for the issue by the primary definers. (Hall et al., 1978, cited in Nash, 2016, p. 189).

Instead of covering both sides of the events in one news item, Vietnamese journalistic coverage often separates opposite opinions into different news items. As a result, articles often consist of primary definers and some supporters’ opinions, while counter-opinion are reflected separately by primary definers in other news items. The aim of this practice is to avoid direct confrontation in one journalistic piece. International media may seek direct conflicts between sources, which can produce sensational and dramatic features

for the news, catching the audience's attention. However, provoking confrontation is not welcomed in either daily life or in journalism in Vietnam.

For example, in March 2015 when Hanoi residents protested against the felling of 6700 trees, the People's Committee of Hanoi city planted new trees to replace the ones that had been felled. At 9.41am on March 25, *VnExpress* published a news article titled 'Hanoi confirms the newly planted trees on Nguyen Chi Thanh Street are *Manglietia Fordiana*'. In this article, the Deputy Head of Department of Construction of Hanoi city, Mr Le Van Duc, confirmed that his Department had planted *Manglietia Fordiana*, a relatively costly type of tree which is on the Red List of endangered species. In this article, Mr Duc is the primary definer, whose opinion is supported by the other sources working in the Hanoi People's Committee Office.

About four hours later, at 14.18pm, *VnExpress* published another news article under the same column, about the same topic, titled 'Experts refute Hanoi's opinion on *Manglietia Fordiana*'. In the second article, Doctor Nguyen Tien Hiep, the Director of Vietnam Fauna Preservation Centre, rejected the idea that the newly planted trees are *Manglietia Fordiana* and asserted they are *Manglietia Phuthoensis*, a much less expensive type of tree than *Manglietia Fordiana*. Hiep was the primary definer and his opinion was supported by other three experts from Forestry University, Institute of Ecology and Fauna Resources and Association of Biological Disciplines. Apparently, Hiep's opinion was the opposite to Duc's, and if the two articles had been merged, Duc would have been the primary definer while Hiep would have been the counter-definer. Grouping sources of similar opinions in one news item and separating out the counter-definers in other news items is a very common practice in journalism in Vietnam. The two contrasting news articles appear in figure 2.1.

The image shows two news articles from the VnExpress online newspaper. Both articles are dated March 25, 2015, at 9:41 GMT+7. The first article, titled 'Hà Nội khẳng định cây trên phố Nguyễn Chí Thanh là vàng tâm' (Hanoi affirms the tree on Nguyen Chi Thanh street is golden heart), discusses a tree on Ba Đình street that was recently felled. It states that the tree is a golden heart tree, which is highly valued. The second article, titled 'Chuyên gia phản bác ý kiến của Hà Nội về cây vàng tâm' (Expert refutes Hanoi's view on the golden heart tree), presents a different perspective, suggesting the tree is just a common golden wood tree. Both articles include social sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Print, and Email.

Figure 2.1: Two news articles about the same topic on VnExpress Online Newspaper on 25/3/2015

Another tactic to avoid potential conflicts is to publish from official reports, decisions and documents that are released by government organisations, especially those produced by the police. In addition, journalists often report on official meetings, using press releases or opinions delivered during the meeting as the primary defined sources. The practice is so popular that Vietnamese journalists have a specific term for such kind of news as '*tin hoi nghi*' ('meeting news'). The provincial charters of the Vietnam Journalists Training Centre (VJTC) even organise many professional intensive courses and workshops on 'How to effectively produce meeting news'.²³ This practice is considered safe for journalists since all they need to do is cover confirmed and government-accredited information, without even needing to double-check the information.

Table 2.2 shows the total number of news articles about Bauxite mining, the measles outbreak and the felling of 6700 trees in Hanoi published in the *Tuoi Tre* newspaper and *VnExpress* online newspaper, and the number of news articles using official reports as the single source. On *Tuoi Tre*, 15% of the news articles

published information from official reports while this number on *VnExpress* was about 19.4%. Since these two newspapers are considered more liberal, the percentage of reports using official information is likely to be much higher in other Vietnamese newspapers.

Table 2.2: Number of articles using official reports on *Tuoitre* and *VnExpress*

	Coverage		Types of sources	
	<i>Tuoitre</i> Newspaper	<i>VnExpress</i> Online Newspaper	Total articles	Official reports in articles
Bauxite	18	3	19	7
Measles	46	6	45	6
6700 trees	9	2	39	7
Total	73	11 15%	103	20 19.4%

As an example of the common practice of publishing official reports on journalistic platforms, in the massive marine life destruction in 2016, MIC discouraged journalistic investigation and instead reinforced the use of reports from the police and State organisations. In a press conference held to announce the causes of the disaster, hosted by the Governmental Office on June 30, 2016, the Minister of MIC, Mister Truong Minh Tuan, said:

The Party and State do not have the policy of holding information. However, after a time (of the disaster break), we commanded Vietnamese journalistic organisations to reduce the intensity and frequency of reports (on the disaster). Journalists are commanded to work within the legal frame, avoid the unconfirmed sources, and be patient to wait for the official confirmation.

In this live broadcast and live-streamed press conference, the leader of the Ministry of Information and Culture, as the editor-in-chief of all the national editor-in-chief, lectured journalists:

In this complex and serious accident [governmental officials use the term ‘*sự cố*’-accident, which indicates the sudden, short-term, less severe effects of the event, instead of the term disaster], journalists are incapable of detecting the criminals. Journalistic investigation cannot replace the investigation of legal guardians and professional organisations.

As all journalists know, Deep Throat is the pseudonym for the unidentified source that helped American journalists investigate the Watergate scandal in 1972, leading to the resignation of President Richard Nixon in 1974. Deep Throat is a reminder of the professional pride of global investigative journalists and a metaphor for secret unofficial sources. However, there is little chance of a Deep Throat being used in Vietnam.

Since the 1990s, to serve the Communist Party's anti-corruption cause after *Doi Moi*, newspapers were given 'the licence to report about corruption' (Macan-Markar, 2003). Thus, publishing negative aspects of government officials has been considered an acceptable practice. Journalists were allowed to record images of officials taking bribes or publish stories about scandals that the officials were involved in. However, policemen play the role of information filter and pre-censor for journalism and most of the information about corruption is provided by the police. Being dependent on the sources of police, journalists sometimes innocently publish unlawful information before the courts release their final claims. For example, in 2006, 40 editors were accused of publishing wrongful stories provided by police about high-ranking government officials involved in the project PMU18. Two journalists from *Tuoi Tre* and *Thanh*

Nien newspapers were imprisoned because of their reports. This represented an historic crisis in investigative and anti-corruption journalism in Vietnam.

When the room for controversy and negativity increased, it led to dissenting opinions that journalists working strictly within the Party's restrictions could not cover fully (Wells-Dang, 2012, pp. 4-5). This created the climate in which another kind of media outside the mainstream spectrum could come to provide this reflection, which was tolerated as long as these reports did not violate the rules of the Party. When responsibility for the coverage of controversy and negativity was shifted onto non-mainstream media, Vietnamese journalism was able to maintain its primary duty as being the mouthpiece for the Party and State by advocacy of positivity, success and stability.

2.1.2. Structure

For Marxists, ideology may represent the way things appear to us but may not be the essence of the things (Joseph, 2006, p. 14). Gramsci (1979, pp. 99-100) examines the concept of 'ideology' mirroring the beliefs in religion up to eighteenth-century French materialism. He argues that the structure of the component ideas forming an ideology can change the ideology. In order to understand both appearance and essence, and the dialectical between ideology and structure of journalism in Vietnam, it is therefore important to analyse the system of journalism in place.

Figure 2.2 illustrates the management structure of Vietnamese journalism organisations, which is aligned to the administrative structure of the Party and the Government. This diagram is adapted from the working materials of the VJA and has been updated and amended for this study. The VJA's original diagram has two levels (the central and provincial levels), while in some areas the provincial journalism organisations also extend their professional scope to district and commune radio and television broadcasting. The arrows in figure

2.2 indicate the flow of guidance, instructions and commands from the higher to the lower organisations in the management structure, and from the Party's blocks to the State's blocks.



Figure 2.2: Management levels of journalism organisations in Vietnam

Article 14 of the Vietnamese Press Code issued in 2016 claims that the right of ownership of journalistic organisations belongs to 'Party, government, political, socio-political, professional and other governmental organisations recognised by the government'. The Press Codes over the years have consistently rejected the involvement of the private sector in journalism. Performance of all mass media organisations is under the direct control of the CPTC, which is under the State control of the CPV and MIC at three levels: centre, province (or city), and district and commune.

Although in term of constitution, the State is under the control and leadership of the CPV, with the introduction of the *Doi Moi* policy the

Government machinery attained relatively equal power with the CPV in the national central level of management. In 1995, the Eighth Congress of the CPV officially endorsed an administrative reform, which was one of the requirements in the interests of economic reform. The administrative reform focused on restructuring organisations, simplifying administrative procedures and rebuilding the civil service. The CPV still kept its monopoly but partly shared power with Government machinery in ruling the country. This reform has permitted pluralism in the economy since *Doi Moi* (Funston, 2001, p.386). This is why the State and the Party are presented on the same level in figure 2.2.

The national management of Vietnam is divided into three administrative levels: the central, provincial and the district and commune (Funston, 2001, p.381). At the central level, the Propaganda and Ideological Department (a unit of the CPV) and Ministry of Information and Communication (managed by Government control) manage all aspects of the media across the entire nation. Some central-level mass media organisations are: *Nhan Dan* (the People) newspaper (the mouthpiece that reflects the official viewpoint of the CPV), Vietnam News Agency, Vietnam Television, The Voice of Vietnam, and Vietnam Television Corporation. Each ministry has at least one newspaper and one magazine which is managed at the central level; for example, *Suc Khoe va DoiSong* (*Health and Life*) newspaper is produced by the MOH, *Giao Duc va Thoi Dai* (*Education and Times*) is an output of the Ministry of Education and Training, and *Tai Nguyen va Moi Truong* (*Natural Resources and Environment*) magazine is a publication of the MONRE. Because it is illegal for the private sector to own newspapers, some media houses affiliate with governmental organisations at the central level to become the national newspapers. Thus, although certain media houses are established by private businesses and have attained financially independent status (for example *VnExpress* e-newspaper is 'owned' by a private company investment company FPT, and Zing-news by VC Corp),

they are required to be government-affiliated. Even foreign-owned media houses need to affiliate with governmental organisations and become a unit of the government sector. When Forbes established their Vietnamese edition—Forbes Vietnam—in 2013, they registered as a supplement of *Culture* magazine, and thus became an affiliate of the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism. While Forbes's reporters and editors produce the content for the magazine, the editor-in-chief of *Culture* magazine, who is assigned by the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism, has the final decision on publishable content.

VnExpress.net of FPT is a special case among the central level media houses. This e-newspaper has developed its readership among the Vietnamese community in the world and has been ranked in the global top 500 most visited websites in 2005, top 300 in 2006 and top 100 in 2007. Leaders of the MIC have commented:

VnExpress gains such success because of their objective and fast reporting. The e-newspaper becomes the first platform for overseas Vietnamese when they read news about Vietnam.

Because of its extremely influential and large readership, in this study I have selected *VnExpress* as a representative example of mainstream state-controlled journalism and I have conducted content analysis on the coverage of green events published in this online newspaper.²⁴

Under the central level is the provincial level. Each province in the 63 cities and provinces of Vietnam has at least three media houses: newspaper, radio and television (broadcasting) stations and online information portals. Since the average area of a province is rather small (5200 square kilometres, which is about 60% of the area of the city of Melbourne), audiences of one province can access the channels of several neighbouring provinces. This has the potential to lead to wastefulness and inefficiency in media investment, as To Huy Rua, the

leader of CPTC, remarked in a media review. In addition, national associations via their provincial offices can also establish newspapers at this level. *Tuoitre* newspaper is an exception. Although it is an affiliation of the Youth Union of Ho Chi Minh City, and therefore it is a provincial level newspaper, *Tuoitre* has gained credibility as the leading national newspaper whose power and influence extends beyond the area of Ho Chi Minh City. Since *Tuoitre* follows a liberal journalistic approach that allows more comprehensive reporting of the green public sphere among other state-controlled mainstream newspapers, I selected *Tuoitre* to conduct content analysis about the green public sphere, together with *VnExpress*.

The lowest level is the district and commune. Vietnam has 644 district units and 11,161 commune units, and each operates its own radio station via a loudspeaker system. Each district unit runs its own television station, which delivers information from the local government to the local people. It also produces local programs to contribute to the upper-level journalism organisations. While the central and provincial level journalism organisations are mass media generators, the district and commune levels are not. Although they are aligned with the guidance from the Party and Government, their purpose is rather information delivery than journalism. This is because journalism at this level targets a small audience living within a district or commune, the information is one-way (top-down from the authorities to the people), and staff members are not required to obtain press cards.

The ultimate Communist Party control of journalism can be observed in eight aspects: media licensing, patrolling, staffing, training, material supplies, access to information, distribution of media products and TV and radio frequency control. All these factors have direct impacts on the content of journalism (Palmer, 1995, pp. 7-37). MIC controls journalists by the Press Code and Press Card. Only those who have been served more than five years in state-

controlled journalism organisations and have not violated the Press Code are offered Press Cards. The VJA is the only official journalists' association. It is also a state-run association, providing further professional and ethical training for journalists. The Party's CPTC organises weekly, monthly and quarterly meetings with the editors-in-chief of all newspapers and broadcasting stations, often on Tuesdays, to review mainstream coverage in the previous periodical and set the agenda for the coming ones. Despite the fact that in 2017 Vietnam had 859 printed newspapers, 660 printed magazines, 67 radio and television stations and 135 online newspapers (MIC, 2017), most of the media outlets covered the same topics from the same angles because all the editors-in-chief received the same weekly agenda and guidance from the CPV.

With rapid social-economic and technological development and the influence of globalisation, this structure of journalism management has come under heavy challenge, allowing the emergence of more structural flexibilities in journalism. The latest Press Code issued by the Vietnamese Government in 2016 defines the change in the business model for journalism organisations. Article 21 in the Press Code—'Model of operation and revenues of a press agency— stages that 'A press agency shall operate after the model of a revenue-generating non-business unit'. Now officially regarded as a revenue-generating unit, a state-owned media house can gain financial independence as long as it can generate revenues from subscription, advertising and other media services. Once it reaches the status of financial independence, a media house can operate under Decree 141, issued by the Government in 2016, which states that to some extent the organisation can be professionally independent from the government if it no longer receives financial investment from the government.

Both the Press Code and Decree 141 have been legally effective since 2016 but the actual race to financial independence had started earlier. In 2015, Professor Nguyen Minh Thuyet, the former Chairman of the National

Assembly's Committee on Culture, Education, Youth and Children, observed at least three types of media agency. First, the totally financially dependent media agencies that are the most crucial among the state-owned ones, such as *Nhan Dan* newspaper, Vietnam Television (VTV), The Voice of Vietnam (VOV), and Vietnam News Agency (VNA). Second, the partly financially independent, a category into which most of the journalism organisations fall. Third, the totally financially independent media agencies who can also be independent in managing their human resources, recruiting editors-in-chief and producing content although they still need to be affiliated with government organisations. With the emergence of the third category, the totally financially independent agencies, Professor Thuyet affirms that 'Vietnam media industry now has not just governmental journalism organisations', recognising that some rare organisations remain outside the formal structure (Thuyet, 2015). Regardless of their financial status, all media organisations must affiliate with governmental organisations. However, interference from a governmental organisation into journalistic content is directly proportional to the government's level of financial investment in the affiliated media houses. Under this rule, financially independent media houses can build their own media agenda (often in technology, sports and entertainment) rather than adhere to the agenda and guidance from the CPTC.

Zing is one of the totally financially independent media corporations. Founded in 2004 under the VinaGame company, which later changed its name to VNG Corporation, Zing's revenue reached 180 million USD in 2017, an increase of 70% from 2016.²⁵ Starting from trading in online games, Zing developed to specialise in digital content in the fields of entertainment, social networks and e-commerce. Zing news (Zing.vn) is the online newspaper of Zing, registered as a unit of the Vietnam Association of Publishing, and has gained fame as a very wealthy newspaper. During the US election of 2016, Zing news

was the only Vietnamese journalism organisation that could afford for their correspondents to report and broadcast live from the US. Zalo, the chat application developed by Zing, had reached 80 million users worldwide in 2017, and is very similar to the huge social app WeChat in China. Tencent, the giant Chinese media conglomerate, which invests in Zing, has increased its share in this Vietnamese media company from 20.2% in 2008 to an undisclosed percentage in 2017. According to Vietnamese laws on foreign investment, a foreign investor can possess a maximum 49% share in a Vietnamese company. However, Tencent have found many ways for their share percentage to exceed the ceiling of 49%, as Tencent has done with its investments in the Philippines, Brazil and India. On the one hand, Zing has benefited from the increasing financial investment from China for its expansion in Vietnam's media market. On the other hand, the growing number of clients for Zing's services (games, chat apps) in Vietnam raises concerns about privacy since China and Vietnam have had a very traumatic relationship in the past. Imperial China dominated Vietnam from the first to the fifteenth century. The war between China and Vietnam occurred from 1979 to the early 1980s. To date, the two countries have been in many armed conflicts in the South China Sea or the East Sea of Vietnam.

Another high ranking financially independent media company is VCCorp. Established in 2006, VCCorp provides digital content for entertainment and e-commerce. As of 2017, the VCCorp ecosystem consisted of 20 high traffic online newspapers and 200 other websites. It claims to serve 90% of internet users in Vietnam. Soha news (soha.vn), for a general audience, and Channel14 (kenh14.vn), for the young audience, are two remarkable online news pages developed by VCCorp. Branding themselves as pages or entertainment ports, i.e. non-journalistic hubs, these two websites are not affiliated with any government organisation, despite the fact that to some extents they publish journalistic content and recruit professional journalists. VCCorp gets investment from the

International Data Group (IDG), a Massachusetts-based company whose partner is Nguyen Bao Hoang, also known as Henry Nguyen, a Vietnamese-American and the son-in-law of the former Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. With abundant financial resources from Goldman Sachs, Henry Nguyen started the first Vietnamese McDonalds restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City in early 2014 and many other successful foreign investment facilities throughout the country.

The structure of Vietnamese journalism is therefore characterised by the strong affiliation of journalism organisations with government organisations. However, this intertwining has been deconstructed by recent socio-economic and technological changes. The number of privately owned newspapers (like *VnExpress*) or foreign investment newspapers (like Zing) or journalistic websites (like Soha or Channel14) is increasing and this is having an impact on Vietnam's media landscape. Although the private companies that invest in running media houses are operating outside the management structure of journalism in Vietnam, they have strong bonds with the government's top leaders. The CEO of FPT was the son-in-law of the Vietnam Army General Vo Nguyen Giap when he founded the company, and VCCorp gets its funding from the son-in-law of the former Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. The private and foreign media businesses build 'marital' linkages to the government sector and become part of government structure by this means.

2.2. Social media in Vietnam

Since 2000, Vietnam has recorded a steady increase in its annual economic growth rate from 5.7% to 7.5%, maintaining the country's position as regional out-performer and globally the second-fastest-growing market after China (Thyer & Mai, 2010 and World Bank cited in Minh, 2014). In September 2017, HSBC global research reported that the economic growth rate of Vietnam in the first half of the year was 6.6%, 3% higher than anticipated by many international economic research institutions.²⁶ This growth has led to rising

income and business modernisation, which in turn paved the way for individual and organisational information technology development.

The internet was introduced into Vietnam in 1997 with just over 200 thousand internet users by the end of 2000. As of January 2018, the number of internet users in the country has expanded dramatically to over 55 million (internet Live Statistics). The International Telecommunication Union listed Vietnam's as one of the most rapidly growing telecommunication industries worldwide, with impressive enhancement in both the quantity and quality of mobile networks, broadband internet and ICT devices (OMIS, 2011). Such accelerated access to the internet has been a major component in an expanding mix of media, in which social media is the most recent segment. A report by Gallup and BBG in 2015 indicated the domination of mobile internet in the Vietnamese telecommunication industry, with 80.5% of weekly internet users accessing the internet via their mobile phones. The report also notes that Vietnam has a very large market for second-hand, cheap mobile phones. According to internet SpeedTest (speedtest.net), in August 2018, the fixed broadband internet speed of Vietnam reached 25.61 megabits per second (Mbps) for downloading and 25.35 Mbps for uploading, placing Vietnam in the 58th spot in global rankings. The mobile internet speed ranked the 70th globally, with 19.69 Mbps for downloading and 10.28 Mbps for uploading.

2.2.1. From Yahoo! 360° to Facebook

Social media in Vietnam can be traced chronologically back to the introduction of Yahoo! 360°, a service from Yahoo introduced into several countries in June 2005. In the dawn of social media, Yahoo! 360° was the self-publishing platform for so-called 'chick-lit' in Vietnam, where well-known young women writers shared their short stories, translated novels and diaries. The public used Yahoo! 360° to connect to their favourite writers, then to share their writings and photos. The popular wave in using Yahoo! 360° was so strong that 'Writing

Yahoo! 360° blogs' was nominated among the top ten ICT developments in Vietnam in 2006 by VietnamNet media organisation. From 2006 to 2009, in addition to many anonymous blogs for political purposes appearing online, well-known mainstream journalists started to write blogs about entertainment, politics or journalism practice. Some earned fame for their blogs, such as journalist Truong Huy San's blog *Osin*, Le Nguyen Huong Tra's *Co Gai Do Long* and Truong Duy Nhat's *Mot goc nhin khac* (from a different angle) (Trang, 2013). After poor technical maintenance resulted in the announcement of the closure of Yahoo! 360° in July 2009, and the actual shutdown in December 2009, Vietnamese bloggers scattered to many other sites such as Yahoo Plus, Opera, Multiply, Wordpress and Blogspot (Quinn & Kierans, 2010).

Before the prime time of 'new generation' social networks (for instance Facebook and YouTube), Vietnam observed huge online communities gathering on popular forums, such as ttvnol, vn-zoom, and webtretho, with memberships of half a million, six million and 1.6 million accounts respectively in early 2015 (Do & Dinh, 2014, p. 4). Figure 2.3 shows that as of January 2018, the top seven social media platforms (including social networks, chat apps, messengers, and Voice over Internet Protocols or VoIP) in Vietnam were: Facebook (61% of the internet users in Vietnam used Facebook), YouTube (59%), Facebook messenger (47%), Zalo (45%), Google+ (39%), Instagram (32%), Twitter (24%), Skype (22%), Viber (20%), Line (15%), LinkedIn (13%), and Pinterest (12%). All the companies in this list are foreign-based services except for Zalo, which was developed by a Vietnamese company. This is totally different from the situation in Vietnam's neighbouring country China, where Google, Facebook, and other international online services are blocked and replaced by similar services created nationally under an internet censorship policy called the Chinese Great Fire Wall (Qiang, 2011, p. 206).²⁷

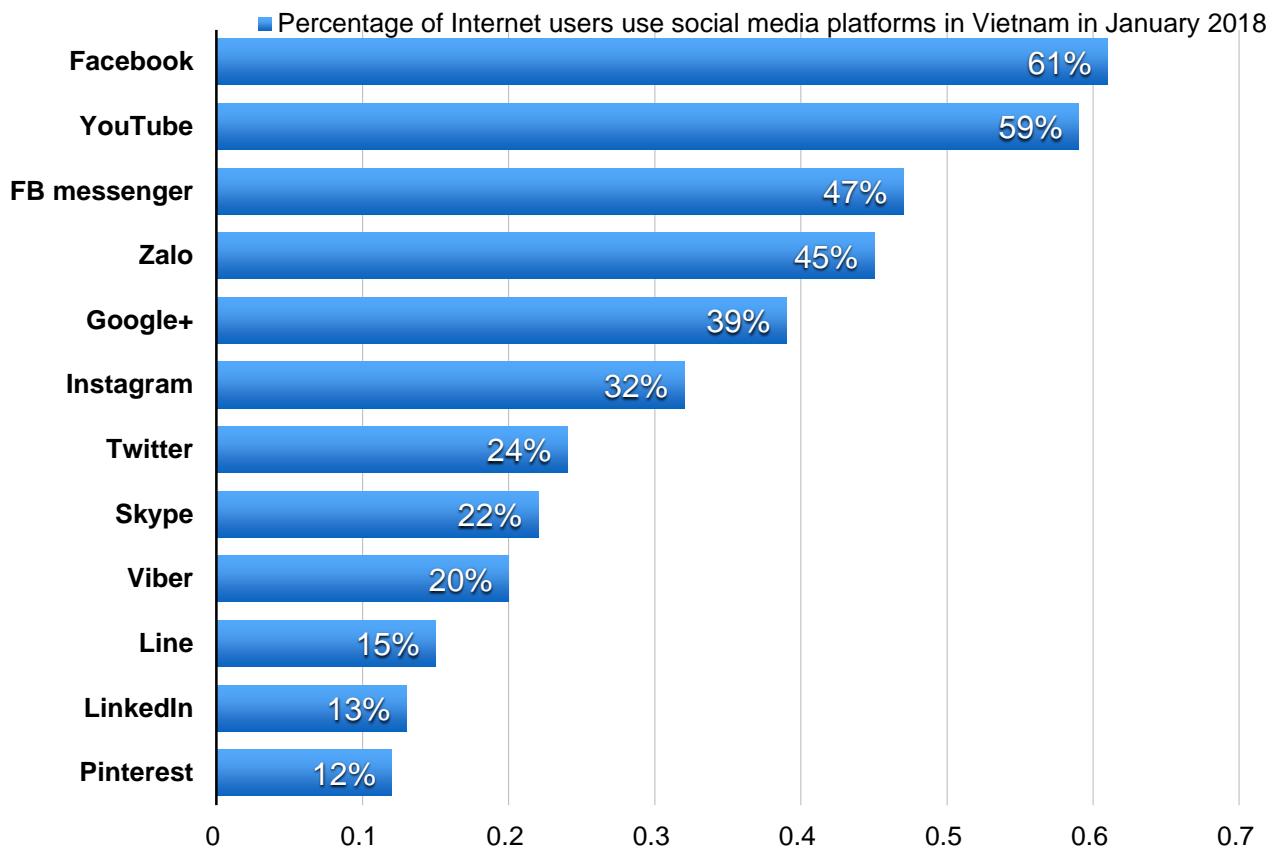


Figure 2.3: Top social media platforms in Vietnam at January 2018 (We-are-social and Hootsuite)

As of January 2018, Vietnam had over 55 million Facebook accounts, taking the country to seventh position in the world in terms of the number of Facebook users. This is a huge surge as six months earlier, in January 2017, the number of Vietnamese Facebook users was just 46 million. There is a growing tendency for Facebook-isation, i.e. the importing of content from smaller social networks to Facebook. Reddit, a site for collections of entries submitted by Reddit users, is an example. While maintaining the Reddit rules, regulations, and norms, the Vietnamese Redditors actually use Facebook as their platform to submit their entries. The Facebook page of Reddit Vietnam has over 290 thousand users as of August 2018. The same situation has occurred with Quora, a site for questions and answers, which attracted more than 28 thousand users on the Quora Vietnam Facebook page as of August 2018. Vietnamese users of such social media have two options: first, to use the official social media sites and apps,

such as Reddit or Quora, and second, to use the Facebook pages of such social media. The former requires a certain level of English competence, so that the users can participate in conversations with the international community. Meanwhile, the latter allows users to use their mother tongue, Vietnamese, and waste no time familiarising themselves with the new social media platform. Although the latter brings the sense of experiencing new social networks, many users still interact on Facebook. As a result, Facebook maintains its dominance over other social networks in Vietnam.

2.2.2. User-generated content

The nature of an online social service is defined by the Government of Vietnam:

Online social media is a service providing a broad community of users the possibility to interact, share, store and exchange information between one another on the internet environment, including *blog, forum, chat and other similar forms*. (Item 14, article 3, 97/2008/NĐ-CP, 2008)

A website is considered as a social media website if it has two features. First, the individual can interact with the website by sharing, leaving comments etc. Second, the content of the website is constructed by participants or users.

Echoing this definition, Bradley claimed:

Social media is a set of technologies and channels targeted at forming and enabling a potentially massive community of participants to productively collaborate. (2010, cited in Albarran, 2013, p. 17)

In Bradley's definition, the technologies for social media are 'social networking, wikis and blogs [...] which enable collaboration on a much grander scale and support tapping the power of the collective in ways previously unachievable'.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) also provided a definition of social media:

a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.
(pp. 60-61)

Web 2.0 is a platform where content can be modified by all end-users instead of being created and published by a single individual. With this definition, the most popular types of social media can be included, such as Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, Second Life, blogs.

Many scholars (Albarran, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Press & Williams, 2010) agree that user-generated content (UGC) is the distinguishing attribute that makes social media different from traditional media. UGC has three basic requirements: to be published on accessible websites or social networking sites; to show a certain amount of creative effort; and to be created outside of professional routines and practice (Moens, Li, & Chua, 2014, p. 8). In cyberspace, businesses and authority have increasingly less control over the information about them since people can say what they want and bypass censorship (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.60). UGC content tends to be collaborative and encourages sharing and joint production of information, ideas, opinions, and knowledge, serving as an alternative source of information challenging the gatekeeping functions of the traditional media (Press & Williams, 2010, p.20; Moens, Li, & Chua, 2014, p.17). Moens, Li and Chua (2014, p.17) strongly asserted that UGC can also be seen as an open platform that enriches political and societal debates and diversity of opinion, that creates a free flow of information and freedom of expression. This concept of freedom is the total opposite to the ‘freedom within the state’ framing around state-controlled mainstream media in Vietnam.

Central to the discussion of freedom of expression is the government's control of the media. Verhulst (2002, p. 432) drew attention to the paradigm shift from content control to technology control in digital communication regulations. The Great Fire Wall of China is an example of using the technology to control the dissemination of digital content. In Vietnam, the government promised in early 2015 that there would be no technological interference to block social media (BBC, 2015). Despite evidence of Facebook blockages in 2009 (GALLUP, 2015) and many other periods, the Vietnamese government has neither officially banned social media nor issued any legal document regulating technical barriers toward social media. Since 2009, anti-government content on social media has been banned and controlled under Sections 79, 88 and 258 of the 2009 Amendment of the Penal Code. In 2013, the government issued the Decree 72 to regulate content on internet and social media. According to this Decree, use of social networking services is prohibited except in accordance with the law and users are responsible for the content of their information and its storage, supply, transmission via social network and distribution of information via a direct link from the users' sets. Decree number 72 is the first legal document to regulate social media and it is often applied to resolve the civil and business conflicts that arise on social media.

2.3. Comparison

2.3.1. Vietnamese journalism versus social media

The analysis in the earlier sections of this chapter has shown that there is an obvious contrast between Vietnamese journalism and social media in six respects.

First, in term of function, while journalism propagates the messages of the Party and the State, social media is a communication tool for individuals. Second, journalism controls its contents via the CPTC's agenda-setting, whereas the UGC is much less controlled, which makes social media the platform for

expression of a diversity of thoughts and opinions. Third, journalistic freedom of expression is freedom within the control of Party and State, while on social media it is created from the free flow of information. Fourth, journalism is produced by Party-accredited journalists who have press cards. In contrast, the content of social media is created by non-professional people without any qualifications in using such communication tools. Fifth, journalism operates within the framework of the Press Code while social media works mainly on self-regulation basis and some articles of Penal Code. Sixth, journalism required financial support from the government while social media runs on free-of-charge platforms and is administered by individuals who are using personal devices to produce UGC. These contrasts are synthesised in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Contrast between Vietnamese journalism and social media

Perspectives	Journalism	Social media
Function	Instrument of the Party	Self-publishing of individuals, organisations
Content	State censored content 3 spheres of discourse	User generated content, less control Platform for debates, diversity of opinion
Concept of freedom	Freedom within the control of Party and State	Freedom of expression resulted from free flow of information
Content generator	Produced by the Party certified journalists	Created outside the professionalism
Legal frame	Control by the Press Code	Decentralised control Technology regulation, self-regulation, Articles 79, 88, 258 Penal Code; Decree 72
Cost	Financial supports and administration by the government	Lightweight in design and administration by individuals

Since the essential characteristics of social media are in sharp contrast to the existing structures in state-controlled mainstream media and in Vietnamese traditional culture, social media has the potential to be an active agent in creating new perspectives in the media industry as well as in Vietnamese society. The two media, however, are not mutually exclusive as Moens et. al. observe:

Citizen journalism ... allows users to correct, influence, or create news, potentially on similar terms as newspapers or other large entities. Furthermore, blogs, social networking sites, and virtual worlds can be platforms for engaging electors, exchanging political views, provoking debate, and sharing information on societal and political questions. (Moens et al., 2014, p. 17)

Thus, to create a full understanding of media landscape it is necessary to examine how the two media have combined and interacted in the Vietnamese context.

2.3.2. Contrast in social power structure

In contemporary Vietnam, most people practice some form of Mahayana Buddhism, which is the influential religion in the country (Irwin, 1996, p. 116; Schober, 2012, p. 10). The Buddha believed that with self-sacrifice, people can be rewarded with rebirth and eternity. The religion encourages peace, kindness and harmony and the avoidance of hatred and delusion (Harvey 2001, pp. 103-105). The second-largest religious community are the Confucianists (Irwin, 1996, p.116). Confucianism was transferred to Vietnam during more than one thousand years of colonisation by China. The religion's impacts on the ideology of the Vietnamese people have been reinforced recently through the Confucius Academy, which was established in Hanoi University in 2014. Like Buddhism, Confucianism's rituals try to manage relationships in a harmony that can be

achieved when patriarchal leadership is respected, when inferiors (laypeople, the younger, women ...) obey absolutely their superiors (governors, the elderly, men ...) (Irwin, 1996, p.45). Further emphasising the dominant role of the government in Confucianism, Goldin (2011, p. 23) interpreted Confucius's statement 'To govern is to correct' as 'government is inescapably a moral endeavour, and the ruler's behaviour has an irresistible influence on his subjects'. In Vietnam, seniority has gone beyond cultural aspects and even been officially legislated. For example, it is stated in the Election Law that if two candidates have an equal vote, the candidate who is the older is the winner (Parliament, 2016).

Hofstede designed the Power Distance Index to illustrate the attitude towards hierarchy in Asian countries. According to Hofstede, a high value on the Power Distance Index is associated with beliefs that hierarchy and inequality are appropriate and beneficial, and that authorities and seniors should not be challenged or even questioned (Irwin, 1996, p. 33). Another cultural characteristic is the difference between a high or low context of communication, as defined by Edward T. Hall (1976). Irwin (1996, pp. 40-41) has claimed that Asian cultures are based on high context communication that is implicit in the context of particular situations, relationships and physical cues including nonverbal behaviours. High-context cultures are relatively formal, more reliant on hierarchies, and tend to be more deeply rooted in the past.

In short, under the influence of Buddhism and Confucianism, which result in a high Power Distance Index, and within a high context of communication, Vietnamese culture idealises hierarchy and harmony and avoids direct clashes. Adhering to these values is thought to contribute to the social stability and economic success of the country.

Social media, in contrast, is a milieu where hierarchical management is increasingly under attack (Albaran, 2013, p. 47). The advances in technology enable people to actively get the information they need from other people instead of relying on traditional institutions such as governments or companies. More and more young and educated people have said they have a growing trust in the information they get from social media (GALLUP, 2015). Personal relationships are profoundly different on social media: instead of relationships of superiors and inferiors, now people are all friends (Albaran, 2013, p. 47). Jones (1998, p. 25) explained this relationship as 'retribalisation', which has occurred because of the absence of the rich context of face-to-face communication. On the internet, where people are often faceless, transient or anonymous, the forms of communication we have established in real life would be inadequate and our interaction would become mechanised and hollow. The anonymity of the medium has a powerful, disinhibiting effect on behaviour. Social media, with its ability to break hierarchy, can even challenge the most authoritarian regimes. For example, in Vietnam, some anonymous blogs (*chandungquyenluc, quanlambao, danlambao...*) are publishing evidence of corruption among highly positioned politicians, which could ruin the status of the Party in Vietnam. These blogs are considered 'reactionary arms' by the Party (VietnamNet, 2015).

Like other forms of internet communication, social media is mainly text-based, where people cannot actually see others or the settings round them. It is in this sense social media is characterised as a low-context communication environment (Jones, 1998, p. 131). Since it is text and technology-based, the success of communication on social media is largely dependent on its users' literacy and skills in adopting digital technology (Hartley, 2002, p. 58). This could well explain why the majority of social media users are elites, intellectuals,

business people and urban youth, who can afford the favourable conditions of education and internet access.

According to Hofstede's study (1991, cited in Irwin, 1996, p. 34), Vietnamese society is a collectivistic culture, in which people pay extreme loyalty to the groups they belong to. Jones' study (1998, p. 212ff), however, proved that online communities have problems of dissolution and fragmentation since participants feel they cannot trust people whose identity is largely masked. On the one hand, the ethos of collectivism has the potential to restrain the tendency to dissolution of online communities. However, on the other hand, it can potentially reinforce a commitment to stay in the group. This will be examined in each of the case studies of this research.

Table 2.3 briefly presents the characteristics of Vietnamese culture in contrast with four dimensions of social media. First, Vietnamese culture has a high Power Distance Index, which is 70 on a scale of 100, measured by Hofstede²⁸, and respects hierarchy. At the same time, social media attacks hierarchy and promotes equal status among users. Second, Buddhism commands people to be self-sacrificing and Confucianism teaches people to respect patriarchal leadership. Social media, by contrast, is a tool for self-reflection, challenging authorities and even advocating dissident communication. Third, Vietnamese culture mirrors high context communication in which the contexts and physical set-ups contribute meaningfully to communication effectiveness. By contrast, social media is a text-based low context communication. Fourth, Vietnamese communities require loyalty among group members while social media communities are easy to dissolve.

Table 2.4: Contrast in social power structures of Vietnamese tradition and social media

Vietnamese tradition	Social media
High Power Distance Index (respect hierarchy)	Attack hierarchy (because of facelessness, transience and anonymity)
Selflessness (Buddhism) Patriarchal leadership (Confucianism) Respect harmony and peace	Question and challenge the authority, allow reactionary communication
High context communication	Low context communication
Collectivism (loyal to group)	Tend to dissolution and fragmentation

2.4. Spectrum of journalists' engagement with social media

The sharp contrasts between journalism and social media in Vietnam push these two types of media to opposite extremes in terms of ideology, structure, ownership and the identity of their producers as well as consumers. Even though journalists work in the state-run mainstream media, for several reasons they have also been using social media for professional purposes.

First, many Vietnamese journalists think it is not appropriate to include their subjective emotions in articles. Any emotional writing should therefore instead be published on social media. One of the most read news articles about the measles outbreak is a journalist's letter to her son, published first on her Facebook page in April 2014 where it got 3447 shares and 1252 comments as of November 2014. A newspaper, not her media organisation, subsequently picked up the post and published it in the mainstream media. The journalist explained why she chose Facebook, not her newspaper, to publish the letter:

I think journalism publishes news articles with specific purposes and it is not a place to express my emotions. That is why I did not send it to my editor to publish on my e-newspaper. I understand that my e-newspaper belongs to the

mainstream media and it carries serious political viewpoints.

(HHY, 2014)

Other journalists share the view that journalistic work and emotions should be separated: journalistic work should be published in journalistic media, while all the emotions that arise around journalistic work should be published on social media. One famous environmental journalist said:

Why do I publish on my WordPress blog? I named my blog 'a slice of peace for my soft heart'... I consider it as a storage for my emotions while I am wandering with my ambition of composing literature ... For that reason, on my blog I do not want to cover any [political] ideology. (DDH, 2015)

Second, journalists are assigned to work in specific areas, and any work outside of those areas that cannot be published on mainstream media can potentially be published on social media. Journalists amass a lot of data or information, but they are not necessarily assigned to work on the areas for which they have data. In journalism, only those who are assigned to cover health issues can publish news articles about the measles outbreak. A journalist justified why he writes about the environment on his Facebook page:

[I write about environment because] I think in the past three-four years, this has become a serious problem that I often observe when I travel to write for my work relating to cars and motorbikes promotion. (NTQD, 2015)

Third, social media is a storage place for the writings that are not available in the mainstream media. Even when the articles have been published, there is no guarantee that readers can access the articles easily. One of the journalists who wrote about the death of animals in a safari on Phu Quoc Island complained that he could not find a copy of the magazine *Charming Vietnam* issued on April

1st 2016, in which his article was published, because all the copies had been bought (by the Safari owner) right after its release from the printing house. Therefore, publishing on Facebook was his choice to make the feature story accessible to the public (MQA, 2016).

Journalists working in the mainstream media are using social media, but they are using the new media differently. The engagement of journalists on social media varies according to the intensity of their use of social media for professional practice. There are three levels of engagement on this spectrum: the social media influencers, the hybrid media producers, and the social media refuters, as illustrated in figure 2.4. The data for this spectrum was acquired from observation of the Facebook posts by well-known former journalists (whose names are mentioned in the section 2.4.1 to 2.4.3, and from a survey conducted with 227 journalists to examine how they use Facebook (Mach, 2017). It is noted that there is no fix number of journalists for each category because journalists can change from this group to the other group from time to time.

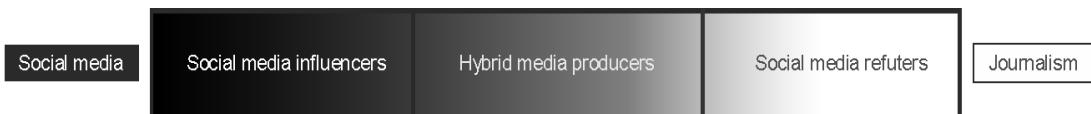


Figure 2.4: Spectrum of Vietnamese journalists' engagement on social media

2.4.1. Social media influencers

Journalists in this category have a high commitment to Facebook, and a low commitment to mainstream journalism. They no longer hold press-cards or government-certified professionally licenses. These journalists do not identify themselves as working for any media house although previously they were working as journalists for mainstream media houses. They construct real profiles on Facebook to brand themselves as influential non-affiliated

journalists. Some of the typical social media leading journalists are Truong Huy San (Facebook Osin Huy Duc),²⁹ Le Nguyen Huong Tra (Facebook Co Gai Do Long),³⁰ Bach Hoan,³¹ Truong Duy Nhat,³² and Tran Dang Tuan.³³ Osin Huy Duc was a journalist with *Tuois Tre* newspaper before becoming a Facebook influencer journalist. There was a period in 2016–2017 when Osin Huy Duc was considered an alarm bell ringing to notify of corruption, because he often posted on his Facebook page stories of corruption investigations even before the police and the court released their reports.

2.4.2. Hybrid media producers

Journalists in the group of hybrid-media producers practice intensive engagement with both social media and journalism. These journalists identify themselves as permanent members of mainstream media organisations. They use social media to share links to their media organisations' websites. Besides sharing professional notes, their posts also cover personal perspectives, about their families and friends, travelling and hobbies. Although using social media, they tend to prioritise publishing on mainstream media. Abiding by the regulations of their media organisations, they can reduce the level of engagement with social media if there are potential conflicts with their professional practice in mainstream media houses.

Nguyen Duc Hien,³⁴ the deputy editor-in-chief of Law newspaper in Ho Chi Minh City, is typical of this group. He can be compared to the journalist Nicolas Kristof³⁵ of the *New York Times*, who has become a case study in many international journalism textbooks as someone who has successfully used social media to promote his column in the *New York Times*. Phung Ai Van,³⁶ a journalist of *Sai Gon Giai Phong*—Liberal Sai Gon newspaper—is also a well-known hybrid media producer. While holding a managing position at the newspaper, she also gained fame as a leader of young volunteers for the environment. As of September 2015, the online group that she managed had

over 40,000 young people whom she could mobilise and allocate to many environmental projects that she initiated (PAV, 2015).

Another typical example of the hybrid media producers group is *To Ngan Like*. *To Ngan Like*—‘one thousand like group’—is the unofficial name for a group of journalists whose posts often attract thousands of interactions (likes, shares, comments). They identify themselves as KOL group, that is, a group of key opinion leaders. According to journalist NHS, a founding member of the *To Ngan Like* group, these Facebook journalists do not associate themselves with any media house, although they are working as senior managers at various media organisations. The term *To Ngan Like* was coined by NHS in a post on his Facebook page in 2015, in which he promised to write a book of profiles of journalists who generated a lot of interaction on Facebook.

Two types of content are posted on *To Ngan Like* Facebook accounts. The first is propaganda content, which shapes, frames and provides alternative understanding on controversial issues. Although expressing the government’s viewpoint, such content is considered inappropriate for publication in mainstream media because it lacks concrete evidence and uses non-mainstream language with lots of slang and lewd language. The second is advertising content, promoting big corporations. *To Ngan Like* members often post about the same topics, from the same perspective and with the same messages. In 2018, some of the topics that *To Ngan Like* members posted on their Facebook include: Con Cung stores, Condotel projects, Zalo and smart administration, Vietjet Air, the Minister of Health and her nomination for a full professorship, the massacre in the forest land conflicts in DakNong, the special economic zones, and some coastal real estate projects.

To Ngan Like members include Nguyen Hong Son (deputy editor in chief of Ngay Nay free-to-public newspaper, Facebook Nguyen Thi Thao),³⁷ Dinh Duc

Hoang,³⁸ Pham Gia Hien (a former reporter for VTV),³⁹ Tran Anh Tu (online manager of *Dai Doan Ket* newspaper, Facebook Duong Tieu),⁴⁰ Tri Minh Hoang (journalist with *People Policemen* newspaper, Facebook Cu Tri),⁴¹ Pham Huu Quang (Deputy editor-in-chief of *Ngay Nay* free newspaper),⁴² Nguyen Quang (a former reporter for BBC Vietnamese),⁴³ and two Facebook accounts Chung Nguyen⁴⁴ and Mai Duong,⁴⁵ which post messages identical to those of the *To Ngan Like* journalists. In addition, from the observation of the author, there are hundreds of Facebook accounts that use fake identification and that interact with *To Ngan Like*, to protect *To Ngan Like* against the criticism on social media.

The formation of the group *To Ngan Like* highlights the fact that there exists a system of highly organised journalistic professional practice on Facebook. This system is dependent for human resources on state-run journalism, since the system participants are well-known, senior-ranking journalists. However, this system is independent of the state-run journalism system in terms of financial resources, since the business sector sponsors the journalists' Facebook posts. Well-known journalists produce news for this Facebook system. Since the Facebook system is not professionally legislated and regulated like the mainstream journalism system, these social media influencers are not bound by the professional duties and responsibilities required of mainstream journalism.

2.4.3. Social media refuters

These journalists engage in state-run journalism only and keep a very low profile or no profile on social media. Although they demonstrate key attributes required to perform well on social media, such as being technically savvy and skilful creative writers, these journalists avoid using social media. They establish strong bonds with their media organisations and adhere to the Press Law and regulations. Some of them use social media in a very limited way, such as keeping their published works, posting intimate family photos or holding an account as a contact mailbox in case of urgent contingencies.

Dinh Duc Hoang is a social media refuter. He used to be one of the *One Thousand Like* journalists with the Facebook name Hoang Hoi Han (Regretful Hoang). At the peak of his time as a social media influencer, he deactivated his Facebook account and concentrated on his journalistic projects. Hundreds of thousands of fans and followers shifted from his Facebook page to his Opinion column on *VnExpress* online newspaper. From mid-2017, Hoang started publishing long-form stories on *VnExpress*, a genre requiring time-consuming intensive research which could not be done if he was consistently providing instant short posts on Facebook.

Do Doan Hoang is another social media refuter. He is a journalist of *Lao Dong* newspaper and collaborates with various other newspapers and broadcasting stations. Having been awarded many professional prizes in journalism, Do Doan Hoang is considered a 'big brother' among journalists. He advises 'If you want to be a well-known journalist, just log off your Facebook account'.⁴⁶ He argues that journalists should give up impulsive short-term hobbies and invest in long-term professional goals.

2.5. Paid commentators

The media landscape of Vietnam from 2012 to 2018 also recorded the emergence of paid commentators, of which there are two major types: government-based and business-based.

2.5.1. Government-based commentators

Since 2012, government-based online commentators have been increasing in number. The chairman of the Hanoi Propaganda and Training Committee, Ho Quang Loi, revealed in an annual media meeting on December 9, 2012:

There are 900 online commentators in Hanoi, working as propagandists in sensitive circumstances. Hanoi also runs a 'fast click and react' journalists club. The authority even

establishes an ‘expert group’ to direct fight in debates and writing wars. The group runs 19 online websites and over 400 social media accounts. (Dao-Tuan, 2013)

Nationwide, members of national and CPV-based associations, such as the Elder People Association, Youth Union, Women’s Association and Veterans’ Association, are also trained to use social media to protect the government and the CPV (Truong-Son, 2015). In December 2017, at a conference of the Central Propaganda and Training Commission in Ho Chi Minh City, Lieutenant General Nguyen Trong Nghia, Deputy Head of the Military’s Political Department, confirmed that the Ministry of Defence had been using a military-based cyber troop called the ‘47th Force’. It took this name after decision coded 47-QD/TW in 2011, which required that the army protect the CPV and the State in cyberspace. As of late 2017, the 47th Force was confirmed to have over 10,000 people (real human, not just the accounts). These government-based commentators receive instructions from their organisations to use social media accounts to leave comments that ‘correct the wrong views’ on the internet (Mai-Hoa, 2017).

2.5.2. Business-based commentators

One director of a social media marketing company in Hanoi said in July 2018 that marketing online had evolved into a new branch of corporate communication (Cuong, 2018). The social media service companies generate hundreds of thousands of fake Facebook accounts to meet the quantification ends of the online marketing campaigns. Consequently, interactions such as likes, shares, views, reports and especially comments can be bought and sold as Facebook commodities. Many online groups exist for Facebook interaction exchange, allowing Facebook users to call for likes and shares. Many applications have been developed to create and maintain fake social media accounts automatically. Astroturf became a prevalent practice in which large

numbers of fake social media accounts could like and comment on Facebook, so that the opinions on Facebook were easy to manipulate. Dissident content is quickly reported by the mass of fake accounts and quickly removed from the Facebook space. The industry adheres to the regulations of Facebook and Google and takes full advantage of the social media algorithms to increase the reach of Facebook content to the target audience. One month after the 2018 *Cyber Security Law* was enacted, Major General Nguyen Manh Hung, a leader from the Ministry of Defence, was designated to be the leader of the Ministry of Information and Communication. Before being appointed to become the Minister of the MIC, Major General Hung was the CEO of Viettel, a military-run corporation in telecommunications. He earned a university degree from Russia and a Master degree from Australia, both majoring in ICT. Since 2016, he has been a relatively new member of the CPV's Central Committee.

In summary, the media landscape in Vietnam has undergone drastic reforms under the influence of social media. These changes have created a crisis for journalism, challenging journalism to the core. Some journalists have shifted from journalism to social media, resulting in the government adopting new tactics in journalism governance. However, the fact that journalists are now posting sponsored content on their Facebook has blurred the boundary between being journalists and being promoters. Consequently, journalists' content on Facebook can create confusion between fact and fiction, 'true and false', 'right and wrong', 'reality and appearance' (Blessing & Marren, 2013). Social media, on the one hand, represents a free space for quality arguments to emerge, but it is a space where the government deems it necessary to manipulate and suppress criticism and dissidents. The dualism between mainstream journalism and social media has resulted in a rupturing of the monopoly of state-run journalism and has created new approaches to green issues and the green public sphere in Vietnam. ■

Chapter 3

Blogging against bauxite mining: the birth of the green public sphere

This chapter analyses the significant roles of the elites, intellectuals and scientists in the establishment of the early foundation of the green public sphere in Vietnam. It also identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the anti-bauxite movement on social media. Blogging against the bauxite mining projects in the Central Highlands in 2009 represents an initial milestone for the green public sphere on social media in Vietnam. The bauxite mining projects, one of the Communist Party Politburo's initiatives, were contested not only for the economic impacts but also for their political, cultural, and especially environmental impacts. The fact that the elites and intellectuals attacked the projects caused a discontinuity in democratic centralism, the core principle of the CPV. Blogging against bauxite mining signified the emerging public sentiment in support of environmental protection around industrial projects. These protests also provoked the implementation of a new law against the political dissidents, setting a precedent for the imprisonment of anti-government social media users. In terms of media, 2009 put an end to the wave of using Yahoo's blogging service, while Facebook had not yet become popular or well-developed, and journalism was still strictly under centralised control. The exclusion of the general public is the distinguishing feature of the public sphere around the bauxite projects.

3.1. Vietnam's bauxite projects

Bauxite is a claylike raw material used in the production of aluminium. It is formed under tropical conditions by the weathering of silicate rocks, namely

granite, gneiss, syenite, basalt, and argillaceous stones (Rennie, 2016). In Vietnam, it is estimated that about 11 billion tons of bauxite are preserved in the red basalt soil, which is abundant in the nine provinces of Kon Tum, Gia Lai, Binh Dinh, Dak Lak, Dak Nong, Binh Phuoc, Binh Thuan, Lam Dong, and Dong Nai (Anonymous, 2011). According to the United States Geological Survey, as of January 2009, had Vietnam had detected 5,400,000 billion tons of bauxite reserve base. The country ranks third in holding the largest global reserves of bauxite, after Guinea and Australia. However, the mine production volume of bauxite in Vietnam in 2007 and 2008 was just 30 billion tons per year (Bray, 2009, p. 29), which is too little compared to its potentials. The bauxite industry in Vietnam was virtually zero before the launch of bauxite projects in the late 2000s in the Central Highlands. The Central Highlands consists of five mountainous provinces: Dak Lak, Dak Nong, Gia Lai, Kon Tum and Lam Dong. As of 2015, their population was 5.5 million people, living in an area of 5.46 million hectares (Nguyen, 2015).

In the 1980s, the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA)⁴⁷ warned Vietnam of the threat from bauxite mining projects on the ecology of the Central Highlands of Vietnam. As a result, the Vietnamese government postponed plans to investigate bauxite and initiated forestation plans for the Central Highlands. The region became the capital of industrial trees, such as coffee, rubber, tea, pepper, maize, cotton, flowers, vegetables and so on. Two decades later, in 2001, the idea of bauxite mining projects in the Central Highlands was discussed again during the ninth Congress of the CPV. Former Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung stated that 'bauxite exploitation is an enormous goal of the CPV and the government'. Following this, in 2007, the government under PM Nguyen Tan Dung's administration signed decision number 167/2007/QD-TTg which approved a zoning plan for exploration, mining, processing and use of bauxite ore in the 2007–2015 period, with the vision of expanding the project by

2025.⁴⁸ The state-owned corporation Vietnam National Coal-Minerals Industries Group (VINACOMIN) was assigned to develop alumina refinery projects. The projects were expected to produce up to 6.6 million tons of alumina⁴⁹ annually (Anonymous, 2009b). As of February 2019, VINACOMIN is running two bauxite mining and alumina refinery projects: the Tan Rai project in the province of Lam Dong and the Nhan Co project in the province of Dak Nong, both in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Figure 3.1 shows the location of the Central Highlands.



Figure 3.1: The Central Highlands of Vietnam where the bauxite projects are located (In Southeast Asia inseasia.com)

The launching of bauxite projects provoked controversial debates around the issues of environment, security and anti-China sentiments, the protection of indigenous culture and economics.

3.1.1. Environment

First, the bauxite projects created controversy over their impacts on the environment. Both the opposers and the supporters used environmental issues as a rationale for their viewpoints on the bauxite projects. The opposers focused most of their attention on the possible impact of red mud. Red mud is the residue of alumina production from bauxite, or the Bayer process.⁵⁰ As a

composite of toxic metals in water and soil, red mud is also called 'red sludge'. To generate one ton of alumina, the process discharges up to 2.5 tons of red mud (Chanh et al., 2012, p. 2257). It is estimated that the projects would release billions of tons of red mud by the time they finished, creating a 'bomb of sludge'⁵¹ hanging over the highlands. If this 'bomb' exploded, the red mud would join the water stream that runs into the low land in the Southern Centre of Vietnam and the South of Vietnam. In 2014, the Tan Rai storage pool burst its boundaries and red mud rushed out onto land lower down.⁵² Metals in red mud can contaminate water streams and can cause high rates of cancer. Fly ash is also a serious source of pollutants resulting in health hazards. The red mud problem does not only threaten irreparable damage to the Central Highlands, but also poses a harsh threat to the lower regions in the South of Vietnam.

The bauxite supporters, however, describe the environmental issues as an internal problem for the Central Highlands region, having no causal relation with the bauxite projects. As a report published on VINACOMIN's website (Nam, 2017) put it:

The environment [in the Central Highlands] has been severely destroyed, especially by the deforestation, water contamination, and shortage of water resources.

According to Hoang (2016, p. 274), the Central Highlands lost 1.7 million hectares of forest from 1995 to 2005, and 25.7 million hectares on average each year afterwards. The reasons for this mass deforestation include: converting the land to a rubber growing area (46.7%), giving land to build hydropower stations (31.3%), illegal tree felling (6%) and bush fires and other causes (16%) (Hoang, 2016; Nguyen, 2015). The Central Highlands has a high density of rivers, streams, and waterfalls, which make it a favourable location for hydropower plants. However, the land taken for industrial rubber trees was so

huge (up to 540,000 hectares as of 2016), that it used up the surface water in the rivers. The local farmers exploited the groundwater for their plantations. In Buon Ma Thuot city (Dak Lak province), 86% of the water for rubber plantations is pumped from underground. According to the Dak Lak Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DONRE), the groundwater in Buon Ma Thuot city, as a result, deceased by three metres within several years (Hoang, 2016, p. 274). This is an unfavourable condition for the development of industrial plantations, and it was used to justify converting the industrial forest region into the mining sites.

3.1.2. Security

Second, critics argued that the presence of Chinese partners in the bauxite project posed a threat to national security. The Central Highlands is a geographically strategic location in the Indochina region. It is in the junction connecting the North and the South of Vietnam, as well as the southern areas of Laos and the northern areas of Cambodia. The Central Highlands of Vietnam have a significant height and centrality in Indochina. Whoever controls the Central Highlands can influence the lower lands in the south of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. During the Vietnam War, the Central Highlands were a battle site for both the Northern Army and the Southern Vietnamese—American troops, with battles in Kontum, Pleiku, Ban Me Thuat, Polei Kleng, and Dak To after the Tet Offensive in 1968. In March 1975, North Vietnam defeated the South in the battle of Ban Me Thuat, then captured the Central Highlands region, which led to the overall victory of the Northern Army on April 30, 1975 (Gillam, 2006, pp. 18-38).

Because VINACOMIN had little expertise in bauxite mining and refinery, the Vietnamese developers needed to co-operate with foreign partners. The first partner was Alcoa, a US–Australian aluminium processing company, which had been conducting pilot surveys in the Central Highlands since 2009, but had not

yet officially signed a contract with VINACOMIN.⁵³ The second partner was CHINALCO, a state-owned aluminium-processing corporation from China. As in many other Chinese projects in Vietnam, CHINALCO brought with them a large number of Chinese casual workers.⁵⁴ Therefore, the bauxite projects did not create many jobs for local people. To make matters worse, the Chinese workers established Chinese villages and married local women. The local authority was forced to correct the rumour that about 4000 children of Chinese workers and local Vietnamese women were born in the Central Highlands. However, the number of Chinese workers and Chinese–Vietnamese children had not yet been described. An anti-China position has become one of the arguments of the bauxite opposes. The *Financial Times* reported the projects as ‘a tribute to China’, referring to ‘the gifts of Vietnamese bauxite’, in which the government of Vietnam had ‘beseeched’ the investment of up to \$15bn from China to the Central Highlands.⁵⁵ As Vietnam had been a colony of China during the first Millenium, and as the two countries fought a short war in 1979, all these developments meant the projects were seen as government-to-government (G2G) rather than business-to-business (B2B) arrangements, and provoked Sino-phobia, anti-China sentiments and concerns about Vietnamese dependence on China in the bauxite projects.

3.1.3. Threats to indigenous culture

Third, opponents argued that the bauxite projects threatened the vernacular cultures in the Central Highlands. Vietnam has 54 ethnic groups, of which the Kinh ethnic group makes up 87% the population of the Central Highlands. Another 53 ethnic groups account for the remaining 13% of the population. These 13% live mostly in the mountainous areas. The Central Highlands has a diversity and high density of ethnic minorities, who belong to the Austronesian language family and the Mon-Khmer language groups (UNHCR, 2006, p. 2). In 2001 and 2004, largescale protests by the ethnic minorities occurred in the

Central Highlands, calling for independence and religious freedom for the minorities. After the protests, many ethnic people from the Central Highlands sought asylum in other countries (ARC, 2017). The bauxite industry marginalised the minority communities by land confiscation, forcing them to give up land for bauxite mine infrastructure. As the ARC's report concluded:

Disputes over land expropriation for socioeconomic development projects remained a significant problem, causing public grievances. Many villagers whose land the government forcibly seized protested at government offices for failure to address their complaints. (ARC, 2017, p. 23)

When the Highlanders re-located to new places, their traditional community and religious structures collapsed (ARC, 2017, p. 24), leading to the gradual erosion of their cultural identity.

3.1.4. Economic objections

Fourth, the economic impacts of the bauxite projects were another controversial issue. The master plan for the bauxite projects required \$15 billion (AluminiumToday, 2009), which was a loan from China to Vietnam, adding weight to the burden of government debt. International Monetary Fund statistics indicate an over-expenditure by the Vietnamese government, despite the fact that the country's economic growth has been over 6% since 2000.⁵⁶ The prosperity of the bauxite projects, however, did not match the investment. VINACOMIN's reports in 2017 highlighted that actual losses had exceeded the envisaged ones. Nguyen Thanh Son, a former manager of a coal project under VINACOMIN, calculated that each ton of alumina was sold at \$346 in 2017, but it took around \$403 to produce.⁵⁷ In fact, as of March 2017, the bauxite projects had lost 3700 billion VND, which is eight times more than the estimated costs planned by VINACOMIN.⁵⁸ After many controversies around the revenue and

losses of the Nhan Co bauxite project in 2018, it was concluded in 2018 that it would be very difficult for the bauxite projects to earn profits in the coming years.⁵⁹

The bauxite-supporters, however, praise the economic growth brought by the bauxite projects as an achievement in the cause of the nation's industrialisation and modernisation program. The bauxite projects are considered a pilot phase, during which Vietnam can trial its capacity to develop natural resources mining, refinery establishment and exportation. As VINACOMIN reported:

With these two projects, VINACOMIN in particular, and the industry of bauxite mining and alumina refinery in general, have learnt quite a good deal of lessons in project consultancy, design, investment, plant building, technology mastering, management, operation, marketing, human resource training...all are the foundation for the new phase of development. (Nam, 2017)

3.2. Opposition from the elites

3.2.1. Non-anonymous and non-violent movement

As discussed in Chapter One, after the National Congress of the CPV in 1986 which implemented the *Doi Moi* policy, the Vietnamese economy shifted from a highly centralised and controlled market to a socialist-oriented market, in which state-owned businesses played the most crucial roles. Bauxite mining was one of the iconic projects in these expectations that state-owned enterprises could shape the market economy of *Doi Moi*. The top CPV leaders decided to support bauxite mining development, which, consistent with the CPV's principle of democratic centralism, should have meant that the projects would be implemented without any challenge from lower-level government

organisations. As Thayer asserts 'the prestige of Vietnam's top leadership was now tied to the success of the bauxite project' (Thayer, 2009, p. 50). However, the projects were opposed by many top national leaders, marking a rupture in democratic centralism. Thayer (2009) describes the surprising way in which the anti-bauxite network developed:

[it has] grown into a national coalition including environmentalists, local residents, scientists, economists, retired military officers and veterans, retired state officials, social scientists, other academics and intellectuals, elements of the media, and National Assembly deputies. (p. 51)

Remarkably, Thayer notes, 'these critics were all mainstream elite' (Thayer, 2009, p. 51).

The anti-bauxite movement started with three letters from General Vo Nguyen Giap. General Giap served in Ho Chi Minh's cabinet before the declaration of independence in 1945, and was a military leader in the war against the French and in the Vietnam war. He was 98 years old in 2009 and was the only founding leader of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam still alive when he called for the suspension of the bauxite projects (Vuving, 2010, p. 377). The first letter was sent to the Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung on January 5, 2009. Although the first letter was a private one, it was leaked to the public and widely published online on the website viet-studies.info and then on VietnamNet e-newspaper (Vuving, 2010, p. 377).⁶⁰ The other two letters were sent to a conference on bauxite mining on April 9, and to the CPV Steering Committee, Politburo, the National Assembly, and the State on May 20, 2009.⁶¹

General Giap's first letter inspired three teachers and scholars, Nguyen Hue Chi, Nguyen The Hung and Pham Toan, to launch an online petition to stop the bauxite projects. By late April 2009, an anti-bauxite petition signed by 135

intellectuals was submitted to the National Assembly. By the end of 2009, 2746 people had signed the petition, including well-known members of the elite, namely the former National Vice-President, Ms Nguyen Thi Binh; the National Assembly member, historian Duong Trung Quoc; the former Deputy Minister for Science and Technology, Mr Chu Hao; and the Vice-Chairman of the National Assembly's Committee for Culture, Education, Youth and Children, Mr Nguyen Minh Thuyet; and Professor at Chicago University, Fields Medal world-ranked Mathematician Ngo Bao Chau.⁶² In addition to the blogs founded by the three teachers and scholars, the blog of Tran Huynh Duy Thuc, a technology entrepreneur, also published a series of anti-bauxite posts at trandongchan.blogspot.com. In his last post published in September 2009, Tran Huynh Duy Thuc described the bauxite projects as 'a disastrous move, the CPV digging a hole to bury itself'.

Religious leaders also joined the petitioners' network. In an open letter dated March 29, 2009, Venerable Thich Quang Do, leader of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, called for Buddhists to participate in an at-home-strike against the bauxite projects.⁶³ In April and May 2009, two Redemptorist priests publicly circulated a petition, and Cardinal Pham Minh Man, the Archbishop of Saigon, issued a Pastoral Letter, calling on Catholics to protest against the bauxite projects (Thayer, 2009, p. 52). In June 2009, the lawyer Cu Huy Ha Vu Ph.D., the son of the famous Vietnamese poet Huy Can, lodged a lawsuit against the Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung (Thayer, 2009, p. 52). The lawyer accused the Prime Minister of issuing decision number 167/2007/QD-TTg that launched the bauxite projects and of inviting foreign companies to enter the Central Highlands of Vietnam. This was the first time the CPV involved in a lawsuit issue against actions of the prime minister and a decision by the CPV.

From January to June 2009, the anti-bauxite movement led by the elites shaped the political agenda of Vietnam. In April 2009, the Prime Minister organised a national scientific conference, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai, with the participation of scientists and intellectuals, engaging in a discussion of the bauxite projects. The plenum of the National Assembly in May 2009 also discussed the bauxite projects, among other issues. The retired military leaders, General Vo Nguyen Giap and General Nguyen Trong Vinh, publicly demanded that the Politburo abandon the bauxite projects (Marston, 2012, p. 184). This action signified an attempt at a democratic practice: scientists were joining with politicians in a discussion about a national plan that was decided by the CPV and about which there should therefore had been no room for further debate.

The players in the bauxite public sphere tended to attach themselves to mainstream science and technology organisations. The founders of the petition and blogs also made themselves known to the public. When the blogs were attacked by being blocked and became inaccessible, the admins of the blogs declared:

We will submit a call for help to the affiliated organisation
VNPT to eliminate the terrible [hacking] practice.⁶⁴

Petitioners provided their job titles, and the names of their current or former organisations to validate their participation in the public sphere. In fact, Vietnam Posts and Technology Groups (VNPT) was just one of the internet service providers, and therefore, is not the organisation that the blogs were affiliated with. The petitioners had achieved high-level positions in the Party and in State (mainstream) structure. When they moved to the non-mainstream online world of blogs and petitions, they still used these positions to back up the credibility of their arguments.

The anti-bauxite activism was a non-violent movement. Venerable Thich Quang Do called on Buddhists to stage a peaceful at-home strike. Retired military leaders joined the movement by sending letters and offering the chance to debate the issues, not by calling for the support of the armed forces. The founders of the anti-bauxite movement were following the ideology of the scholar Phan Chau Trinh, and had been using the portrait of Phan Chau Trinh as a profile picture for the Facebook page of Bauxite Vietnam (see figure 3.2). Phan Chau Trinh (1872–1926) was a proponent of national democracy at the time of the French colonisation of Vietnam. While Phan Boi Chau, another well-known activist of his time, advocated an alliance with the Japanese military to fight against the French and to seek independence and popular rights for the Vietnamese people, Phan Chau Trinh argued against this:

Don't rely on foreign help, reliance on foreign help is foolish; do not resort to violence, violence is self-destructive. (Trinh, 2009, p. 24)

When studying in Japan, Phan Chu Trinh advised other activists:

The level of their people is so high, and the level of our people is so low! How could we not become slaves? That some students now can enter Japanese schools has been your great achievement. Please stay on in Tokyo to take a quiet rest and devote yourself to writing, and not to making appeals for combat against the French. You should only call for 'popular rights and popular enlightenment.' Once popular rights have been achieved, then we can think about other things. (Trinh, 2009, p. 18)

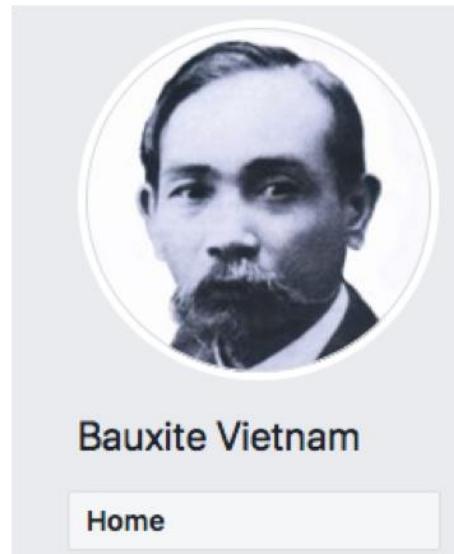


Figure 3.2: Portrait of Phan Chau Trinh, which has been used as the profile picture for the Facebook Page Bauxite Vietnam (screenshot taken on 11th February, 2019)

As they were both Vietnamese nationalists in the 20th century, Phan Chau Trinh and Ho Chi Minh knew one another. At the international conference at Versailles at the end of World War One, they both presented a list of demands, including that the people in Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) should gain more benefits from laws similar to those of the Western countries (Trinh, 2009, p. xv). They both had the goal of a better life for the Vietnamese people, but they adopted different methods. Ho Chi Minh became the President of Vietnam, in a structure where the CPV, the ruling party, declared that workers and farmers form the ruling class. The country endured many long wars against France, America and China. In contrast, Phan Chau Trinh emphasised education, culture and civilisation, rather than fighting for national independence. Quite a few Vietnamese scholars attended the national mourning for Phan Chau Trinh in 1926, turning the funeral into a stage for worshipping the significant role and power of the intellectual class in national development (Ngoc, 2011).

Phan Chau Trinh's ideology informed the practice of the anti-bauxite movement, which was based on persuasive communication, raising awareness,

exchanging opinions and debates. This thread of ‘*duy tan*’ or ‘renovation’ in Phan Chau Trinh’s style can be observed throughout the later green public sphere in Vietnam, especially in the ideology of the activists in the Formosa movement (analysed in chapter nine).

3.2.2. *Intimidation*

In July 2009, the Prime Minister issued the Decision 97/2009 about the behaviours of Government employees, stating that:

Any critiques aiming at policies and strategies of the Party and State should be sent directly to the relevant Party and State offices, and are not permitted to publicly publish under the names associated with the science and technology organisations.

(Government, 2009, Article 2.2)

Based on this regulation, the government considered anti-bauxite materials as internal literature that should only be circulated within Party and State organisations. Before this regulation, protesters were using their names and referring to the titles and names of organisations they worked for. Many of these organisations were state-owned.

Also in late 2009, many intellectuals were arrested and imprisoned under the newly amended terms of regulations for anti-state expression, stated in articles 79, 88, and 258 of the *Penal Code 2009*.⁶⁵ Those arrested were accused of engaging in democratic activities that were aimed at the overthrow of the people’s administration, and with causing public disorder. The high school teacher Dinh Dang Dinh, who lived in the Central Highlands and often wrote the anti-bauxite essays, was arrested in 2011 and died in 2013 some days after being released from prison. The IT entrepreneur, blogger Tran Huynh Duy Thuc, was sentenced to 16 years of imprisonment from 2010, and was still in jail as of February 2019.⁶⁶ Lawyer Cu Huy Ha Vu lost his lawsuit against the Prime

Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. Vu was subsequently arrested and sentenced to seven years in prison. Under pressure from international human rights organisations, Vu was deported and was living in the US as of early 2019.⁶⁷ On a Facebook post published on February 25, 2017, the admin of the anti-bauxite blog revealed that police searched the houses of the blog founders in late 2009, confiscated their equipment (computers and laptops), and interrogated the blog founders for months. As well as the bauxite activists, other intellectuals who were activists for democracy were also arrested. For instance, scholars associated with the bloc 8406 (a group of activists for political reform, founded on April 8, 2006), such as lawyer Le Cong Dinh, businessman Le Thang Long, and the IT engineer Nguyen Tien Trung, were also arrested in late 2009, and sentenced in early 2010, convicted of anti-state expression and activities.

The introduction on the current anti-bauxite website states that the websites that launched the anti-bauxite petition collapsed and were no longer working from 2010. The content was moved to a website at boxitvn.net. As of February 2019, in addition to the website, the anti-bauxite network published on a blog at boxitvn.blogspot.com, and on the Facebook Page Bauxite Vietnam at <https://www.facebook.com/Bauxite-Vietnam-85922774678/>.⁶⁸ However, based on my personal experience, as of early 2019, it was impossible to access the anti-bauxite website and blogs in Vietnamese territory (it was still possible to access them from other countries). The internet service providers (FPT, Vettel, VNPT) took turns temporarily blocking access to such websites and blogs, creating inconvenience and disruption in using the platforms. This creates a negative experience for users and may discourage users who are not tech-savvy enough to bypass the firewall. In early 2019, this temporary ban was also happening with other websites of the organisations that the CPV considers to be hostile forces, including the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), VOA (Voice of America), RFA (Radio Free Asia), RFI (Radio France Internationale), SBS

(Special Broadcasting Service – Australia), HRW (Human rights Watch), Amnesty International and many blogs.

3.3. Media about the bauxite projects

3.3.1. Journalism

Searching with the keywords *bôxit* (bauxite) and *alumin* (aluminium) on March 31, 2017, I found just 17 articles on *Tuoï Tre* newspapers, while this number on *VnExpress* was 19. The number of articles about bauxite projects in the eight years from 2009 to 2017 is extremely small compared to the size and impact of the projects. During 2009–2010, bauxite was totally absent from *VnExpress*, and there was only one news article about bauxite on *Tuoï Tre* newspaper on April 22, 2010. In April 2009, MIC withdrew the publishing license of the *Du Lich* (*Tourism*) bi-weekly printed newspaper for three months from April to July,⁶⁹ because the newspaper released a series of features about territorial tensions in the borderland between China and Vietnam. These developments may have discouraged state-run journalism from conducting further investigation into the involvement of Chinese partners in the bauxite projects. The two surveyed newspapers published just one article about Chinese involvement. This was the news article ‘How the bauxite projects were trapped by the Chinese service providers’, published in *Tuoï Tre* newspaper on March 29, 2015. There were 111 readers’ comments under this news article. However, these 111 comments were inaccessible in March 2017. After *Tuoï Tre* newspaper was banned from online publishing for three months, from July to October 2018, all the comments that readers had generated before July 16, 2018, were removed from the *Tuoï Tre* website. In brief, from 2009 to 2017, state-run journalism provided only a few articles and insubstantial material for the debates about the bauxite projects.

3.3.2. Social media

The Yahoo! 360° blogging service created a sensation in Vietnam when it was launched in 2005. However, according to HDM, an activist and one of the

Vietnamese Forbes' 30U30 (30 influential people under 30 years old in Vietnam), Yahoo! 360° did not have the power to connect people. HDM (2015) said:

With Yahoo! 360°, you just visit your blog and follow the blogs of your friends and celebrities. That's the problem in the structure of blogging with Yahoo.

There was no such thing as an algorithm on Yahoo blogs to show the most prominent and important content to users. He emphasised the Yahoo blogging service's inferiority compared to Facebook:

Can you register in an event on Yahoo! 360°? You cannot. You read about the event on Yahoo blogs or websites, then you had to phone or email the event organisers to register. On Facebook, you just click the going-button. (2015)

HDM went on to assert that 'Without Facebook, there are no social movements [collective and connective actions] in Vietnam'

Due to poor maintenance, Yahoo closed down this service from 2008, and the platform finally crumbled in late 2009 while it was still in the Beta version of development. Social media users scattered to a number of other platforms, namely WordPress, Blogspot, Google Plus, MySpace and Facebook (Quinn & Kierans, 2010; Pham, 2013). From 2009 until 2012, Facebook was technically blocked in Vietnam (ITCNews, 2012). The anti-bauxite Facebook page had just 700 members in 2009 (Anonymous, 2009a), which is an insignificant number when compared to the membership of Facebook pages of more recent green public sphere movements (the Save Son Doong Facebook page had 217,000 members).

The 'like' button on Facebook was added in early 2009 but it was not until May 2010 that Facebook introduced the combination of the 'like' button and

Open Graph API.⁷⁰ This function allows other websites collect data on what Facebook users like, in order to customise users' experiences on their own websites (Dijck, 2013, p. 49). Until May 2010, the Facebook button was embedded on websites, allowing users to share the contents from websites to Facebook. Thus, during 2009 and early 2010, the closure of the Yahoo blogging service, the absence of API and the unpopularity and premature development of Facebook made it impossible to quantify audience engagement or measure the size of the general public participating in the bauxite public sphere.

The engagement of intellectuals in the bauxite public sphere is measurable by the number of petitioners and the number of essays that the intellectuals sent to the anti-bauxite blog. As discussed earlier, during 2009–2010, there were nine rounds of collecting signatures for the anti-bauxite petition. Eventually, 2746 intellectuals signed in it, with their names, job titles and work locations. From 2011 to March 2017, intellectuals sent 57 essays to the bauxite blog. The blog posted these exclusive essays, and collected and reposted many other news articles, making the blog a focal point for the arguments about the bauxite projects. The admin(s) of the bauxite blog told me that they liked the essays of Dr Nguyen Thanh Son the most because its strong criticism was rooted in very rich data. Dr Son was the Director of the Red River Coal Projects of VINACOMIN. However, the admin(s) admitted that 'the State doesn't care about our opinions, they still do what they want' (BVN, 2016).

To examine the influence of the blog on state-run journalism, I selected the topic 'roads to the bauxite projects', a prominent topic during the first phase of the infrastructure construction for the projects. As table 3.1 indicates, there were three news articles on *VnExpress*, four news articles on *Tuoi Tre*, and six essays on the anti-bauxite blog on this topic.

Table 3.1: Articles on VnExpress and Tuoi Tre, and essays on the anti-bauxite blog about building roads to the bauxite projects (as of March 2017)

No.	Media outlet	Title	Publishing date
1	VnExpress	Building roads to carry bauxite	Dec 16, 2011
2		Find money to build 277 km of roads for bauxite	Sep 9, 2012
3		Feasible study for a railway to carry bauxite	May 16, 2013
4	Tuoi Tre	Bauxite moving shakes the roads and bridges	May 29, 2013
5		Will built a scale station to stop overload trucks	Jun 1, 2013
6		Worried, bauxite trucks can destroy La Nga Bridge	Jun 5, 2013
7		Truck carried aluminium turned over, again	Aug 19, 2014
8	Anti-bauxite blog	The story that not many people know about the bauxite projects in Central Highlands (episode 2)	Nov 14, 2011
9		Response to the essay of engineer Le Trung Thanh	Nov 17, 2011
10		The new road is unplanned	Nov 21, 2011
11		The story that not many people know about the bauxite projects in Central Highlands (episode 4)	Nov 27, 2011
12		Huge transportation cost - huge loss for Tan Rai and Nhan Co projects	Jun 13, 2013
13		11 thousand billion Dongs burned in roads for bauxite	Jun 15, 2013

The news article published on *Tuoi Tre* newspaper on August 19, 2014, 'Truck carrying aluminium turned over, again', was accessible in March 2017, but it was removed from the website after that, and could not be retrieved in February 2019.

The anti-bauxite blog raised the topic of 'roads to the bauxite project' in 2011. However, *Tuo Tre* did not pick up on the topic until 2013, and *VnExpress* published just a notice from the authorities about the road construction launched on December 16, 2011. *Tuo Tre* and *VnExpress* did not quote the same sources that the blog quoted. Meanwhile, one essay on blog used *Tuo Tre* newspaper as the source. In the essay 'Huge transportation cost - huge loss for Tan Rai and Nhan Co projects' published on June 13, 2013, the engineer Le Trung Thanh asserted:

Tuo Tre and some other newspapers took some photos of the covered trucks, with packages of aluminium, and over-loaded ... The trucks were stopped by traffic policemen in Lam Dong and Dong Nai.

This essay referred to photos of the trucks published in *Tuo Tre* newspapers on June 1, 2013. Thus, while mainstream journalism did not refer to the blog, the blog repeated some content published in journalism. Thus, the blog did not have an apparent impact on journalism around the anti-bauxite topic.

Essays on the blog used jargon that was not understandable for the general public. For example, in the essay 'Response to the essay of engineer Le Trung Thanh', published on the blog on November 17, 2013, responding to a previous essay posted on November 14, 2013, engineer Le Quoc Trung wrote:

I Googled and found four types of coal depending on the ratio of carbon in it: Charcoal = 0.208 (use as the water filter); Coal Anthracite = 1.506 (to burn in high temperature coke-oven); Coal Anthracite = 1.105; and Coal, Bituminous = 0.833. Maybe Mr Thanh wanted to discuss about the transportation of coal because it was absolutely impossible to transport Alumina (Al_2O_3 , weight ratio 3.6-3.8) by the three-wheel based trucks.

In my opinion, this was obviously an exchange of arguments between experts who shared the same background and concerns in chemistry. It may have been a focus of research for some engineers, but it did not contain many elements of public interest. Consequently, it was difficult for such opinions to go beyond the academic sphere and be digested by a non-academic audience.

3.4. The bauxite public sphere

This section summarises the core characteristics of the bauxite public sphere, the roles of intellectuals as the founder of the green public sphere, and the strengths and weaknesses of the bauxite public sphere.

Blogging against the bauxite projects marks the first milestone in the evolution of the green public sphere in Vietnam in the period of 2009 to 2018. The bauxite green public sphere was unprecedented in several respects. First, it was the first time top national leaders launched a dissident movement against the CPV's decisions, inspiring intellectuals, particularly scientists and engineers, to actively disseminate counter-opinions against national projects. The public was able to observe a serious departure from democratic centralism, the foundational principle of the CPV. Second, it was the start of the CPV's legal intimidation of dissidents. In 2009, new items were added to the Penal Code to prevent anti-state propaganda, and it was under these new regulations that some bauxite dissident bloggers were arrested and imprisoned. Tran Huynh Duy Thuc, one of the bauxite dissidents who was convicted in 2010, was still imprisoned as of early 2019. Third, it marked the beginning of the use of non-mainstream media for activism. The anti-bauxite petition was launched on blogs, which were operating outside the control of the state media system. The collapse of Yahoo's blogging service in 2009, the temporary and un-announced ban on Facebook in 2009–2010, and the technical attack against the petition platforms were difficulties that hindered the expansion of the bauxite public

sphere. Despite such obstacles, the use of blogs opened the new horizon of an alternative media through which to practise freedom of expression.

The elites and intellectuals played the role of founders of the green public sphere. Because high-ranking positioned intellectuals could access the resource of data and had more knowledge about the field than the general public, they were able to identify the potential green issues, and to generate quality arguments and counter-positions on the issues. The bauxite petitioners considered the ideology of the 20th century nationalist Phan Chau Trinh as the North Star for their public sphere. Following his lead, the public sphere these intellectuals promoted was non-violent, and the anti-bauxite petitioners aimed to solve the problems by generating quality confrontational writings about bauxite to improve knowledge around the projects. The bloggers claimed on the blog that 'we don't overthrow the state, we must fight against the bad state' (*chúng tôi không chống chính quyền, chúng tôi chống lại tà quyền*). This statement captured the core essence of the bauxite public sphere, and the green public sphere in general at that time, that it was non-political politics, helping the public to exercise their right to freedom of expression to correct wrong-doing by the authorities on green issues, not to demolish the authorities.

The bauxite petitioners used their actual identities to join the public sphere. They provided their full names, job titles and locations in their petitions, essays, open letters and blog posts. The jobs title that they held within state organisations helped them stand out from the crowd in the debates. More seriously, however, the lack of anonymity caused danger and turbulence for their careers. Many intellectuals were arrested and imprisoned right after the peak of the anti-bauxite movement in 2009. Many others gradually stepped down from their positions in state-organisations. By the end of 2018, Dr Chu Hao, who actively participated in the petition, and the writer Nguyen Ngoc, who advocated the ideology of Phan Chau Trinh, led a wave of intellectuals

abandoning the Communist Party. As a consequence, their career legacies were erased from mainstream media. The lack of anonymity revealed a naivety of the players in the early green public sphere that was not repeated in the later green social media-based public sphere.

Another weak point in the blogging against the bauxite projects was the exclusion of the public from the debates. The bauxite activism attracted little attention from the general public. Although the bauxite projects were located in the Central Highlands, just four people out of nearly 3000 petitioners were from the provinces and cities in the Central Highlands. The general public, and especially the people living in areas affected by the projects, became outsiders to the activism. The public played the role of observers, rather than players, in the bauxite public sphere. In bauxite activism, state-run mainstream journalism was also an outsider. Journalism simply transmitted the will of the ruling party for bauxite mining construction, rather than covering the developments in the bauxite public sphere.

Overall, blogging against the bauxite projects marked the dawn of the social media-based green public sphere in Vietnam. It defined the role of the elites and intellectuals as the pro-active founders of the green public sphere. More importantly, the bauxite public sphere shaped the ideology of non-political politics for the green public sphere in the later phase of the green public sphere in Vietnam. ■

Chapter 4

Journalists and the green public sphere around Song Tranh 2

This chapter examines the roles of Vietnamese journalists in constructing the perception of green issues and converting such perceptions into policy on the environment. The chapter investigates the working conditions of journalists who covered the topic of the Hydropower Plant number 2 on the Tranh River (Song Tranh 2) over 2005–2012. Via the case study of Song Tranh 2, this chapter identifies the drivers of the production of the coverage about green issues and the features in journalism management structures that impeded quality environmental journalism in Vietnam. As outlined in Chapter Two, Vietnamese journalists work at one of three levels of journalism organisations: the central, provincial, and the district and commune level. For this project, I interviewed journalists (and guaranteed their anonymity, for security reasons) at different levels to investigate how they worked and co-operated in producing coverage of Song Tranh 2. The chapter concludes that the structure of journalism management, in which the journalism organisations are affiliated with government authorities, restricted the journalists at the lower level (district and commune level) from producing critical coverage against the local authority. Teaming up with journalists at a higher level (the national level) was one solution that allowed journalists to produce coverage of local environmental issues. The chapter also reviews the threats that environmental journalists have faced, and the ways in which the professional journalism associations have supported and protected their members.

4.1. Song Tranh 2

Travelling for two hours by car along the steep road from Tam Ky city in the east into the mountainous Bac Tra My District in the west of Quang Nam province is like sitting in an aeroplane that is taking off. The two systems of the rivers Vu Gia and Thu Bon, flowing through this area, provide sharp contrasts of height from the mountainous areas in the west to the sea estuaries in the low-land of the east. These features endow Quang Nam with a tremendous potential capacity for hydropower generation. Quang Nam province is home to 1.5 million people from 34 ethnic minority groups, living in an area of 10,400 square kilometres. In 2017, the province hosted 47 hydropower projects in operation, and over 62 ratified projects, give the area the lead in the number of hydropower plants in the central region of Vietnam.⁷¹

In order to ensure enough energy to achieve the goals of industrialisation and modernisation, the government put electricity first on its development agenda, followed by other infrastructure. The phrase '*dien, duong, truong, tram*' ('electricity, roads, schools, clinics') has long been the priority for investment in rural areas of Vietnam (Huu, 2014, p. 14). By 2012, hydropower accounted for over 44% of national electricity production, ranking second after coal-fired power (BMI, 2015, p. 61). From the time of national independence in 1945 to the North–South reunification in 1975, Vietnam had just two hydropower plants, Da Nhim in the South and Thac Ba in the North. From the beginning of *Doi Moi* in 1986, many more hydropower plants were constructed, such as Hoa Binh, Tri An, Yali, Vinh Son, Song Hinh, Thac Mo, Ham Thuan, and Da Mi (MOIT, 2013). In 2017, 260 hydropower plants were operating, 211 projects were under construction and would become operative, and 266 future projects were being considered for licensing to investors (MOIT, 2013).

The Hydropower Plant number 2 on the Tranh River, Song Tranh 2, is located in North Tra My District, Quang Nam Province. Song Tranh 2 is about

900 kilometres from Hanoi and is in the middle of the route from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City. Construction of Song Tranh 2 started in 2006 and was finished in 2010. The two 180-metre high dams make Song Tranh 2 the largest reservoir on the Tranh river, compared to the Song Tranh water dams 1, 3 and 4. Figure 4.1 shows a section of Song Tranh 2.

One problem with the region is that seismological literature has recorded a repeated pattern of earthquakes occurring in the vicinity of the Song Tranh 2 (Cao et al., 2014; Gahalaut et al., 2016). According to Cao et al. (2014, p. 319), the height of the water dam, and possibly the fault-zone in the Tra My-Tra Bong region triggered earthquakes around Song Tranh 2. Since the initial reservoir was filled in November 2010, there have been more than 300 earthquakes in the vicinity of the reservoir during the two years of 2011 and 2012. Before that, only one earthquake was reported in global catalogues of the region over the past 400 years (Gahalaut et al., 2016, p. 2389). Some of the most sizable earthquakes are the one of Richter magnitude (M) 4.2 on 7 September 2012,⁷² M 4.7 on 15 November 2012,⁷³ M 3.6 on 8 July 2012,⁷⁴ M 3.1 and M 3.2 on 17 October 2016, and the M 3.9 on 26 February 2017.⁷⁵ According to the Vietnam Institute of Geophysics, within 20 months from 2017 to August 2018, there were 74 earthquakes near Song Tranh 2 with a Richter magnitude from 2.5 to 3.9. Dr Nguyen Xuan Anh, the director of the Institute concluded in September 2018: ‘In Song Tranh 2, earthquakes decreased in intensity, but increased in frequency’.⁷⁶ Together with earthquakes, ‘ground cracks, landslides and erosion are also clearly seen’, and there was evidence of deformations such as curving, folding and dense concentrations of cracks, surface sliding scratches, changes of topography and the manifestation of recent volcanic activity, such as basalt eruption, gas escape, and ash mud eruption (Cao et al., 2014, p.321). The series of earthquakes, together with the water leaking through the dam since 2012, have resulted in damaging floods, droughts and house cracking, causing

constant anxiety about safety and poverty for residents and the people living in the downstream areas of the Tranh River.⁷⁷



Figure 4.1: A section on the main dam of Song Tranh 2 Hydropower Plant (The photo was taken on 24th February 2017 in Tra Doc Commune, Bac Tra My District, Quang Nam Province, Vietnam)

4.2. How journalists covered Song Tranh 2

Six reporters from BRT, QRT, VTV, *Tuoil Tre* and VFEJ were invited to answer the question 'How have you and your media organisation produced coverage of Song Tranh 2?'. Reporters were invited to participate in the study because their media organisations had appointed them to produce coverage about Song Tranh 2. Most of the coverage was published and broadcast between 2005 and 2012. When I conducted field trips to the media houses in February 2017, the coverage was inaccessible, and was not archived in the small local broadcasting stations. As a result, description of the coverage was gathered from the in-depth interviews I carried out with the journalists, not from content analysis.

4.2.1. BRT

Bac Tra My District Radio and Television Station (BRT) is under the direct management of the Department of Culture and Information of North Tra My People's Committee. As such, it belongs to the lowest level in the structure of Vietnamese journalism. BRT is located in the central downtown area of North Tra My District, about 10 kilometres from the Song Tranh 2 project. BRT has four reporters and four technicians, producing a thirty-minute television program each week and a thirty-minute radio program each day. As of February 2017, the BRT television programs broadcast every Thursday night from 7.45pm to 8.15pm, right after the evening news program on Channel 1 of the Vietnamese Television Program. According to a report of a BRT survey in 2016 to the North Tra My People's Committee, over 50% of the 42,000 people in the district access BRT's programs on a daily basis. However, according to the BRT reporter I interviewed, that number was made up to match the expectations of the local government (TT, 2017). The actual number could be much lower because of the language barrier and technical issues. A majority of the district's population live in ethnic communities (the Kors and the So-dangs) and speak ethnic languages. Meanwhile, BRT broadcasts in the Viet language. BRT's analogue broadcasting still requires antennas to be installed in users' television sets, which prevents households living in mountainous areas from getting the signal. Frequent thunderstorms in the region regularly destroy the loudspeaker system, causing further technical obstacles for reception of BRT's programs.

The BRT team leader asserted:

The purpose of BRT's program is not to reflect what is happening but to create stability and make local people feel safe.
We definitely do not make adverse-propaganda news.

This ultimate purpose can be identified by BRT's topics of coverage and the information sources that BRT recruited.

On the issue of topics, BRT witnesses two phases in producing news about Song Tranh 2: (1) construction of Song Tranh 2 and (2) its operation. In phase one, from 2005 to 2010, when Song Tranh 2 was constructed, BRT reported on three main topics: the compensation and resettlement provided for residents whose lands were taken for the construction; the benefits that the hydropower plant would bring to the development of the region; and the convenience of the new residential areas. In phase two, from 2010 to the present, since Song Tranh 2 has been in operation and the reservoir has been affected by the earthquakes and geological instability, BRT has produced news on two topics: how to cope with the unavoidable earthquakes and evacuation training activities.

According to the head of the BRT station (TT, 2017), BRT takes the North Tra My People's Committee as its primary definer source. Notices, reports, working schedules and many other official documents of the People's Committee are sent to BRT every day, which are then read on radio programs and covered by BRT's television reporters. BRT and Song Tranh 2 are just 10 kilometres apart, and it takes just 15 minutes to travel to and fro between the two offices by car or motorbike. However, BRT staff have never interviewed Song Tranh 2 staff as sources. Similarly, Song Tranh 2 staff have never contacted BRT directly. Instead of contacting BRT as the nearest media platform, Song Tranh 2 sends its information to the 'mother' affiliation, the state-corporation of EVN. The EVN then forwards the data to different organisations including North Tra My People's Committee. The People's Committee, in turn, sends the information to BRT. The information is transferred vertically from a local point up to a central point, rather than horizontally from a local point to the local media outlet. This navigation of information complies with the hierarchy of Vietnamese administrative structure, in which lower-level organisations are subordinate to

and report to upper-level organisations, rather than communicating to other organisations at the same level.

Counter-definers never appear in BRT's coverage. Sometimes, BRT reporters take the risk of using themselves as counter-definers. In such situations, one reporter acts as a layperson making suggestions to the authority, for example, by suggesting that the construction and operation should consult experts to reduce the damage, while another reporter records the interaction. Lay people, as a passive audience of the one-directional information flow, seldom have their voices heard on BRT's programs.

BRT's production of footage of local events serves two purposes. First, BRT produces news to broadcast across the district or to send as unedited footage to upper-level stations, where the material becomes ingredients for journalistic productions. BRT staff said they could not control the footage once it was released to stations at the upper levels. For example, in 2014, BRT released photos and footage about a herd of wild elephants destroying rice fields in North Tra My. Many other television and newspapers used the materials repeatedly as illustrated images of damage by elephants from 2014 to 2017. Second, and more importantly, the collected footage is archived as evidence that can be submitted to other organisations as requested. For example, footage of riots in the district can be handed over to police for investigation.

4.2.2. QRT

Quang Nam Radio and Television (QRT) is the broadcasting media house of Quang Nam province, located in Tam Ky city, about 70 kilometres from North Tra My District. In the hierarchical diagram of Vietnamese journalism management, QRT is at the provincial level, the second tier of the structure. As a unit of the Quang Nam People's Committee, QRT is subordinate to the Quang Nam People's Committee. QRT receives the guidance from the Committee and

attends weekly agenda-setting meetings with the provincial CPTC. The Head of the News Department of QRT said most of the QRT reporters had completed formal higher education and intensive training in journalism. As such, they had more expertise in journalism than their colleagues at BRT. The Head of the News Department said QRT people were 'smarter'. According to him, BRT staff needed to receive daily written guidance from the local authority because they were from ethnic tribes and may therefore have had less education and be slower at producing news.

My interview with the Head of the News Department of QRT (TV, 2017) revealed the topics that were broadcast and those that were censored in the Song Tranh 2 coverage. In addition to the topics covered by BRT, QRT also covered technical problems at Song Tranh 2 and a visit by national leaders to the construction site. However, many other topics were censored from the QRT news, such as: the deforestation to make land for the construction of Song Tranh 2 and the roads to Song Tranh 2; the unreasonable displacement and resettlement of tribespeople; the erosion of eco-diversity in the Tranh river basin; abnormal flooding destroying wooden construction in Hoi An ancient town; and long-term climate change impacts on the downstream areas of the rivers in Quang Nam. The Head of the News Department said QRT had been obliged to withdraw one news item from the evening news program. It was about the visit of the former Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung to Song Tranh 2. The news was withdrawn because of its sequence of images. The image of the Prime Minister was followed by the image of tribespeople leaving their homes and being moved to the re-location areas. He said this sequence of images could have implied a causal relationship between the two events, and it could therefore have suggested negative implications for the authorities.

It is difficult for QRT reporters in Tam Ky city to meet and interview experts in Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City.⁷⁸ For coverage criticising Song Tranh 2, QRT

often interviewed a retired chairman of the Quang Nam People's Committee. According to TV (2017), this source was a former local teacher of geography before being elected as the chairman. His background makes him eligible to debate the construction of Song Tranh 2.

4.2.3. VTV

VTV is the country's national television organisation, and is at the central level in the structure of Vietnamese journalism. VTV is under the direct control of the Central Party Committee and the Government of Vietnam. The General Director of VTV, Mr Tran Binh Minh, has been the standing member of the Politburo Committee of the CPV since January 2011. Channel 8 of VTV broadcasts coverage about the central region of Vietnam. VTV8's headquarters are in Da Nang city, the neighbouring province of Quang Nam province. The Head of the News Department at VTV8 remarked that the central region of Vietnam has is facing emerging environmental disasters: the Formosa incident, floods, droughts, pollution, pandemics and so on (HT, 2017). The problems of earthquakes and water leaking through the dam in Song Tranh 2, therefore, have faded from the media's agenda at VTV8, since the station has to reserve its resources to cover many other green issues.

The topic of Song Tranh 2 has had to compete with national events that VTV8 needs to cover. As a national channel, VTV8 has to give priority to covering the national news, while Song Tranh 2 has been regarded as local news. One example of this practice occurred in November 2017, when Vietnam hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Da Nang City. On November 8, 2017, a storm hit North Tra My District causing a landslide and flood. Several people died. The head of BRT said BRT sent the footage of the storm to VTV8.⁷⁹ However, the head of BRT was worried that the footage would not go to air because on that day VTV8 had a plan to live broadcast the arrivals of world leaders for the APEC Summit. The footage was not used in VTV's

news program. The visit of Trump, Putin and Xi to the town was big news, and the news about a local fatal storm was sacrificed. From the point of view of a national television station, the world leaders' trips were more newsworthy than a local natural disaster.

4.4.4. VFEJ

Established in 1998, the Vietnam Forum for Environmental Journalists (VFEJ) is a professional association for journalists working on environmental issues in Vietnam. Since 2006, VFEJ has been registered as a unit of the Vietnam Nature and Environment Association. The chairman of VFEJ, Mr Hoang Quoc Dung, is proud that his association has obtained full legal and financial independence status (with its own stamp and bank account), because it is very difficult to establish associations, especially associations for people working in government-run media organisations (HQD, 2016). As of February 2017, VFEJ had about 1500 members, including influential journalists, environmentalists, and others concerned about the environment. The most prominent activity of VFEJ is providing training courses and field trips for its members (HQD, 2016).

VFEJ also provides professional support in reporting green issues. In reporting about Song Tranh 2, VFEJ established a group of environmental journalists working in different media houses in different cities and provinces. In 2010–2012, when Facebook was still blocked in Vietnam, VFEJ created an email list of environmental journalists. Information about Song Tranh 2 was circulated by email. On behalf of its members, the chairman of VFEJ approached scientists and experts in the Vietnam Committee on Large Dams (VNCOLD) and the Institute of Geophysics (IoG). The chairman also facilitated an interview between group members and relevant scientists. He said he had helped the VFEJ members to interview Professor Nguyen Dinh Xuyen, the former Director of the Institute of Geophysics, and Dr Nguyen Hong Phuong, the Deputy Director of the Earthquakes and Tsunamis Detection Centre, for coverage about

Song Tranh 2. VFEJ also contacted international scientists to request more data about earthquakes in Song Tranh, particularly scientists in France. In a phone interview on May 23, 2016, the chairman of VFEJ explained to me that ‘data in Vietnam is still insufficient, mostly depends on the old data from the time of French colonisation and we still lack independent [not from the government] data’. According to Mr Hoang Quoc Dung, management from the IoG of Vietnam increased the frequency of reporting to the media about Song Tranh 2 under pressure from VFEJ. When environmental journalists approached the IoG as an organised group, their work benefited from more sources and more data, compared to the attempts of each individual journalist.

4.4.5 *Tuoï Tre*

Tuoï Tre newspaper was founded in 1975, after the reunification of the country. Although it is under the direct control of the Ho Chi Minh City Communist Youth Union, it is not just a local newspaper. *Tuoï Tre* newspaper gained prestige as ‘one of the most popular in Vietnam’ since it is ‘more investigatory and less prone to pure propaganda than Vietnam’s other state-run newspapers’ (Huntt, 2018). According to a *Tuoï Tre* reporter who has been assigned to report Song Tranh 2, *Tuoï Tre* was a pioneer in reporting the issue (HTV, 2017). The reporter established a very close relationship with one staff member at BRT. While the BRT cannot reflect any negativity about Song Tranh 2, the staff member sent his writing and video footage about the problems at Song Tranh 2 to the reporter of *Tuoï Tre*. In this situation, the local reporter became a primary source for *Tuoï Tre* newspaper, contributing his journalistic expertise to *Tuoï Tre*. Thanks to this local–central level collaboration, *Tuoï Tre* was able to publish a scoop about the water leaking through the main dam of Song Tranh 2 in March 2012 (HTV, 2017). Eventually the BRT staff member was invited to be a co-author of the news about Song Tranh 2 in *Tuoï Tre* newspaper (NTB, 2017). The relationship between the *Tuoï Tre* reporter and the BRT staff member changed

from journalist–source to journalist–collaborator. Both journalists' names were on the by-lines of some of the *Tuoï Tre* coverage of Song Tranh 2. Both journalists received an equal share of '*nhuan but*', the extra payment journalists can receive for news articles aside from the fixed salary they earn (HTV, 2017).

However, the collaboration between the local reporter and *Tuoï Tre* reporter did not last long. After a short time publishing under his real name, the BRT staff member used six different pen names for different topics of the coverage he produced for *Tuoï Tre* and other central level newspapers (NTB, 2017). Publishing under pen-names helped him to avoid too much attention from his employers at the People's Committee of North Tra My district. He said that, from 2012 to 2017, he once attempted to quit his job at the local BRT station and tried to move to the more prominent media house in a desire of becoming a professional journalist. However, he said if he had moved, he would have lost all the 'political benefits' (*lợi ích chính trị*). Such benefits included not only promotion for himself, but also a plot of land in North Tra My District, an employment opportunity for his wife, and schooling for his children at nearby schools. However, after choosing to stay at BRT, he was demoted and then moved to the Information and Culture Department of North Tra My People's Committee. This appeared to be one of the local authority's efforts to discourage local journalists from collaborating with journalists at higher-level media houses in producing coverage about local green issues.

4.3. Journalistic practice on green issues

The analysis of professional practice of the reporters at BRT, QRT, VTV, VFEJ and *Tuoï Tre* in reporting about Song Tranh 2 indicates the two primary patterns in journalism practice in the green issues: self-censorship and resistance against social media.

4.3.1. Self-censorship

Journalists perform self-censorship to protect their professional security and because of insidious beliefs. The former is a legal burden, while the latter is shaped by Vietnamese social and cultural values. Article 25.3.b. of the Press Code regulates the duties of journalists as involving 'defence of the viewpoints, guidance, policies of the CPV' and doing 'propaganda for the positive actors' (Government, 2016). As a consequence, professional practice must be aligned with the guidance from CPTC and MIC, and media houses are the mouthpiece of the organisations they are affiliated with. Journalists reinforce the existing political structure rather than questioning, doubting or challenging it. Journalists, and the majority of the population, believe that their responsibilities are a practice of patriotism, such as maintaining job security, career promotion, income for their families, maintaining harmony and solidarity for their workplaces and supporting the Party's missions.

Among journalists producing coverage of Song Tranh 2, self-censorship is an increasingly common practice. During the interviews I carried out, journalists admitted that the huge water dam would erode a vast cultural region and threaten the safety of local habitats. However, they never mentioned these topics in their coverage of Song Tranh 2. They acknowledged the green issues of the project and discussed the issues and problems elsewhere rather than in their news reports. One journalist said he was worried that in the scenario of the dam bursting, which he thought would occur sooner or later, the towns in the low land, particularly the Hoi An ancient town, a well-known tourism site, would be destroyed. He requested that I keep his comment off the record. Another journalist, who said he wanted to witness the demolition of Song Tranh 2, asked not to be quoted. The withdrawal of news before it goes to air at QRT, the use of pen names instead of one's real name and the use of retired leaders as sources, are also part of this practice of self-censorship.

The respect for hierarchy is observed in most government organisations, not only in media houses. For example, the Song Tranh 2 management board reports up to its ‘mother’ organisation, EVN. Then EVN informs the North Tra My People’s Committee, and the Committee informs down to BRT. The information circulates vertically between organisations and their affiliations before it is transferred to media houses. The horizontal flow of data from a government organisation to local media did not exist in the case of Song Tranh 2. The construction and operation of Song Tranh 2, as part of the energy development for industrialisation policy of the CPV and the government, was a top-down decision. Journalism never discussed the rightness of the top-down decision. As a substitute, journalism mentioned other related topics. In the case of Song Tranh 2, such topics were preparation for earthquakes, the resettlement of ethnic peoples and errors made during dam construction. The media promoted the mindset that the government’s decisions are always the right course of action. The job of journalists is to check and make sure the people do the things right to execute the government’s decision.

The phrase '*dung quy trinh*' ('we perform the procedure right') became a touchstone to protect staff members of this government structure from any consequence for their performance. In late 2016, Song Tranh 2 often opened the dam to release water out of the reservoir during earthquakes. Responding to accusations that it was irresponsible to release water during an earthquake, Song Tranh 2 staff explained they had performed the procedure correctly. The guidance document number 1537 on advising the operation of hydropower reservoirs, issued by the Prime Minister in 2015, recommended that water needed to be released when it reached a certain height in normal weather conditions. The document number 1537 does not give instructions about what to do if the water exceeds the certain height in an earthquake (Government, 2015; NQD, 2017). Government staff perform the procedure correctly, even though it

might be not the right procedure in the specific circumstances. Being compliant with top-down instructions is seen as a desirable attribute for staff in the government structure, including for the people working within the journalism structure in Vietnam.

4.3.2. Resistance against Facebook

Heads of news departments from BRT, QRT and VTV8 offered reasons to explain why Song Tranh 2 dropped from the public agenda even though its environmental consequence were still devastating (HT, 2017; TT, 2017; TV, 2017). First, Song Tranh 2 technical problems occurred prior to the emergence of Facebook. At the peak of the earthquakes triggered by Song Tranh 2 from 2010 to 2012, Facebook was blocked in Vietnam. The Facebook group ‘Stop the construction of Song Tranh 2’⁸⁰ had just two members in October 2017. One of them said in May 2017 that he had never heard of Song Tranh 2 before. The number of lay people concerned about Song Tranh 2 was too far from a critical mass to enable any open or public discussion. Second, the heads of news considered local people surrounding Song Tranh 2 to be much less proactive than those in central Vietnam:

The ethnic people of Bac Tra My are so easy to accept the top-down procedure. They have never gone on any demonstration.
(TT, 2017)

Unlike people in Nghe An-Ha Tinh,⁸¹ people in Quang Nam-Da Nang [the location of Song Tranh 2] are very gentle in their actions and minds. (HT, 2017)

Belief in these characteristics of the local people was also used to justify the absence of the public sphere around Song Tranh 2. The passiveness of the local people in using media and social media causes the public ignorance in Song Tranh 2 issues.

The first Vietnamese journalist who won an international environmental journalism prize was Hoang Quoc Dung, an editor of *Tien Phong (the Pioneer)* newspaper and the chairman of the VFEJ. The award was given in 2008 by Reuters–IUCN for Mr Dung's investigative journalism about a cross-border wildlife trafficking network in Vietnam (HQD, 2016).

In 2015, Do Doan Hoang, a well-known environmental investigative journalist from *Lao Dong (the Labour)* newspaper, won the title 'Reporter of the Year', awarded by an Asian environmental organisation for his features about the killing and trading in wild animals. In addition to this regional award, Hoang won four national and tens of institutional awards for journalism and creative writing for his influential investigating documentary films and features, including 'The trade-offs' and four episodes about 'Vietnam's pollution blackspots' (DDH, 2015).

Both Hoang Quoc Dung and Do Doan Hoang reject the use of social media in professional journalism. Dung said in April 2016 that he did not own a Facebook account while Hoang's famous advice to inexperienced reporters was 'If you want to grow in journalism, you should get rid of Facebook'. Environmental journalists who were participated in this study are disposed to reject social media. A journalist from *Tuoi Tre* newspaper working in the central area of Vietnam justified his inclination to journalism and the rejection of social media, saying:

When I get paid by *Tuoi Tre* newspaper, I should devote all time and expertise for the newspaper. All my writings belong to the newspaper whether they are published or not. I don't post my writing on Facebook because the writings are the assets of my newspaper. (HTV, 2017)

4.3.3. Professional developments in environmental journalism

At a conference about environmental journalism, Professor Do Chi Nghia suggested there should be more awards for environmental journalists, but insisted that the priority should be given to initiatives and good models of environmental protection, and that the journalists should not excessively criticise business (Do, 2015). Vietnam's national journalism awards are given to Party-accredited journalists only, not to bloggers, social media users or citizen journalists. A biannual environmental journalism award has been organised by MONRE since 2011. The stated purpose of this award is:

Promoting the achievements of MONRE in the cause of development and protection of the country; reflecting the significant activities in management, policymaking, lawmaking, good people working in environment and natural resources management.⁸²

From MONRE's perspectives, journalism and propaganda are two interchangeable terms. Investigative journalism on topics related to environmental and natural resources management is not welcomed because it could stain MONRE's reputation. Previously, Siemens, a technology multi-national company, had been among the first organisations launching biannual Vietnamese journalism awards for green energy in 2011.⁸³ Because green issues attract considerable attention, a category for environmental journalism was first introduced into the MIC's national journalism award, which was announced at the journalism festival in March 2017. At this festival, 40 features about green issues were awarded professional prizes.⁸⁴

As of December 2018, Vietnamese journalism schools and associations for journalism were not yet including environmental journalism and communication in their curriculum and training programs.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, VFEJ

has been very pro-active in conducting training for its members on green issues. According to the chairman, VFEJ follows a strategy of seeking co-operation with international organisations. This strategy brings at least two benefits for VFEJ. First, sponsored funding from international organisations helps VFEJ achieve financial independence, which leads to financial autonomy in training for environmental journalists. Second, it expands the spectrum of publishing for coverage about green issues. Environmental journalists can publish in international media outlets. As of late 2018, except for the chairman who published his articles in newspapers in the US, the other VFEJ members had not yet published internationally. However, the vision of publishing in outlets in South East Asia or the US was designed to help environmental journalists overcome self-censorship practices and go beyond the frame of the government structure. Similarly, the VFEJ also helps international environmental journalists to cover green issues in Vietnam. For instance, in 2016, VFEJ helped a US journalist investigate the environmental movement on social media in Vietnam (HQD, 2016).

For the safety to investigate the green issues, the environmental journalists, who participated in this research, tried to avoid attention from the public. VFEJ's chairman said 'VFEJ should go quietly in the valley, not loudly in the highway' (HQD, 2016). Updating VFEJ's Facebook page and website has never been a priority for VFEJ staff. DDH, the environmental journalist who won the award 'reporter of the year in 2015', was vindictively attacked by three masked men on a quiet road in Hanoi in March 2016. The attackers smashed the index finger on his right hand, the finger that presses camera buttons and hold pens. Popularity and attention are considered to cause more trouble than benefits for environmental journalists.

4.3.4. Journalists and the green public sphere

Habermas (1989b, pp. 29-30) asserts the public sphere can become existent in the ‘world of letters’. The public (or the middle-class in the Habermas’ study) can approach the world in letters through the critical debates of the elegant clubs, salons and discussion tables. Critical debates can also be articulated and presented in the press. The public sphere requires two elements: quality debates and open and accessible platforms from which to launch such quality debates.

Song Tranh 2 is typical of top-down projects. Reporting the issue of Song Tranh 2 was highly restricted by the propaganda-nature of the Vietnam’s journalism structure. Journalists working in mainstream media houses are governmental officials. Within the government structure, journalists’ work is framed by propaganda parameters, which emphasise positivity, good people and good deeds, and which reinforce the existing structure rather than questioning and challenging it. The quality and critical assessment of green issues hardly exists in such milieu.

Journalists can opt to publish on social media, which is more independent and open, compared to journalism platforms. However, in the case of Song Tranh 2, Facebook and other social networks were unpopular during the crucial first phase of Song Tranh 2’s construction. Social media become open and accessible in Vietnam from 2014 (from the measles outbreak in 2014, analysed in chapter five), by which time the construction was accomplished and Song Tranh 2 had started to operate. Furthermore, the rejection of and resistance to social media has become a popular norm among government-loyal journalists. More importantly, environmental journalists tended to avoid using Facebook, in an attempt to keep low public profiles for the safety of their jobs which include both job security and avoiding the risk of physical harms . At the time of Song Tranh 2, social media had not yet been used as an appropriate platform for journalists to launch quality debates on green issues.

To investigate and report wrong-doing, it is essential that journalists are independent of the actors who are involved in the wrong-doing. For those who are still dependent on the benefits that such actors offer, collaborating with others who are independent is one solution. In the Vietnamese context, as this chapter has shown, collaboration can be on the same level, between journalists of the same level of journalism. For example, environmental journalists approached the GoI as a group of VFEJ, not as individual journalists, which forced the GoI to change the intensity and frequency of its release of data to the media. More importantly, collaboration can be inter-levels, which enables journalists to reach beyond the scope of their work. For example, the BRT journalist who co-operated with the *Tuoi Tre* journalist, or the VFEJ members who worked with a US journalist on an investigative project. The professional development and capacity-building for environmental journalists can take place in the network of peer support. Although social media has great potential for forming an online community, it has had little impact on the establishment and enhancement of the network of environmental journalists. The quality exchange of ideas and opinions among the group of environmental journalists occurs in platforms that allow confidentiality. Emails, club meetings, private training and closed groups are helping environmental journalists to perform their missions of generating quality input for the ‘world of letters’ of the public sphere. ■

Chapter 5

The measles outbreak and the beginning of the Facebook public sphere

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the measles outbreak of 2014 as a milestone in development of the green public sphere in Vietnam. As discussed in chapter three (blogging about bauxite) and in chapter four (journalists covering Song Tranh 2), green issues had become increasingly serious but the number of people addressing the issues was restricted to only intellectuals, members of the elite and scientists. When the unofficial ban on Facebook was lifted in 2013, the public started using Facebook for mass protests (It is called “unofficial” because there was no official governmental documents about this ban). The measles outbreak was not only a historical event in the field of public health but also an extraordinary milestone in Vietnam’s media history. It marked a tipping point for the media landscape of Vietnam, the point at which social media entered the realm of agenda-setting, which resulted in social media being used strategically as a media strategy by both the public and government officials. Despite its impacts on journalism, politics and society, the public sphere that developed around the measles outbreak was also typical of the extremely short-term period of Facebook activism, which illustrated a weak point in the public sphere that emerged on social media.

5.1. Public scrutiny of the public health sector

Chapter One indicated that children and mothers were among the critical stakeholders who engaged in the concept of ‘green issues’ in the Vietnamese context. This section discusses problems of public health, in which the victims were children and mothers.

Vietnamese regulations on birth registration allow that if a child dies within 24 hours of birth, the hospital can use the birth record form to record the child's death.⁸⁶ Therefore, a single merged form is used for registration of both birth and death where a child's lifespan is shorter than a day. By early 2017, Mrs Bui Thi Tuan had tragically acquired three merged forms, apart from two stillbirths and two seriously weak babies. Born in 1977 in a Muong ethnic community of Yen Lam commune, Yen Dinh District, Thanh Hoa province of Vietnam, Mrs Tuan was not the only person suffering health problems in the commune. Thousands of cancers, miscarriages and infant deaths occurred in three communes around Nicotex Thanh Thai—a business run by the Army. From 1999 to 2009, the business dumped out-of-date pesticide on its premises. This was not detected until a night in August 2013 when two local men dodged the military guards to get inside and dig up the yard of the factory (PanNature, 2015, p. 7).

The 'cancer rate' has become a new indicator of the dark side of the coin 'industrialisation'. For example, in the marine disaster caused by Formosa in 2016, a delegation from the Taiwanese Parliament visited Ha Tinh province of Vietnam to inspect the Formosa impact. A local activist took local people suffering from cancer to the meeting with the delegation. The activist had assumed that because these people were working in and living near the Formosa plant, they were vivid evidence of the deadly living conditions caused by Formosa (NAT, 2017).

In 2007, MOH recorded 51 'cancer villages' in Vietnam. MOH defined a village as 'cancer village' if there are from 73 to 169 cancer patients per 100,000 residents.⁸⁷ Most of these villages have been contaminated by their regular daily work, and are situated closed to industrial zones or to former war-time chemical storage sites. In 2016, the Health Environment Management Agency (HEMA), a project under MOH, published reports on water resources in ten of the most

severe cancer villages. According to HEMA, the water samples in such villages had no sign of carcinogenic substances. HEMA also affirmed that cancer rates in the so-called cancer villages were within the national average (135 victims/100,000 people for women and 181/100,000 for men) and lower than the global average (182/100,000). With this report, the MOH effectively denied the existence of the so-called ‘cancer villages’.⁸⁸ The cancer clusters had still not been demystified.

Despite the fact that the MOH did not acknowledge the concept of a ‘cancer village’, the term had been in use nationwide, particularly for villages surrounding industrial zones. Inconsistencies emerged when people compared the MOH’s reports with reports from other sources, discussed later in this section. While the capacity of the health sector was being challenged by growing public scrutiny, Dr Nguyen Thi Kim Tien, the Minister of Health from 2011, was subject to hard criticism. In October 2013, on the day three children died from vaccinations in Quang Binh province, the Facebook page ‘Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health’ was established. Until then, there had not yet been adequate grounds to claim a causal relationship between the anti-vaccination trend that took hold after three children died from vaccinations in October 2013 and the mushrooming rates of tropical diseases in early 2014. However, in the first half of 2014 it became obvious that the number of victims of measles was on the rise. The *Measles Bulletin* of the World Health Organisation (2014, p. 3) recorded there were 17,267 suspected measles cases in Vietnam, including 5,568 confirmed cases, killing over 140 people, most of them children in 2014. In 2013 and 2012, there had been just 637 and 895 confirmed cases respectively.

On April 15, 2014, *Tuoi Tre* newspaper published a report from the MOH that stated that 25 children had died from measles.⁸⁹ Journalists in the Paediatrics Hospital, however, noticed that the death toll must be more than 25

(HHY, 2014; LA, 2015). On April 16, the Deputy Prime Minister Vu Duc Dam, who was in charge of national public health, told the media that he had read on Facebook of a post by a doctor about the number of measles deaths being higher than this. After the Deputy Prime Minister's remarks, the MOH released a revised report stating that 108 children died of measles.⁹⁰ The inconsistency in the reports appears to have caused distrust and panic among the public. The awkwardness of the Minister of Health during the measles outbreak was another factor contributing to the tension. Some of her unprofessional answers to the media were often cited in criticism against her, such as 'I would never be so stupid to take my measles children and grand-children to this [Paediatrics] hospital',⁹¹ 'I am not allowed to talk', or 'The cause of measles is climate change'.

During the measles outbreak, the Paediatrics Hospital in Hanoi was the treatment centre for most of the children with measles. The protesters made the hospital a site for demonstrations against the MOH and Minister of Health. They hung banners and posters at the gates of the hospital, then took photos and posted these on their Facebook pages. Parents of children with measles used Facebook to inform each other about new measles cases. They also launched a fund-raising campaign for equipment to assist breathing for the victims. Thousands of people used real names and real profiles to join the Facebook page 'Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health'. Social media became a tool for a public argumentative form of communication, unprecedented in the history of the CPV. At the same time, social media empowered the public to perform several tasks to manage health services, such as buying equipment for measles treatment and keeping count of the number of children diagnosed with measles. The accumulated developments in the measles outbreak indicated the peak of public's lack of confidence in the capacity of the Minister, as well as in the government's management of the public health sector. This also signalled the construction of a new confidence in

the power of the public that enabled the public to partly perform some of the functions that had previously belonged to the government, and to influence how the government performed the functions.

5.2. Media about the measles outbreak

5.2.1. Sample for content analysis

Four newspapers were selected as representative of the mainstream media coverage about the measles outbreak: *VnExpress*, the most-read Vietnamese language newspaper; *Tuoi Tre*, which is known as the leading newspaper for independent journalism in Vietnam; *Nhan Dan* newspaper, the mouthpiece of the CPV; and *Duc Khoe va Doi Song*, the mouthpiece of the MOH. The social media platform selected for analysis was the Facebook page 'Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health'. Because the measles outbreak was detected in April 2014 and escalated from April to May 2014, I selected the articles and Facebook posts that were published within this time frame. The keywords used to search within the websites of the newspapers were '*bệnh sởi*' and '*dịch sởi*' ('measles' and 'measles outbreak'). Using these criteria, I collected 45 news articles on *VnExpress*, 46 news articles on *Tuoi Tre*, 63 on *Nhan Dan*, 22 on *Suc Khoe va Doi Song*, and 15 posts on the Facebook page. The texts and images in the news articles and the Facebook page were analysed in order to identify the categories of topics and sources and their opinions. In addition to the content in the articles, I also analysed the attitudes being conveyed in the comments. Comments are the readers' opinions, listed chronologically under each post on social media and after some news articles on mainstream media. Each of the selected 15 Facebook posts had 1000 likes, shares and comments. Consequently, the volume of comments to analyse was extremely large (6134 comments in total).

5.2.2. Theme of positivity in the mainstream media

Of 45 news articles on *VnExpress.net* about the measles outbreak, only one criticised the work of the MOH. This was the article *Cần minh bạch về bệnh sởi*—‘Transparency about measles is needed’, published on *VnExpress* on April 17, 2014. However, the author of this article was a reader, not a journalist, and it was published in the column of Community Commentary, not as news or a feature story. *Tuoi Tre* newspaper provided more criticism than the other newspapers. Of 46 news articles about the measles outbreak published on *Tuoi Tre*, seven criticised the authority. On *Nhan Dan*, the CPV’s newspapers, of 63 news articles about the measles outbreak 2014, just two articles reflected the theme of criticism. However, the critics were directed at the lower levels of health management (clinics) and avoided criticism of the top level of management (the Ministry and the Minister). The theme of criticism was absent from all 22 news articles about the measles outbreak 2014 on *Suc Khoe va Doi Song*, a publication affiliated with MOH. *Suc Khoe va Doi Song* advocated positive themes such as: good developments in measles treatment, how to prevent measles and care for measles patients, and the working schedules of the Minister and MOH.

Why did mainstream media so rarely and reluctantly criticise the authorities? The first and foremost reason was the fact that the government owns and controls all aspects of media practice in Vietnam, as discussed in Chapter Two. Each newspaper and broadcasting station was operating as ‘the mouthpiece’ of a state authority and is affiliated with a state organisation. In such a context, the state-controlled mainstream media was not expected to publish criticism or negativity about the organisations in the same state-controlled structure. Instead, the mainstream media tended to cover the themes of consensus and positivity, as analysed in chapter two.

5.2.3. Theme of negativity and criticism on social media and comments

Table 5.1 demonstrates the number of positive (compliments), negative (criticisms) and neutral comments that social media users and mainstream media audience generated in the coverage of the measles outbreak on the Facebook page and in the *VnExpress* newspaper. Among the comments, the theme featuring negativity was 46.22% of the total comments, outweighing the percentage of the theme of positivity, which was just 3.77%.

Table 5.1: Number of positive, negative and neutral comments about the measles outbreak 2014 in the selected newspapers and Facebook page

Media outlet	Number of comments			
	Total comments	Positive	Negative	Neutral
VnExpress	3119	199	1104	1816
Tuoi Tre	0	0	0	0
Nhan Dan	0	0	0	0
Suc Khoa va Doi Song	0	0	0	0
Facebook	3015	32	1731	1252
Total	6134	231	2835	3068
	100%	3.77%	46.22%	50.01%

This analysis suggests that the space for criticising the authorities had expanded with the widespread uptake of social media, which is created outside the sphere of professional journalism and government censorship. In 15 posts on the Facebook page, the theme of criticism was the primary pattern. Facebook users generated 1731 negative comments and just 32 positive comments about the Minister and Ministry (the rate of criticism was 5400% more than that of compliments).

VnExpress embedded a hybrid model of mainstream media and social media in their site. Whenever there was a need for space to criticise authority, *VnExpress* offered readers the chance to add comments. An example of this was the news article *Four reasons for the measles outbreaks and children's death*, which was published on *VnExpress* on April 21st, 2014 and in which the Minister of Health is quoting claiming that 'measles occurred because of climate change'. The theme of criticism was absent in the news articles but was expressed eloquently in the 316 negative comments, compared to just 9 positive comments. Comments did not instantly appear on the *VnExpress* website as there was a delay to enable editorial approval before publication. The theme of criticism was prominent in the readers' comments while it was still extremely rare in the news articles. Among the comments published under 45 news articles on *VnExpress*, there were 199 positive and 1104 negative comments (the rate of criticism was about 554% more than compliments).

Tuo Tre newspaper invited its readers to comment but the comments were hidden from the general public and visible only to *Tuo Tre*'s editors. The newspaper did not allow readers' comments on news articles about the measles outbreak. By excluding non-professional contributions from its content, *Tuo Tre* considered that it was devotedly following the paper's motto of being 'the most credible, accurate and up-to-date news'. *Nhan Dan* and *Suc Khoa va Doi Song* also did not offer audiences the chance to leave comments on their websites.

Under pressure from public opinion expressed on social media, two strategies emerged in journalism. The first was that social media became embedded, with mainstream publications (such as *VnExpress*) allowing public participation in journalism, thus leaving the role of criticising authority in the hands of the public. The second was the maintenance of mainstream purity (such as in *Tuo Tre* newspaper), where the space to criticise authority was still narrow (in terms of the number of critical topics) but was instead filled by

professional journalists with verified facts and figures. Criticism and news were thus separated in mainstream media but were combined on social media. The increasing extent of criticism of the authorities was challenging state control and paving the way for a greater freedom of expression in Vietnam.

5.2.4. Mainstream media duplication of the social structure of power

Table 5.2 describes the sources used in *VnExpress* and *Tuoit Tre* coverage of the measles outbreak in April and May 2014. In terms of occupations, the sources are categorised into five groups: government, political leader, experts, laypeople and social media users. In terms of their opinions, four types of sources are identified: primary definer, counter-definer, different opinion and no conflict. Definitions of each of these categories were discussed in chapter two.

Table 5.2: Information sources in the *VnExpress* and *Tuoit Tre* coverage of the measles outbreak in April–May 2014

	Primary definers	Counter definers	Different opinion	No conflict	Total
Government	10	4	1	20	35 (16.8%)
Political leader	1	1	1	3	6 (2.9%)
Expert	34	24	20	60	138 (66.3%)
Lay people	8	6	0	12	26 (12.5%)
Social media	1	1	0	1	3 (1.5%)
Total	53 (25.5%)	36 (17.3%)	22 (10.6%)	97 (46.6%)	208 (100%)

Overall, content analysis of the 45 news articles on *VnExpress* and 46 news articles on *Tuoit Tre* newspaper indicated a heavy reliance on health experts and governmental officials in reporting on the measles outbreak 2014. Two thirds (66.3%) of the sources used by journalists were health experts and 16.8% were governmental officials. Health experts and government officials were the two

biggest groups of primary definers, 34 out of 53 or 64% of primary definers were health experts and 10 out of 53 or 18.8% of primary definers were government officials. Apparently, the mainstream media were reduplicating the existing structure of power in Vietnamese society, where the government and people working in health sector had the most prominent voice in mainstream coverage.

5.3. The rise of Facebook in the measles outbreak

There is evidence of Facebook blockage in Vietnam during 2009 to 2012 (ITCNews, 2012). However, since October 2012, Facebook was attracting one million new accounts from Vietnam per month, and in March 2013, the number of Vietnamese Facebook users was 12 million (BBC, 2013). The measles outbreak in 2014 marked an extraordinary milestone in Vietnam's media history. With this event, Facebook entered the realm of agenda-setting, activated connected collective actions such as cyber mass protests and fund-raising, and resulted in an unprecedented embedding of social media as a strategy among governmental officials.

5.3.1. Facebook goes mainstream

During the measles outbreak was the first time Vietnamese journalism reported that Facebook had become a source for the top CPV leader. At the start of the measles outbreak, the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Vu Duc Dam, confirmed that he had heard the news from the Facebook page of a doctor, not from state-run journalism. On April 16, 2014, *Tuoi Tre* newspaper published the following:

During the hospital inspection in the afternoon of April 15, the Deputy Prime Minister Vu Duc Dam said he would like to thank a doctor working in the National Paediatric Hospital who posted on Facebook about the fact that many children died of measles. After the post, the Deputy Prime Minister knew the fact and paid the hospital inspection visit. (Lan-Anh, 2014)

In this news article, *Tuoi Tre* newspaper covered both the Deputy Prime Minister and the source on Facebook. Stuart Hall has discussed practice such as this in the following terms:

The media do not only simply 'create' the news ...[by reproducing the definitions of those who have privileged access] the media stand in a position of structured subordination to the primary definers. (Hall et al., 1979)

This opened up the ideological role of the media. Hall et al. cited Marx's basic proposition that 'the ruling ideas of any age are the ideas of its ruling class' (Hall et al., 1979, p. 59). Hall et al. write:

Because this class owns and controls the means of material production, the class also owns and controls the means of 'mental production'. In producing their definition of social reality, and the place of 'ordinary people' within it, they construct a particular image of society which represents particular class interests as the interests of all members of society. (Hall et al., 1979, p. 59)

In the measles article example, by reporting that the top national leader used Facebook, the media produced 'a way of life' perception that Facebook was an accredited source for the ruling class, and as such, that society could also trust the source on Facebook.

Notably, Facebook users discussed some topics that could be considered offensive or hostile to the authorities, such as calls for resignations or for demonstrations. Mainstream media brought this agenda from Facebook to the authorities, forcing the authorities to address Facebook users' agenda. Responding to the social media users' request for her resignation, the Minister said: 'I don't think of resignation now', which became the headline of many

news items on April 30, 2014. In some situations, the news generated by laypeople on social media was picked up by the mainstream media. For example, *VnExpress* published a call for donations, which was initiated by Facebook users, and reported about price of parsley seeds that are sold on the parents' forum.

5.3.2. Facebook for online mass protests

The measles outbreak marked the first time the public had used Facebook to protest against national leaders. A Facebook page titled *Bộ trưởng Y tế hãy từ chức*⁹² (Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health) was established in October 2013. However, the page did not attract public attention until the measles outbreak in April 2014. On April 18, 2014, 24 hours after *Tuoi Tre* newspaper published the news article about the Deputy Prime Minister's inspection of the hospital inspection, over 2000 people joined the page. Figure 5.1 shows the sharp increase in the number of people who became members of the Facebook page 'Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health' from April 17 to May 3, 2014. The number of 'likes' dropped sharply on May 3, 2014, because on that day public attention shifted to the entry of the Chinese oil rig *Hai Yang Shi You 981* into the disputed sea between China and Vietnam. For five years from 2013 to 2018, this period of two weeks, from 16 April to 3 May 2014, attracted the most significant number of 'likes' and followers to the page.

It is important to note that figure 5.1 shows 'organic likes', not 'paid likes'. 'Organic likes' indicate an actual interaction on social media by active users who are interested in the topic on the page and may do some online searching around the issue before being navigated to the page. A 'paid like' is an interaction on social media from less active users for whom the page admins take a financial sponsorship so that a wider audience are able to see the content on the page. Interestingly, many people used real names with real profiles to

join this Facebook protest page, which was an unprecedented act of protest on social media in the one-party state of Vietnam.

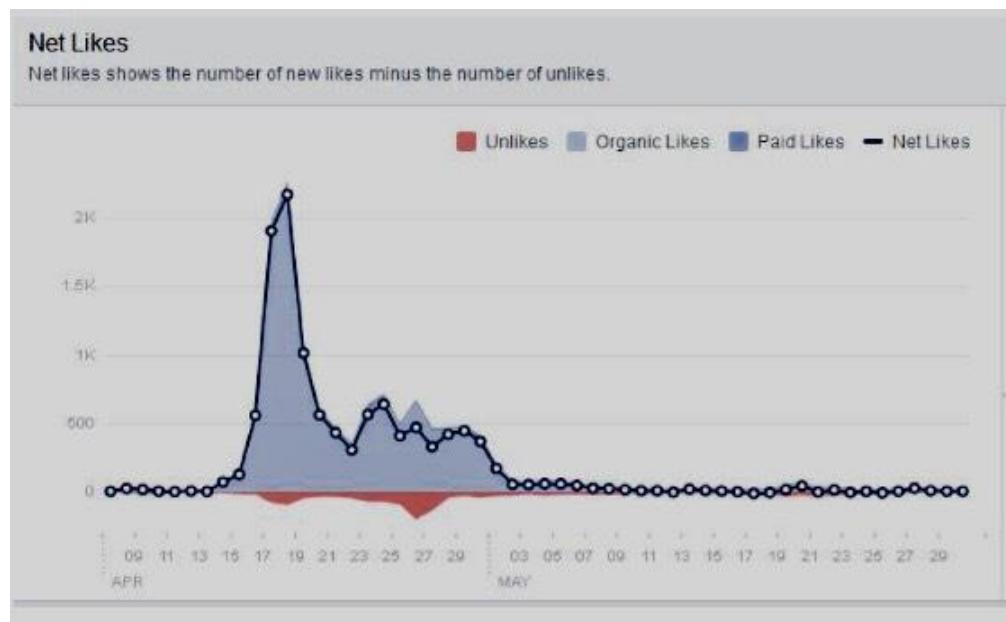


Figure 5.1: The number of 'organic likes' on the Facebook page 'Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health in April–May 2014 (page admin/s)

Public demonstration shifted to Facebook since the measles outbreak 2014. According to the Decree 38 on 'regulations to maintain social order' issued in 2005, any group meeting at a public space without permission from the local authorities would be under scrutiny as such meetings could potentially lead to protest and demonstrations (Government, 2005). As of early 2019, the Vietnamese National Assembly had not yet removed the Law for public (offline) demonstrations. Therefore, offline public demonstrations have been deemed to be illegal. The *Defence Act* enacted from January 2019 allows the local authority to declare an immediate curfew in specific circumstances.⁹³ The stricter the legal framework for physical demonstrations, the more the public appreciated the flexibility of cyber demonstration. Social media users could join cyber protests at any time. They could combine the two forms of physical and cyber demonstrations. For example, during the measles outbreak, mothers held protest posters at the gates of hospitals, took photos and posted them on the

Facebook page calling for the resignation of the Minister of Health. This combination of public and online demonstration was duplicated in later Facebook protests, including the ‘Save Son Doong’, ‘Hug Trees’ and ‘I choose fish’ campaigns.

5.3.3. Facebook for public mobilisation

From April 17 to April 20, 2014, a fundraising campaign that started on Facebook reached 500 million Vietnamese dongs (25 thousand USD). This charity was for the purchase of new respiration aid equipment for children with measles in hospitals. ZingNews described the campaign as follows:

The senders transfer money to the bank account, and then leave comments under a post to notify Minh Do [the campaign leader] of the amount and contact details. After the calculation at the end of each day, the total amount and the spending plan will be publicly posted on the personal page [of Minh Do].
(ZingNews, 2014)

Fundraising proved to be an extremely successful collective action on social media. Fundraising for the measles children hospital was an example. Contributors to the fund included not only the families of children with measles but also Vietnamese communities overseas. An ingredient in the success of this fund-raising was that their fundraising messages were able to reach a critical mass of potential contributors. Facebook, with over 46 million Vietnamese users in 2014 and 55 million in 2018, proved to be a platform able to attain such a critical mass.

5.3.4. Facebook embedded in government communication strategies

In response to the anti-fan page, Ms Nguyen Thi Kim Tien, the Minister of Health, launched her official Facebook pages in October 2014: one personal account⁹⁴ and one ministerial-controlled account.⁹⁵ In October 2018, the former

had over 45,000 followers, while the latter had over 350,000 followers. These accounts were ‘blue ticked’, indicating that Facebook had verified the identity of the Minister Nguyen Thi Kim Tien as the owner of the accounts. The MOH of Vietnam was a pioneer among Vietnamese government organisations in embracing social media in its communication strategy. Since then, many government organisations have been using social media outlets, including Facebook, Wikipedia and YouTube, together with their websites to disseminate information to the public, marking the participation of the government sector in two-way communication, or communication 2.0, with its citizens.

One of the *Tuo Tre* reporters remarked:

The Minister of Health hired a professional PR team after the measles outbreak. The team manages to maintain a good reputation for the Minister. However, I don’t want to work with the team. They filter me out from the raw materials that I would approach directly. (LA, 2015)

However, in an interview with *Tuo Tre* in 2016, the Minister of Health responded to the reporter that she often personally updated her Facebook account. The Minister acknowledged that:

Compared to the traditional complaint management policy, this [Facebook account] is faster, allowing more interactions, and more practical, because people are more direct and honest in this virtual [and maintain anonymity] platform.⁹⁶

5.4. The emergence of non-political politics

5.4.1. Short-term and long-term influence of the public sphere

As illustrated in figure 5.1, the Facebook page ‘Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health’ attracted the public’s attention for just 17 days from April 16

to May 3, 2014. After May 3, 2014, the public shifted its attention, sentiment and emotion to another event. When the season changed from late spring to early summer, and the peak season for measles finished, the public sphere around the measles outbreak disintegrated. As of early 2019, the Minister of Health Nguyen Thi Kim Tien remained in her position as the leader of MOH. In 2014, she earned just 97 votes of high confidence and 192 of low confidence in elections by member of Vietnam's National Assembly. However, in the 2018 voting, the numbers were 224 high confidence votes and just 53 low confidence votes (as illustrated in figure 5.2). The Facebook page 'Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health' had not yet succeeded in demoting her and had not significantly expanded its public since the measles outbreak. However, the Facebook page did play a role of constant watching and criticising the public health sector, which contributed to the high confidence in the performance of the Minister of Health from 2014 to 2018.



Figure 5.2: Confidence vote for the Minister of Health in 2014 and 2018 (Source: Vietnam National Assembly, 2018)

5.4.2. Social media-based opposition forces

Because the performance of the Party and State in Vietnam is based closely on the principle of democratic centralism, many political candidates from the grassroots to the central level are elected on the basis of being verified and accredited by the Party. As a result, non-CPV partisan forces do not exist in the government structure in this one-party country. The shadow cabinets or opposition parties that exist in many western political systems are illegal in Vietnam. However, the power structure has radically changed in the era of

social media. Many social media-based groups began criticising government policy, tracking the truth of government claims and questioning the working agenda of government offices, actions which mirror the roles of opposition counterparts in political systems that allow opposition parties.

The Facebook page ‘Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health’ shifted from criticising the Minister in particular to criticising the Health sector in general. This Facebook page inspired the emergence of many similar social media-based opposite groups. For example, various Vietnamese embassy offices worldwide have had to change their practice in response to public feedback on the Facebook group titled *‘Toi va Su quan’* (‘Me and the Embassy’). Similarly, the Facebook group titled *‘Quan tam toi giao duc’* (‘Educational concerns’) provides thorough analysis of the policies and performance of the Ministry of Education and Training. The Facebook group titled *‘Ban huu duong xa’* (‘Friends on far roads’) emerged to help drivers fight against wrongdoings in road transportation, a function that should have been performed by the Ministry of Transport and Logistics. Although the group members identify themselves as normal citizens who are just providing feedback to the public services they are using, and as such, the groups are non-political, they demand that government offices to are accountable and change their services to address the problems identified by the public. This has added homogeneity, pluralism and competition to the realm of politics, which had operated as a monopoly for decades.

5.4.3. Some weaknesses of the social media-based activism

As of early 2019, the admin(s) of the Facebook page ‘Call for the resignation the Minister of Health’ has/have not yet disclosed his/her/their identities. The admin remains isolated from the public that supports the Facebook page. Meanwhile, admins of other social media pages have made themselves known to the public. This has raised the question of the real motivation, capacity and

moral intent of the admin(s). When asked to judge any changes by the Minister of Health, the admin replied promptly 'She changes her hairstyle. It looks neater than before' (Admin, 2016). This judgement is not critical enough to contribute meaningfully to the quality of the public opinion about the Minister. Social media-based activism lowers the capacity required for participation: people can participate just by hitting the 'join', 'like' or 'share' buttons or by commenting. Therefore, public opinions offer more emotional opinion than rational criticism. The participation of professional doctors in the movement was discouraged by intimidation by the MOH. In 2017, a doctor in Thuy Thien-Hue city was demoted and had to pay a fine of 5 million dong (250 USD) for having posted on his Facebook account a call that the Minister should resign.⁹⁷ In principle, participation in Facebook activism is free and open to the masses, but the quality of the public opinion is not always guaranteed.

On the Facebook page against the Minister of Health, there was a shift from non-political to political activism. The admin(s) of the page asserted that the page's purposes have expanded. Initially, the objective of the page was to call for the resignation of the Minister of Health. Later, as the page gained growing attention, the admin noted that:

many people leave their comments on the page, providing more information on the deteriorating Vietnamese health sector. More significantly, it justifies the reasons for such deterioration are rooted from the political regime. (Admin, 2016)

Starting as a space for people to express emotional reactions, the page has developed into a forum for exercising a political movement against government leaders and policies. The public joined the Facebook activism because of its non-political cause. However, the Facebook admin(s) has over time altered the page's focus into a political cause. This shift from non-political to political could

potentially destroy the common ground which initially constructed the public sphere.

In conclusion, the measles outbreak established a milestone, with Facebook entering the realm of the public sphere. With the measles outbreak, the public began practising ways of using social media for expression, connected collective actions and non-political politics and to challenge the government. The measles outbreak opened a new chapter in the employment of social media in the green public sphere in Vietnam from 2014 to 2018. ■

Chapter 6

Boo fashion company and the commercialisation of green issues

This chapter uses Boo Fashion Company as a case study to examine the commercialisation of the green public sphere in Vietnam. It concludes that by educating the young people, enterprises can create an epistemic public of green issues, who have sufficient knowledge about the green issues and can convert their knowledge into purchases of green commodities. This green commercialisation can lead to changes in the legal system and the concept of development. While these changes have not yet become apparent in Vietnam they have occurred in other countries. The case study of Boo shows that creating sensibilities about 'green issues' for the sake of doing business is the first and foremost priority of the business sector. As a business, Boo is conservative in its use of social media and has tried to minimise its engagement in public debates since this could damage the positive images of its brands. The chapter argues that the role of the business sector in the public sphere, therefore, is to provide more knowledge on green issues, rather than directly and actively to form the green public sphere. The chapter compares the Vietnamese business sector to the conventional bourgeois class that Habermas described in his analysis of the public sphere in the 18th century. Both form a public for commercial interests, and the public engagement attenuates as soon as these benefits are achieved. This chapter, therefore, clarifies the conditions of involvement, as well as disassociation, of the business sector in the green public sphere in Vietnam.

6.1. Wear Young Live Young

On the morning of August 8, 2015, on the fifth floor of the headquarters of Boo Fashion Company (Boo) on Yen Phu Dam, between the West Lake and the Red River in Hanoi, Boo Fashion CEO Mr Do Viet Anh pressed the button to call the lift for the two guests who had just shared a goodbye hand-shake with him. When the lift arrived and took the guests down, Viet Anh walked down the stairs to go to another meeting in Hanoi Centre. Minimising the use of power-consuming commodities, including the lift, is a signature of the lifestyle of Viet Anh and Boo⁹⁸.

In this company, a green lifestyle is embedded in daily office operations. Anyone bringing a single-use plastic bag to the office must pay a fine of 5000 VND (25 cents). The printers, by default, are set to print on both sides of the paper. Boo-cycles is a team-building program, in which Boo staff ride their bikes around West Lake and have a break together every Saturday morning. Customers at Boo stores can get an instant 10,000 VND (50 cents) discount if they do not use plastic bags to carry away their newly bought items. The Boo factory uses sustainably grown cotton and follows eco-friendly dyeing process. According to the manager of Boo's Marketing Department, Boo brands are about 30% more expensive than similar products on the market. Boo claims that young urban consumers are willing to pay more for Boo brands because of the company's green approach to doing business. By converting the concept of 'green' into a unique selling point, Boo has been a pioneer in the commercialisation of green issues.

Boo Fashion Company was founded as a skating accessories shop in 2003 by Do Viet Anh. He was 23 years old at the time, newly returned to Vietnam after a childhood in Czechoslovakia and university study in the UK. From a small clothes shop on the Hanoi-Amsterdam High School gate, Boo had grown to 24 flagship fashion stores in 2016 in six cities throughout Vietnam: Hanoi, Da Nang,

Ho Chi Minh City, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An and Hai Phong. Boo owns a number of fashion brands for youth, such as Bò Sữa, Picked by BOO, BOOSHIRT, and Infamous. From 2017, Boo re-branded itself as international products with three fashion lines: Graphic, Trend and Basic. It is also the local partner of Adidas and has been operating as franchised stores selling Neo sportswear, an Adidas product line, since 2012. Boo has expanded its business into the food and beverage industry, opening two restaurants in Hanoi in 2014. In 2016, Boo moved its headquarters from Yen Phu Dam Street to the Hanoi Creative City Plaza. It can be considered a medium-sized company with over 150 permanent employees in 2018, according to the information on the company's website.

Although Boo seldom participates in fashion weeks, the company is usually a vital stakeholder in environmental talk shows, seminars, tree growing tours, earth hour nights and many other green events for youth in Vietnam. In figure 6.1, Do Viet Anh is talking on the stage of a seminar for building awareness on climate change, hosted by the Academy of Journalism and Communication, in Hanoi, Vietnam, on December 5, 2013. Among business-attired CEOs, Do Viet Anh (at the far right), in Boo's streetwear, advocated Boo's spirit and motto: WYLY ('Wear Young Live Young').



Photo 6.1: Do Viet Anh (far right), CEO of Boo Fashion Company, at a seminar on awareness of climate change in Hanoi in 2013 (Photo courtesy AJC)

The company states its mission as:

We believe that doing business is not just to earn revenue, but the significance is to contribute to society, and to inspire youth by positive changes, that makes us a worthy Vietnamese brand.

Positioning itself as a company for youth, Boo targets people from 12 to 25 years old. This demographic segment consists of those studying at high schools, universities and new graduates. Ms Nguyen Quynh Duyen, Director of Boo-green, said in an interview with the author in 2015:

If we want to change the mindsets of the society, we start with the youth. Mindsets of young people are still under the construction process, and so Boo can help to construct the mindsets. Traditional and dogmatic approaches seem to fail to attract young people. As a result, Boo tailors its products and services to be enjoyable, creative, active, informal, and useful

for the youth. Since we cannot change everything in the society nowadays, we choose environmental issues as our starting point, and then expand our activities to address other social issues. Our CEO, Viet Anh is a businessman with a mindset for social changes, especially the changes in the green issues. He transfers the mindset to our staffs, and we craft this mindset for our customers and the youth. (NQD, 2015)

Vietnam has a very young population. A United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report released in 2017 indicated that 40% of the Vietnamese population is aged from 10 to 24 years old.⁹⁹ Many statistical reports¹⁰⁰ affirm that, from 2009 to 2040, when these young people join the labour market, Vietnam will achieve the status of a 'golden' population structure. That means that the number of working people will be twice the number of dependents. The report envisages two scenarios for the Vietnamese economy during the golden population structure period. The first is that, with good policies, these physically-fit and well-educated workers could boost their incomes, creating financial stability in the long-term for the whole country. However, the second scenario is that problematic conditions in politics, culture and socio-economics could cause widespread unemployment, financial exhaustion and social insecurity. The future of Vietnam until 2040 is genuinely dependent on its policies towards young people. This analysis suggests that in the long-term interests of fixing the current problem in society and shaping a desirable future, the approach needs to be to target young people. By targeting youth, Boo Fashion Company therefore sees itself as being on the right track in their mission of making positive changes for society.

Targeting youth is a pattern in many green campaigns. Mrs Phung Ai Van, a journalist of *Sai Gon Giai Phong* (SGGP) newspaper, said she led a group of 2000 students in Ho Chi Minh city, participating in green events organised by SGGP

in Ho Chi Minh city. Mrs Hong Hoang, the chairwoman of the NGO 350 Vietnam, was referred to as a ‘climate hero’ and identified as ‘inspiring Vietnam’s Youth’ in the green movement.¹⁰¹ High school and university students are also the major participants in the events of Change, an NGO in the south of Vietnam. The Vietnam Green Generation Network, consisting of organisations promoting a sustainable lifestyle, defines itself as ‘the group for youth, individuals, environmental clubs, and organisations for youth, sharing the same concerns of environment and climate change issues’.¹⁰² Another example is the ‘Green Journalists Club’. The mission of the club is ‘to provide opportunities for young Vietnamese to work for a better environment’.¹⁰³ In brief, the two concepts of ‘green’ and ‘young’ form a tandem in many green activities and campaigns and in the thinking of the Vietnamese people.

To attract young people, green events are therefore often tailored to be playful activities, such as a flash mob dancing on the street, rubbish collecting on streets and seashores, recycling, and promoting eco-friendly forms of energy. These activities often organised on weekends or during summer vacations so that they fit the schedules of school and university students. In order to deliver messages about green issues, it is essential to know how to work with the young. As Ms Nguyen Quynh Duyen, the Director of Boo-green, said:

We want to inspire young people to change their lifestyle. To that end, we cannot just speak vague and useless messages. Besides knowledge about green issues, our staff need event management and innovation skills to establish and maintain relationships with the young. (NQD, 2015)

In brief, Boo and many other organisations are setting their mission to be raising awareness of green issues and the practice of a green lifestyle by the Vietnamese public. They choose young people as the target audience to achieve

this mission because of the significantly increasing young population of Vietnam. This requires specific tailoring in designing messages delivered by green events to present them as enjoyable, dynamic, playful and creative. Neither seriousness nor critical and rational arguments are the requisites for green campaigns for young people.

6.2. Using social media at Boo and in the business sector

Because Boo targets young consumers, the company has established a media relationship with journalism aimed at young people. When I interviewed Mr Phung Quang Ngoc, the Marketing Director of Boo, in August 2015, he said that the company often places its coverage on the online news portal Kenh14 (Channel 'for teens'), Zing news, and VTV6 (Vietnam Television–Channel 6 for youth). Boo maintains just one or two articles per month in mainstream journalism to communicate with its targeted young public. However, whenever Boo runs campaigns, the number of items of coverage could increase to over 100 articles for each campaign in three months. Mr Ngoc posited that 80% of the coverage about Boo on journalism is positive. Mr Ngoc suggested that the 20% of coverage that is neutral and negative is mostly because the older generation considers the youthful slang and acronyms printed on Boo's t-shirts to be offensive and inappropriate. Mr Ngoc admitted that some negative feedback is unavoidable since Boo is a pioneer in promoting youth subculture and a lifestyle that sometimes the older generations cannot accept.

Boo runs two websites, one for company information at Boo.vn, and one for its online commercial store at bosua.vn. As of 2018, the company runs nine social media pages, including eight Facebook pages and one Instagram page, which are listed in table 6.1. Although Boo designed a plan to launch a Pinterest page and a YouTube channel, the proposal was still been pending in July 2018¹⁰⁴. In 2015, the Marketing Director said that Boo had not yet expanded its social media platforms because most of the company's target audience was using just

Facebook and Instagram. The total number of Boo's fans is over 500,000. The contents on Boo's social media pages can reach about 40% of them. About 10% of the reached fans have regular interactions on Boo's social media pages. Social media users often interact with content that they find useful, particularly information about promotions and sales at Boo's stores. Materials about green issues are seldom posted separately. Instead, they are embedded in the material about the campaign events, such as the 'Earth Hour' night or the 'Planting tree day out'. The company believes that embedding green issues within the 'fun and young theme' helps the messages reach more young people.

Table 6.1: Social media pages of Boo fashion company as of July 2018

No.	Description of the social media pages	Followers
1	Wear Young Live Young - The Facebook page for collections, sales, and promotion of Boo fashion products - https://www.facebook.com/faceboovn/	100,254
2	Bosua by Boo - The Facebook page for collections, sales, and promotion of Boo fashion products - https://www.facebook.com/bosuabyboo/	584,963
3	Boo Careers - The Facebook page listing Job opportunities at Boo - https://www.facebook.com/BOO-Careers-848125061890441/	7,913
4	Boo Cafe - The Facebook page for Information about Boo's catering service - https://www.facebook.com/BOOCafevn/	61,632
5	Factory of Dream - The Facebook page for Boo's employees, internal communication activities - https://www.facebook.com/factoryofdreamsboo/	4,049
6	Turn off light - Turn on Ideas: The Facebook page for Boo's green activities - https://www.facebook.com/TatDenBatYTuong/	48,416
7	I will if you will - The local Facebook page for the global campaign on doing the green activities in pairs - https://www.facebook.com/iwillifyouwillvn/	26,716
8	I ride a bike today - The Facebook page for the campaign promoting riding bikes - https://www.facebook.com/irideabiketoday/	6,545
9	Bosua by Boo - The Instagram page for collections, sales, and promotion of Boo fashion products - https://www.instagram.com/bosuabyboo/	36,400

Interestingly, the company uses the Facebook pages of celebrities to deliver its green messages. These celebrities are 'hot boys' and 'hot girls', from 18 to about 25 years of age, who are winners of beauty contests or are singers, dancers, movie stars, sportspeople and fashion models. For example, Le Ngoc Hoai An (known as An Japan), a television star and model, born in 1996, has joined the list of celebrities affiliated with Boo fashion company. Whenever Boo launches new collections, An posts on her Facebook page the photos of herself in Boo's

clothes. She is often invited to Boo's public events and for that reason the events receive more coverage within journalism as well as generating more interaction on social media (A marketing staff from Boo Fashion company confirmed in 2015 that Boo paid for celebrities to attend the events). As of 4 July 2018, An's Facebook personal page had 383,912 followers, and her Facebook fan-page had 461,064 followers. The posts on An's Facebook pages can reach a population that is as large as that of the page 'Bo sua by Boo', and a hundred times more than that of Boo's campaign pages. Boo works with 30 young stars like An Japan. The list of stars is updated continuously so that the stars are always in the same age range as Boo's target audience.

At Boo, Facebook has been used as a quantifiable communication tool. With the statistical data of reach,¹⁰⁵ 'likes',¹⁰⁶ 'shares'¹⁰⁷ and comments,¹⁰⁸ it is easy to determine the level of interest and engagement of the audience for each post. Viet Anh, the CEO, asserts that he can check the trends, and measure the efficiency of sales and promotions. The second benefit of Facebook is that it is an effective platform for advertising, especially advertising on celebrities' Facebook and Instagram pages. It is also the platform for getting feedback for new ideas because whenever the CEO posts his new initiatives, people often share and comment, from which the CEO can measure the public's attitude toward his initiatives. The benefit of using Facebook is evident because it is both a free media and is measurable. However, Viet Anh thinks that using only Facebook is not enough. Business should apply a combination of different social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and many more, together with the below-the-line promotion channels, like emails, look-books, catalogues, trade shows and other direct marketing tools.

Nevertheless, Facebook is a double-edged sword. Viet Anh concedes:

Facebook is like a dangerous minefield where business can easily become trapped. If some bad guys make up negative stories about the company and they post them on Facebook, people will share and comment without any verification. Then the business will collapse before we can fix the rumours. I don't like the practice of throwing stones on Facebook, but it seems that criticising without evidence is popular in our culture.

(DVA, 2015)

His strategy in using Facebook is 'criticise no-one, be amiable to everyone' (DVA, 2015).

Events indicate that on social media, anyone can become a scapegoat for the emotional sphere. The case study of 'Ha Galaxie versus Danlait goat milk powder' still haunts the business sector in Vietnam.¹⁰⁹ In January 2013, on a forum for parents (webtretho), a mother, using her social media name 'Ha Galaxie', accused of Danlait goat milk powder of being 'fake French milk' and 'made in China'. The rumours spread widely across platforms from the webtretho to Facebook. They were quickly picked up by mainstream newspapers and became the topic of many television and radio talk shows. Under pressure from angry mothers, the market management authority of Hanoi city confiscated all Danlait products from the market. Manh Cam company, the owner of Danlait goat milk brand, then invited experts from France to address a press conference and sent samples of the milk powder to a laboratory to verify the company's nutritional claims. After many crisis management attempts by Manh Cam company, the Hanoi market management authority released 6000 packages of Danlait goat milk powder. However, the products were close to their expiry date, and the public was closely scrutinising the Danlait brand. Eventually, the Manh Cam company was forced to stop producing Danlait goat milk and filed for bankruptcy as a result of the rumours.

In the social media era in Vietnam, public emotion can define the success or failure of a business.

Despite considering Facebook as a potential source of problems, in 2015 Boo fashion company had not technically blocked negative content on social media. At the same time, many big businesses in Vietnam had publicly declared they would use technical barriers on social media. For example, the Bank for Investment and Development of Vietnam (BIDV), one of the four biggest banks in Vietnam, launched their Social Media Command Centre in 2015. This centre scanned all social media posts about BIDV, identified negative content and blocked the access of their target audience to the negative content. Another example is Vin group, a giant business working across various industries, including real estate, automobile sales, retail supermarkets, education, film production, and so on. Vin group is known by the practice of blocking and removing negative contents about them from social media. Son Dang, a Facebook user, had been banned from accessing his Facebook account for several days after posting his opinions on Vin group's construction at Ba Son, a cultural heritage site in Ho Chi Minh City. To continue his normal access to Facebook, whatever Son Dang posted about the Vin group was set for 'friends' only, not for 'public', and his friends then copied the contents to re-post on their Facebook accounts (BT, 2017).

The strategy of using the third-party (friends or followers) has become popular among the business sector. Boo fashion company uses the Facebook pages of celebrities to promote their brands. The activist Son Dang asked his Facebook friends to re-post his criticism against Vin group. The reason for this indirect and guarded approach is that the opinions of consumers on Facebook are relationship-based, rather than rationality-based. A market study with US consumers in 2012 highlighted the fact that 81% of social media users are moderately to highly influenced by their friends' social media posts. The

business sector, consequently, tries to make friends, and expands the relationships of friends of friends, fans, followers and supporters. A strong circle of friends has the potential to help a business defend itself against unreasonable criticism that can go rapidly viral on social media. To this end, besides constructing a strong circle of fans, the business sector is using technology to eliminate anti-fans. There is a mushrooming in the number of social media service companies that help to protect businesses on social media. Their services include but are not limited to: increasing interactions, blocking negative content, reporting violations and verifying the authenticity of individuals and organisations on social media.

6.3. Green appeal versus greenwashing

'Green appeal' refers to an emphasis on the environmental attributions and ecological implications of products. The practice of claiming green appeal without verification is known as 'greenwashing'. This occurs when a business promises more environmental benefits than it actually delivers. While there is no evidence to judge whether Boo is greenwashing, the possibilities of greenwashing are apparent at Boo particularly, and in the business sector in general.

In May 2018, the Ministry of Finance of Vietnam submitted to the National Assembly a plan to increase the environmental tax on gasoline. According to this plan, the environmental tax will rise by 25%. The price of the petrol RON95 in Vietnam in May 2018 was 20,500 VND (about 0.91 USD) per litre, of which the environment tax was 3,000 VND (about 0.13 USD).¹¹⁰ The increase in the environmental tax on gasoline will definitely increase the price of other goods and services, and the inflation rate¹¹¹. It also raises concerns about whether the environment tax should be so high (14% of the total cost). Other concerns include how public can trace where the tax goes and whether the environmental problems can be solved if the tax increases. On mainstream media, an

unidentified researcher from the Ministry of Finance expressed an opinion accusing the government of taking advantage of the anxiety about green issues to pay for budget losses. He said that the increase in the environmental tax was ‘to earn more money, not to love environmental issues’.¹¹² Sturgeon’s analysis could well describe this practice. She asserts:

The decision to ‘green’ one’s business practices can be read cynically as a corporation’s attempt to deflect concern away from labour or pollution issues through hitching itself to the positive connotations of environmentalism. (2009, p. 174)

At Boo Fashion Company, however, the green appeal has been successful with young consumers. According to the Marketing Director, Boo’s products are always 20% more expensive than those of other Vietnamese fashion brands, such as Canifa, NinoMax, or PT 2000. For example, in August 2015, a basic t-shirt in the Vietnamese market was sold at 300 thousand VND (13 USD). Meanwhile, the price of Boo’s t-shirt was 355 thousand VND (15.5 USD). From 2015, Boo opened shopping complexes, in which its fashion stores are physically connected with Boo cafes and located in central plazas where young people gather. Food and beverage in these Boo cafes is claimed to be 20% more expensive than that in restaurants in the neighbourhood. The strategy of 20% higher prices has been maintained since the official launch of the company in 2009. Two obvious techniques have been implemented to convince consumers to pay 20% more: showcasing of the green dimension, and financial commitments for green purposes.

Boo’s unique selling point (USP) is their green commodities, and this is eloquently communicated to consumers and employees. First, consumers know about Boo’s green products before they actually buy and consume the products. Boo invites the public by creating slogans and drawing pictures to promote the

green lifestyle, for example, cycling, recycling, saving water and energy, jogging or eating healthy food. These slogans and drawings are also printed on Boo's t-shirts, coffee mugs, and notebooks, turning consumers into mobile propagandists whenever they use these products. Boo-tours are organised every fortnight. In these tours, visitors can enter Boo's offices, factories, warehouses and stores, where they can see the production lines and learn how the cotton and inks are processed. In late 2015, Boo expected to launch a Boo app, allowing customers to trace the history of ingredients, and facts about nutrition in each dish. The app is still pending in October 2019. Instead, brochures and leaflets are provided to consumers together with the menu in Boo cafes. While waiting to be served, customers can check the nutrition facts about each dish, such as the index of vitamins, fat, sugar, calories and protein, and trace where the ingredients are grown and how they are processed. Boo also co-ordinates a wide range of green activities nationwide. For example, the '*Turn off the light, turn on ideas*' slogan, a localised reference to the Earth Hour event, has been organised by Boo for many years. '*I will if you will*' is a national campaign where young people challenge their peers to do environmentally friendly activities. '*I ride a bike today*' is a discount program for customers riding bikes to Boo stores. '*Hanoi bike tour*' is a visit to the historical and cultural sites in Hanoi by bike. '*Boo Tainai*', a new concept, launched in 2017, is a weekend market for second-hand goods. Boo's green activities are summarized in figure 6.2.

Second, employees are one of the target audience groups of the Boo fashion company. Since the average age of Boo employees in 2015 was about 24, they are in the same age range as Boo's target consumers and share the same interests in Boo's events. Boo has designed a variety of internal communication activities which convert staff into smart green ambassadors, for example, incentives for recycling, free breakfasts for sporty activities on weekends, and eco-friendly working space at Boo's offices. Many internal green activities have

been conducted for Boo employees, such as *Boo cycle*, *No plastic office*, *Boo cine*, *BoOlympic*, *Boo picnic*, and *BOO talks* (in the format of TED talks). These activities are captured in figure 6.1. A large fish-tank stands in the company's central meeting venue, visible from every office. More plants were brought into the office. A skating theme park, an indoor playground, annual company bowling competitions and so on are realisations of Boo's vision of creating an inspiring working space for young people. In this space, 'people do not come to work for money, they come to fulfil the desire for the healthier and greener lifestyle'. According to the CEO Viet Anh, this aim was not stated when Boo was first launched as a shop in 2003, but has gradually become a realistic vision and an insightful recognition at Boo fashion company.

On the price tags of Boo apparel, the financial commitment is declared as 'Boo contributes the revenue from this product to green campaigns'. According to Ms Nguyen Quynh Duyen (NQD, 2015), the Director of Boo-green department, a majority of the money has been invested on reforestation. Periodically, Boo's bus from Hanoi City takes young volunteers to remote areas to plant trees during weekends. A total of 4200 mangroves were planted in Huong Tra District in 2014, and another 5000 in Thuan An town, Phu Vang District, in 2015 in Thua Thien-Hue, a province in the centre of Vietnam. Another financial commitment comes from a subsidiary for the green promotional products. Boo prints green slogans on limited editions of t-shirts, caps, mugs, office notes and so on. Compared to the standard products, the ones with slogans are 50% less expensive. Ms. Duyen said the company subsidises the products with the slogans to promote consumption of these editions. The end-consumers, as a result, deliver the messages from Boo and become promoters of green living. Boo also devotes their human resources to organising global events, such as Earth Hour, Earth Day, and other international campaigns.

Ms Nguyen Quynh Duyen, Director of Boo green department, explains:

The public is fascinated by Boo's activities relating to the environment, climate change, and sustainability. They know about these activities before they decide to buy Boo's products.
(NQD, 2015)

Mr Phung Quang Ngoc, the Marketing Director, justifies Boo's approach:

Our customers accept to pay more than the average market price because of our better quality, less impact on the environment, and healthier new lifestyle that the products provide. (PQN, 2015)

There is a strong correlation between the investment on Boo Green and Boo's overall growth. Parallel to the expansion in the size of Boo's green activities throughout 2014 and 2017 (as illustrated in figure 6.1), Boo's revenue increased fourfold, from over 37 billion Vietnam Dongs (VND) in 2014 to over 132 billion VND in 2017 (figure 6.2). The number of stores increased from 13 in 2014 to 24 in 2015. Similarly, the number of permanent staffs rose from 93 in 2014 to 151 in 2017, as summarized in table 6.2. Apparently, green appeal has been a significant contributing factor to the astonishing growth of the Boo fashion company.



Figure 6.1: The expansion of Boo Green activities from 2014 to 2017

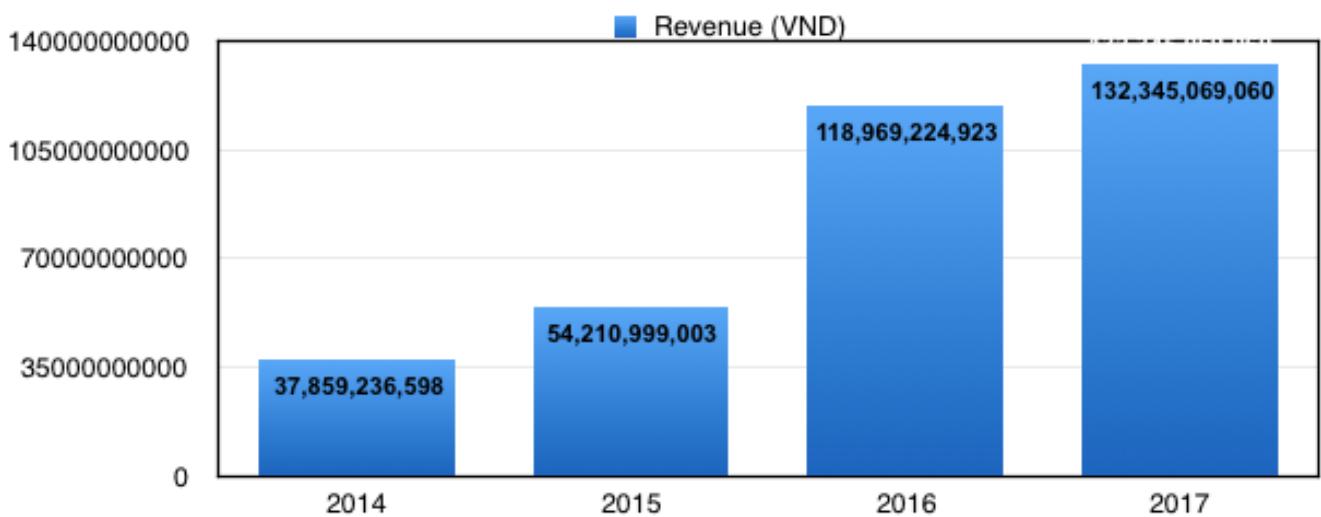


Figure 6.2: Revenue of Boo Fashion Company from 2014 to 2017

Table 6.2: Boo store and staff numbers from 2014 to 2017

	2014	2015	2016	2017
No. of Boo Store	13	24	24	23
No. of Boo Staff	93	112	114	151

Paradoxically, Boo is working in one of the top polluting industries globally. Textile dyeing, a fundamental process of fashion production, ranks second in making water dirty, after agriculture (Perry, 2018) and tenth in causing hazards for public health (Mills-Knapp et al., 2012).¹¹³ The fashion industry, including garments, clothes, shoes, bags and accessories, has been releasing its products to the market at shorter intervals. Traditionally, the industry had just two seasons (spring-summer and autumn-winter). However, producers have been increasingly adopting the trends from the luxury runway fashion shows to create the more affordable fashion on a weekly basis. In the fashion industry, there are 52 seasons, as demonstrated by the weekly changes of the outfits on the mannequins in the front windows of fashion stores. These short-interval trends mark the fast fashion segment, which is seen as 'the most pervasive and internationalised industry in the world'.¹¹⁴ Some of the large international retailers in this industry are Zara, H&M, New Look, Topshop, Esprit, Cotton On, and Forever 21. Vietnam has witnessed the emergence of local fast fashion brands, including Canifa, Viet Thy, Owen, Blue, Ninomax, Viet Tien, and An Phuoc.¹¹⁵

However, with such huge volumes of sales, this kind of fashion can be regarded as pollution-generating at all stages of the supply chain. First, weaving cotton into fabric damages the ecology since the liquid effluents expelled during textile manufacturing contain chemical pollutants. The industrial operations of textile processing generate dust and noise pollution, resulting in many health hazards among workers in the industry. The processes of bleaching, mercerising

and dyeing demand a large quantity of water, which then becomes chemically-laden as toxic wastewater and requires special treatment before being discharged. Second, the industry has a tremendous carbon footprint. This is due to the shipping and trucking of cotton, mostly from the United States to the manufacturing countries, and then the return of ready-made products from the manufacturers to markets in the US and Europe. The US has a long history of lobbying so that cotton-growing farmers benefit from market-protecting incentives. In addition, the rules-of-origin tariff exemptions allow goods with at least 40% of the value attributed to US inputs to be imported duty-free to the US market. Moreover, most of the manufacturers are from the developing countries across the ocean, where labour is cheap. As a result, global freightage in the fast fashion industry is unavoidable, increasing the burden on the worldwide carbon footprint. Third, apparel waste turns out to be more of a problematic issue than the production of new clothes. Since buying new garments becomes institutionalised as a regular habit, consumers need to give away their used clothes through charity or recycling systems. The used clothes eventually decompose, mostly in developing countries, where there are few regulatory standards in waste management.

Therefore, there exists an apparent conflict between the green dimensions of the products, which the company promotes as its public image, and the core essence of the company, which is making capital out of selling more products. Boo is aware of the ecological impact of its products and of the fashion industry. For this reason, Boo stresses the facts that they are using eco-friendly inks for cotton dyeing and that the wastewater in their factories has been treated. These key messages are delivered during the weekly Boo tours, in which young people visit Boo's facilities. Increasing consumers' awareness of the green dimension in Boo's products makes a significant contribution to the commercialisation of green commodities in general. Once consumers gain

higher knowledge levels about green dimensions, they can use this knowledge as a checklist of criteria when making buying decisions about a wide range of products and services. They may demand more transparent information about the ingredients' traceability, processing and impacts on the environment and health, which in turn challenges businesses to shift to a greener approach. In conclusion, the more consumers become aware of green issues, the more they are involved in pro-social and pro-environmental behaviours such as green purchasing (Hoang & Nguyen, 2012, p. 5). Thus, communicating the green dimension can influence the production and consumption culture.

Despite effective communication of the green dimension, the impacts of the business sector on green issues remain, particularly in the fashion industry. As of 2016, Vietnam ranked tenth in the list of most prominent global textile exporting countries, and promoting sales in fashion is still a business target. Fast fashion is still a giant industry, providing jobs and investment opportunities to workers in developing countries. Due to its economic and social importance, there is no global trend to eliminate fast fashion.

When Boo fashion expanded to the food and beverage industry, Boo cafes were positioned as selling organic products. However, in an interview with me in July 2015 a leader of the Vietnam Association of Consumer Protection said that the market for organic food was insufficiently regulated. While many businesses claimed their products as organic, this was difficult to verify or certify. In 2015, Boo had not implemented any specific quality criteria to control the organic level in their products. Some have argued that it is not the level of awareness but the level of income of customers that determines the organic option (Anguelov, 2016b, p. 87). As a result, the size of the green dimension depends mainly on which set of criteria the business implements to control green issues, as well as consumers' cognitive and financial acceptance.

6.4. The business sector and the green public sphere

The *Dictionary of Critical Theory* defines the public sphere as follows:

Jürgen Habermas's term for any realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed. It comes into existence whenever a forum is created in which citizens can express their opinions concerning topics of general—i.e. public interest, and those opinions can be subjected to critical debate. The public sphere should be open to all citizens and everyone within it should be treated equally. (Buchanan, 2018)

According to this definition, the components of a public sphere include the involvement of all citizens, equality in giving opinions, critical debate and public interest. The following section analyses these four components at Boo particularly, and in the business sector, generally.

First, a company cannot achieve the involvement of all citizens in its business. At Boo, the target audience is young people from 13 to 22 years old. Although this age range accounts for a majority of the population, it does not include the entire population in Vietnam. Boo's apparel is designed primarily for young people, as are its campaigns. Similarly, only parents of small babies are interested in Danlait goat milk powder. The price of petroleum has an impact on drivers and the transportation industry only, although it could indirectly affect all consumers. The exclusion of the non-target consumers helps the business sector optimise their resources. However, this can limit the reach of the business sector in attempts to gain a critical mass for any radical change in their business and society.

Second, it is apparent that in the social media environment, the business sector is eliminating equality in giving opinions. Many companies are hiring social media service companies to maximise the reach of positive content about

them, while blocking access to or removing any negative content. Although this practice has not been implemented at Boo, it is widespread in large companies as one of the protections against communication crises.

Third, the business sector often follows the strategy of being neutral, withdrawing themselves from critical debates. In Boo's example, both mainstream and social media have been used as a tool for advertising and delivering positive images. Boo has been using social media indirectly by building a network of celebrities who promote Boo's products and activities. On green issues, however, Boo avoids taking a position, neither supporting nor protesting in conflicts and debates. Instead, Boo co-operates with other organisations, such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the TH True milk company. The opinions, activities and campaigns are the alliance of organisations, rather than from a single company itself.

Fourth, possible conflicts between public interests and business interests always exist. A company promotes certain images of itself, which may be that it is pro-environmental, eco-friendly, healthy, economical and ethical. In fact, the core essence of the industry that the company is involved with reflects different images. Thus, a company such as Boo raises a certain level of awareness and attitudes about green issues among consumers—but only to the extent that these convert to buying behaviour. Boo organises green campaigns and events that follow global trends and are approved by the local authorities. However, it avoids any activism against the industry and local authorities that could hinder regular business and is not on the official agenda of the business sector. As Habermas indicates, the bourgeois class in the 18th century came together to protect their interests against the church and the monarch. However, when the bourgeoisie obtained certain agreements with authority, they formed a new state of re-feudalism, leading to the erosion of the public sphere. If existing policies cause no major difficulty in doing business, then the business sector has

no reason to engage in activities to change the policies. To increase revenue and capital, the business sector may engage in green issues, but not in the green public sphere.

While the CPV has continuously prioritised economic growth since *Doi Moi*, the business sector also benefits from these favourable open-door policies. From the food stamp system before *Doi Moi*, in which a person could buy just 800 grams of pork per month and 1.2 metres of cloth per year, to the *Doi Moi* material demands of a market for organic food and affordable fashion, the business sector has made a gigantic leap. Knowledge of green issues runs in parallel with the expansion of the green market. In its turn, the demand for green commodities and a green lifestyle become the catalyst for changes in green issues.

Emden (2013, p. 65) describes this practice as forming 'epistemic publics', that is, 'publics that come into existence through the exchange of objects, practices, images, and tools' based on certain knowledge and sensibility. In this sense, Boo Fashion Company has been creating three agents for the formation of the public sphere: knowledge, the public and action. First, it provides knowledge and sensibility of green issues to young people, especially Boo employees and customers. Second, these young people use Boo stores and cafeterias as a platform for practising their purchasing power over green fashion and green food and beverages, creating images of a new and greener generation. In this sense, Boo turns their employees and customers into an epistemic public for green issues. Third, it is possible that the public not only practises its knowledge of green on consumption but also applies this knowledge to a broader spectrum of industries. For example, Nutifood Indonesia, a food processing company in Indonesia, is also creating an epistemic public for the food and beverage industry, just as Boo is doing for the fashion industry.

This green commercialisation directly creates a public of consumers for the green commodity. If the public expands, it requires certain changes in legislation to manage the public and their concerns. In the Philippines, the government issued the *Green Jobs Act* in 2016 (Institue-of-Labour-Studies, 2016) to encourage enterprises to generate and sustain the quality of the environment. The *Act* offers a substantial incentive in tax deductions and duty exemptions for green companies. Examples like the Philippine's *Green Jobs Act* show that green commercialisation can be implemented not only in a single company, like Boo Fashion Company or in Nutifood Indonesia, but also nationwide. The *Green Job Acts* measures the development in three dimensions—economy, environment and society—in which the dimension of the green economy is the prominent interfering indicator, pointing towards the other two. ■

Chapter 7

Local responses to global initiatives

As shown in Chapter Five, social media became an essential element of the public sphere from early 2014. Social media was recognised as having a significant capacity to connect people who shared a concern with green issues, regardless of geographical boundaries. This chapter examines the local-global nexus in the green public sphere in Vietnam. It delineates the power of international stakeholders in the formulation and acceleration of the green public sphere. The engagement of the international community in local green issues is examined through the Save Son Doong campaign. Save Son Doong is a showcase for the successful mobilisation of global resources to address local green issues. However, the chapter argues that it is impossible to attain global consensus in green problem-solving, especially when the issues are complicated and have international impacts. The limitations of international agents in the green public sphere are discussed through the examples of Vietnam's preparation for COP21 and blogging about Phu Quoc Safari.

7.1. Save Son Doong

Quang Binh is a province in the central area of Vietnam. Its 8000 square metres of land are endowed with geographic diversity including mountainous jungles, coastline, deserts and a system of limestone caves. The province is home for over 800,000 people in 25 ethnic groups. In 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) inscribed the Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park in Quang Binh province in the list of world natural heritage sites. Before that, in the 1990s, Ho Khanh, a local man, accidentally found a cave in Phong Nha-Ke Bang park when he was looking for

shelter during jungle rain. In 2009, the British Cave Research Association (BCRA) announced that this cave was the biggest in the world. Since the cave was formed by river water eroding underneath the limestone mountains over a period of about five million years, the BCRA scientists named it 'Son Doong' or the 'mountain river cave'. The largest chamber of Son Doong is as large as a 40-storey building twice the size of Malaysia's Deer, the second largest cave in the world. Son Doong has an eco-system of heavy rain and cloud. The unique climate and geographic isolation of the cave have fostered the evolution of new species of fauna and flora. Most of them are white and blind after thousands of generations of living in the dark.

Son Doong was only recently found (officially in 2009). It is largely unexplored and is located in a highly protected conservation park. As a result, the number of visitors to the cave was kept minimal. Since 2013, ecotourism exploration tours to Son Doong cave have been operated by a local company, Oxalis. The tour, however, is open to only a very limited number of trekkers. Just 200 people were allowed to enter Son Doong cave annually from 2013 to 2015, and the number increased to 500 annually from 2016 to 2017.¹¹⁶ According to Mr Nguyen Chau A, the CEO of Oxalis, tickets to Son Doong tour are often sold out years before the exploration dates, and the waiting list is long enough to fill several years ahead. Each trekker paid 3000 USD to Oxalis for a five-day tour to Son Doong cave, including a health check and training sessions before the tour. Quang Binh People's Committee earns 20% of the amount from the ticket price (NCA, 2015). Since the number of annual trekkers to Son Doong was limited to 200 to 500 people, the local government's earnings from the Son Doong tour were fixed at 120,000 to 300,000 USD per year.

In October 2014, Quang Binh People's Committee announced a plan to construct a cable car system to Son Doong cave. The cable system was to be 10.6 kilometres long and would carry up to 1.5 million cave visitors a year.¹¹⁷ The

Committee also announced that its partner in this construction project was the Sun Group, a real-estate investment corporation. Before this plan, the Sun Group accomplished cable car constructions to many natural sites, for instance, in the Ba Na Hills of Da Nang city, Fansipan—the highest mountain in Vietnam—and especially at Ha Long Bay—the UNESCO world natural heritage site. While the cable car system promised an increase in the number of tourists, which would generate more income for Quang Binh province, it raised the concerns of human intervention and adverse impacts on the endemic ecology in the Son Doong cave. Because the Son Doong cave is located in a UNESCO world natural heritage site, it benefits from the preservation regulations of UNESCO. *The UNESCO Operational Guideline for the Implementation of the World Heritage Conservation* requires that uses of the site must be ‘ecologically and culturally sustainable and maintain the most diverse fauna and flora characteristic of the bio-geographic ecosystems’ (UNESCO, 2008, p. 25). In clarifying the uses of the site as ‘ecologically and culturally sustainable’, UNESCO notes that for some world natural heritage sites, ‘human use would not be appropriate’ (UNESCO, 2008, p. 29). The cable car system to Son Doong would make possible tourism on a massive scale, which would pose a threat to the conservation of the cave.

On October 23rd, 2014, immediately after the announcement of the construction plan, a Hanoi man in his early thirties initiated the Facebook page ‘Save Son Doong’ to protest against the cable car system to Son Doong. Young people in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city quickly formed a group of admins for the page. A lawyer working in a public relations company in Hanoi helped them to draft a petition to the local authorities and to UNESCO. In the following week, a petition was launched on social media (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) and on a website at Save Son Doong.org in multiple languages to reach to people worldwide. As well as signing the petition, social media users protested by posting their photos on social media with the hashtag #Save Son Doong. In

the photos, social media users wore t-shirts imprinted with the slogan 'Save Son Doong'. The online petition collected over 74,000 signatures in the first year. By October 2018, four years after the launch of the campaign, over 218,000 Facebook users follow the Save Son Doong Facebook page.

The campaign activities have not been limited to social media and websites but have gradually extended offline. Protesting by wearing the t-shirts has become popular since tourists often wear campaign t-shirts during their trekking journeys. The campaign admins were invited to many significant events, such as a meeting with then US President Barrack Obama with Vietnamese young leaders during his visit to Vietnam in 2015, the Global Issues Network summit in 2016 and the Forbes Summit in 2016. While the protests are mostly conducted on social media, the campaign has shifted to education and entertainment when it goes offline. Save Son Doong has organised photo sessions, book launches and movie showings about the cave. Recently, after winning a US-funded grant, the campaign started a project of an exhibition and virtual reality tours to Son Doong, promoting the idea that instead of physically visiting the cave, young people could experience a virtual tour and leave no impact on the Son Doong ecology. Starting as a group of Facebook users in 2014, by 2018 Save Son Doong has become highly institutionalised as a non-profit organisation calling for the permanent withdrawal of the cable car construction to Son Doong cave.

Quang Binh People's Committee temporarily paused the construction plan. Sun Group is no longer a partner in the construction, while FLC—a real estate corporation—announced in January 2018 that they might commence a feasibility survey for the cable car construction. In November 2018, the construction had not yet been launched. Before the Save Son Doong campaign, the local government generally made all the decisions about constructions within their geographic boundaries. The campaign initiated a new practice, in which people

living outside the boundaries of an area, and even having no intention of going to the area, could interfere in the decisions of the government in those areas, just through their social media accounts. This engagement of international factors in local environmental issues shows the public sphere challenging the policy decision-making process of provincial authorities. This practice of activism in a non-political arena has had definite impacts on politics. Yang and Calhoun described this kind of event as 'depoliticised politics' (2007, p.216), which occurs when the engaged community becomes involved in a decision-making process, particularly in decisions about construction plans requiring due consideration for their impact on biodiversity and culture diversity.

7.2. Social media's role in taking green issues beyond geographic boundaries

A journalist who works for an automobile magazine and also writes about environment topic on Facebook pointed out that:

One of the reasons why people often skip environmental coverage is the physical distance between people and the problems. For example, mountainous people could feel pity for the people living in flooding coastal lands, but they do not care much since it is not their problem. People living in the lowland, similarly, ignore deforestation because forests are out of their sight. Writing about the environment, for me, is writing about the water quality in your living areas, the contaminated air that you breathe in every day, or the noise in your street. (NTQD, 2015)

In the case Save Son Doong, however, geographical proximity was not a decisive agent in the success of the protest, in which people living in all corners of the world used social media to express their concerns about a cave they had not yet been to, and quite possibly would never visit. A survey conducted on October 23, 2015, one year after the launch of the Save Son Doong campaign, to

identify the location of the fifty people who had most recently signed the petition, showed that 19 people declared they were from foreign countries (about 40%), highlighting a significant group of international public in this protest. Content analysis of the 13 most interactive posts on the Save Son Doong Facebook page¹¹⁸ showed that: 1.7% of comments were generated by people living in Quang Binh province, 72.1% of comments were from people living in Vietnam and outside Quang Binh province, 2.7% of comments were from people living in foreign countries, and the location of the remaining 23.5% of the comments could not be identified. These figures indicate that in social media activism, 'presence' does not need to be physical but can be digitalised in the format of videos, photos and texts to be displayed. Social media can create digital proximity, rather than physical proximity, as long as the topic is relevant to the concerns of social media users.

The topics of discussion also expand in parallel to the expansion of the audience. On the Facebook page, while the local public (people in Quang Binh) joined the discussion just to protest against the construction, the national public (people in Vietnam) added the topic of criticising the local authority and demanding transparency and scrutiny of the local government's agenda. The international public (people living outside of Vietnam) added the topic of exclamations about the beauty of the cave. According to Hallin (cited in Cain, 2014, p.90), three spheres of discourse can be identified in media: consensus, controversy and deviance (or trolling) (discussed in Chapter Two). Save Son Doong social media users generated a sphere of consensus (agreement on the essential need for ecological preservation and sustainable tourism), a sphere of controversy (scrutiny of which level among local, national and international authorities could make the final decision to stop the construction) and a sphere of deviance (tourism promotion information, exclamations about the beauty of the cave and the park).

By contrast, local journalism covered only the sphere of consensus. By August 2015, the Quang Binh local newspaper had published just two news articles about the cable construction to Son Doong cave. One was about a press conference managed by the Quang Binh People's Committee.¹¹⁹ The other was the statement of the Quang Binh People's Committee that the plan for the cable construction was compliant with legislative guidance.¹²⁰ The sphere of controversy, the voice from the side of the protesters, was largely ignored in local newspapers. According to a television reporter at Quang Binh radio and television station, as of August 2015, the station produced only one documentary film to promote the Phong Nha-Ke Bang Park. The controversy around building the cable car system was thus not covered in the local broadcasting media.

Social media also surpasses international journalism in drawing public attention to green issues. In the case of Son Doong cave, there were two points in time when the public paid major attention to Son Doong. One was in March, and the other in May 2015. In March 2015, Ryan Deboodt, a freelance cameraman from the United States, posted his short films about Son Doong cave on Vimeo, a social network for high definition video. In May 2015, the program 'Good Morning America' produced by ABC News hosted a live show from Son Doong cave. The show managed to invite Deputy Prime Minister Vu Duc Dam¹²¹ to talk live in English from inside Son Doong cave. To examine how this international coverage could influence the world's attention to Son Doong, I surveyed Oxalis's website. As illustrated in figure 7.1, the number of visitors to the site in March 2015 was more than that in May 2015 (6000 site visitors in the peak in March, compared to about 4000 in May). The implication of this figure is that the video post on social media raised more curiosity about Son Doong than the talk show on ABC.

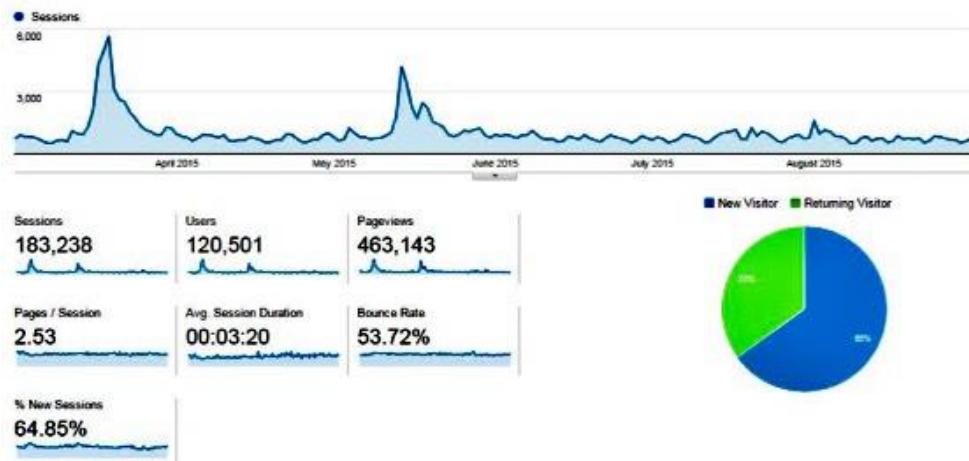


Figure 7.1: Number of visitors to Oxalis' website from March to August 2015 (<https://oxalis.com.vn>)

In addition to signing the online petition, protesters posted on their Facebook pages photos of themselves wearing t-shirts with the hashtag SaveSonDoong or holding protest posters. Before the press conference managed by the Quang Binh People's Committee, the protesters posted their lists of questions and asked the mainstream media to raise these questions in the press conference. In response to this online protest movement, *Nhan Dan* (a newspaper of the Communist Party) published a news article covering the conclusion reached by the Minister of Tourism and Quang Binh People's Committee that the construction would not harm the cave.¹²² Again, the pattern of consensus was re-produced on *Nhan Dan*, the national newspaper. Social media users from all over the world had made the local and national authorities respond to their protest. Notably, the Party had shown their concerns and could not ignore the public's protests against the construction.

7.3. International agents in the green public sphere

In Save Son Doong, according to the admin of the campaign Facebook page (BT, 2017), the engagement of international agents was the first and foremost impetus that made the person who launched the campaign willing to do so. International engagement was also a major factor in the success in the later

phases of the campaign. Many other electric cable cars have been built in Vietnam, namely Vin Pearl Land in Nha Trang, Yen Tu in Quang Ninh, Ba Na in Da Nang, and Sapa in Lao Cai. All these cable systems raise concerns about sustainable development. However, only the plan for Son Doong was halted. The other projects were accomplished without any obstruction.

Like Son Doong, Sapa is located in a core area of a national conservation park, which is also restricted for mass construction and tourism. While social media users protested against the building in Son Doong, the cable system in Sapa was hailed as a construction success at the 12th National Congress of the Party in January 2016.¹²³ The launcher of Save Son Doong campaign said he chose Save Son Doong instead of Sapa, even though he was fully aware of the plan in Sapa, because:

Son Doong had more chance for success since it is recognised as a UNESCO's world heritage. The world [UNESCO] can interfere to stop the construction. Otherwise, UNESCO could take off the heritage recognition. (BT, 2015)

Another tactic to gain an international public for green issues is to use the English language. Because Save Son Doong is a bi-lingual protest, the Facebook page and online petition were able to reach to a wider audience in the country and the world. Data from the petition page indicated that the petition had been accessed from 39 countries by the end of August 2015, and had therefore been read by those whose mother languages were neither English nor Vietnamese.

As seen in the Save Son Doong case, one of the technical aspects that ensures for the success of the green public sphere is the use of international media platforms. First, it was a wise choice to launch the campaign on Facebook since this platform ensured the anonymity of its users. Hence, the authorities could not easily trace the identity of the activists. Second, the petition website Save

Son Doong.org was created and hosted in the US, out of the Vietnamese government's control. In providing a rationale for the use of non-Vietnamese media platforms, Nguyen Anh Tuan, an activist against Formosa, explained:

These international communication platforms allow security for conversation exchange. The messages on these platforms are encrypted so that only the sender and the receiver can read the messages. (NAT, 2017)

NAT is based in Da Nang city, in the centre of Vietnam. He used WhatsApp to join the discussion with a group of international lawyers based in Taiwan.

However, it must be noted that these movements occurred before the *Cyber Security Law*, at a time when the identities of social media users were not yet required to be traceable by law. In June 2018, the day before the National Assembly voted to pass the *Cyber Security Law*, the admin of Save Son Doong called for a petition against the law. When being asked why a protest for the cave shifted the focus to another object, one of the admins of Save Son Doong explained on Facebook:

There would have been no such things as Save Son Doong or 6700 trees campaign if there were the Cyber Security Law. When we launched the page, we posted confidential unverified stories that the newspapers cannot. Imagine one day when Cyber Security is passed, the Quang Binh People's Committee can trace our identities. What should we do if they sue us in the court because of the unverified news about Quang Binh authority?¹²⁴

International media platforms, then, are an essential agent in challenging the government system (this system was illustrated in figure 2.1 in chapter 2). In Save Song Doong, international agents, including international organisations,

individuals, media platforms and languages, remained outside the reach of the communist system. According to Nancy Fraser, such international apparatuses are ‘conceptually distinct from the state’ and make an arena for ‘the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state’ (1990, p. 57), which cannot be done by the internal agents or the apparatuses from within the state. She asserts that such distinctions between external (international) agents and state apparatuses are essential for democracy (Fraser, 1990, p. 57).

7.4. Criticism of international agents in the green public sphere

7.4.1. Poor localisation and adaptation

‘We hate international NGOs’, said the CEO of Oxalis, the company operating trekking tours to the Son Doong cave. He continued:

NGO use the money to pay back to experts they hire from their home countries. Very little of NGO money is paid for local people. International NGOs act slowly and change nothing here.
(NCA, 2015)

To respond to this complaint, an NGO project manager in Phong Nha - Ke Bang park conceded:

I agree that it takes a long time for the preparation phase of any NGO project working with local people ... Unlike the traditional local approach, which is often in a top-down model. International NGOs would like to transfer the bottom-up model of participation and decision making. One of our projects took eight years for preparation before it was executed. (GIZ-staff, 2015)

The NGO project manager provided an example. In building the local legislative documents on tourism concession fees for Phong Nha-Ke Bang Park, there are still significant gaps in domestic and international approaches:

In developed countries, tourism concession fees are charged for the longer term and more items. Then the fees would be reinvested to the ecological system of the tourism sites. However, when our project introduced tourism concession calculation methods to the local staff who are in charge of tourism, the locals interpreted the methods in the way they prefer rather than in the appropriate way. A perfectly tested model on the international scope would fail when being executed in the local mountainous, isolated areas due to the differences in the context of politics, legal frameworks, cultures, traditions, customs, local norms and habits. The success of international initiatives depends heavily on the will to open to new things and abilities to adapt to local people. (GIZ-staff, 2015)

Both the business and NGO who participated in this research were reluctant to provide their opinions about the Save Son Doong campaign. There was a period of time (in November 2014) when many people believed that Oxalis was involved in the Save Son Doong protest. Two reasons were suggested for this belief. First, it was logical that if the cable construction was stopped, Oxalis would benefit by continuing their exploration tours to Son Doong cave. Second, the interfaces of the Oxalis website and Save Son Doong website (Save Son Doong.org) looked very alike. To deal with public scrutiny, Oxalis claimed they had diversified their tourism services, selling tours to many other cave systems in Quang Binh rather than just to Son Doong (NCA, 2015). On the similarities between the Oxalis and the Save Son Doong websites, two admins from the two websites confirmed in August 2015 that they had got photos from the same source, the cameraman Ryan Deboodt (BT, 2015; VP, 2015). The admin of Save Son Doong then stated on the Facebook page that there was no interest or connection between Oxalis and the protest.

The network of NGOs working for sustainable development in Quang Binh often cite UNESCO's and the IUCN's guidelines on preservation and development when they are asked for advice on local green problems. When asked for an opinion on the cable car construction to Son Doong, the NGO staff member I interviewed asked for an immediate pause. After a ten-minute break, she resumed the interview and answered:

NGOs had the principle of being neutral and balanced in local governmental controversial issues and respect the local legislative frame. As a result, the NGO would keep a distance from the protest. However, the legislative frames sometimes are interpreted inconsistently. For example, while many legislative documents prohibit construction in national preservation parks, the governmental Decree No. 117 issued in 2010 to regulate and control forest systems allows building the cable car in the forest.

(GIZ-staff, 2015)

Apparently, the international initiatives are not always well implemented locally. It is time-consuming to seek the consent of reluctant local partners, and initiatives are challenged by local apparatuses whose benefits would be reduced once the initiatives are applied.

7.4.2. Resistance of the local power

While international agents can help to raise awareness of local green issues, there is an enormous gap between awareness of and action to address the issues, especially when the issue generators possess power that helps them to resist the attacks. Since this was not a clear feature in the case of Save Son Doong, to examine resistance by powerful local agents, this section analyses the case of blogging against the Vinpearl Safari, on Phu Quoc Island (or Safari Phu Quoc).

On February 15, 2016, Peter Dickinson, a British zoologist, wrote on his blog *Zoo News Digest*¹²⁵ about the massive death of wild animals in Vinpearl Safari, on Phu Quoc, a far south-western island in Vietnam. He wrote:

According to my contacts most of the expat team have now left Phu Quoc, mostly in disgust after the deaths of over 1000 birds and nearly 700 mammals, including twenty Giraffe. Deaths are attributed to parasites, disease, underfeeding and horrific accident. Likely capture myopathy has also played a large part. As if this wasn't bad enough in itself, around 500 monkeys and numerous birds have escaped into the island. Compounding the wrongs are the arrival of Pangolins and Gibbons of unknown origin. There have been some very disturbing stories doing the rounds for months ... but mostly there is silence. There is nothing in the press. Vinpearl is big and powerful. The 100 Rhinos? Not all have arrived yet and I hope they don't. Animal dealers and Rhino farmers if they care two hoots about their animals need to step back. I will be more than happy to name them if they don't.

On his blog and LinkedIn profile, Dickinson claimed that he had 47 years of experience in zoo management. His post immediately attracted huge international attention. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) requested an investigation on the origins of the wild animals on the Safari. The Safari is a 500-hectare themed zoo for wild animals from various places in the world. It started operating in December 2015. The owner is Pham Nhat Vuong, the CEO of Vin realty conglomerate. In 2013, Forbes listed Pham Nhat Duong as the 240th billionaire in the world and a Vietnam's first billionaire.¹²⁶ Vin group then admitted that about 100 animals had died in the Safari and over 100 small monkeys had fled

from the Safari to the island. They denied the illegal trafficking of wild animals to the Safari.¹²⁷

At the same time, in February 2015, on the Facebook page of Chu Dang Khoa's ex-wife, there were some photos of wild animals in South Africa. The photos showed animal cages being loaded onto a flight, ready to be transported. Chu Dang Khoa, the owner of the farm, was a diamond trader. He was having a romantic relationship with the pop singer Ho Ngoc Ha in early 2015. The photos planted a seed of suspicion that Chu Dang Khoa transported animal from his farm in South Africa to the Safari in Phu Quoc Island. This in turn hinted that the Safari might be keeping wild animals there to feed markets in Vietnam and China, where eating wild animals as medicine is still a very common practice. The International Animal Rescue Africa then called for an immediate investigation of the origins of the animals in the photos.¹²⁸ Where were they from? Where were they transported to?

The story about wild animals in the Safari and in the photos from South Africa has many sensational elements: a billionaire, a celebrity and cross-border wild animal trafficking. However, most of the independent investigation around Safari Phu Quoc was not published by Vietnamese mainstream journalism. Apart from the news articles using fact and figures provided by the Vin conglomerate, there was not a single negative news item about Vin. In an online interview with me in late April 2016, MQA, a journalist who wrote about the dying animals in the Safari on Phu Quoc Island, complained that he could not find a single copy of the magazine *Charming Vietnam* issued on April 1, 2016. In this issue of the magazine, his story about his trip to Safari Phu Quoc was published. He claimed that all of the copies had been bought directly from the printing house. This is a typical practice with media about the Vin Group, in which negative news about Vin is often blacked out or removed or, as in this case, is bought and destroyed before it can reach the public.

Many Facebook accounts became inaccessible after they accused Vin of being involved in wild animal trafficking. Among the temporarily disappeared Facebook accounts was one of the journalist Nguyen Thanh Tuan from Zing News, after he published a series of three articles about the Safari. The Facebook post of Son Dang was removed from Facebook after it had been shared one thousand times. BT, the admin of the Save Son Doong Facebook page said on a follow-up interview with me on February 22, 2017 in Hanoi, that:

To avoid the removal of content on Facebook, Son Dang advised Facebook users to copy the content and re-post, not just to share the content [because] because they [Vin, or other powerful businesses] can easily hire many Facebook accounts to report some certain content. According to the principle of Facebook, the content will be removed if many Facebook users report it as violating the community norms.

7.4.3. Inconsistency at the international level

The inconsistency of international initiatives is further examined via a case study of the NGO Change and its involvement in the COP21.

To ensure systematic and consistent responses to global issues of climate change, the principle in designing national and regional programs is to adhere to international initiatives. In particular, there are three areas in which the national response should be in line with international initiatives: the exploration of nature and physical mechanism of climate change; the evaluation of impacts and vulnerability of climate change; and solutions, strategies, and plan for mitigation (Tan & Thanh, 2013, p. 43). In 2015, the MONRE developed Vietnam's INDC to submit to the Parties to the COP21. In the INDC submitted to the UN in September 2015, the Vietnamese government prepared for a scenario in which the atmospheric temperature increased by less than 2.0 degrees Celsius since the pre-industrial times (MONRE, 2015). This is consistent

with the global commitment declared later in the Paris Agreement, which Vietnam and 174 other countries signed on April 22, 2016. The Agreement states:

Governments agreed a long-term goal of keeping the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. (UNFCCC, 2016)

However, the Paris Agreement came to a second commitment on global average temperature, which was 'to aim to limit the increase to 1.5°C, since this would significantly reduce risks and the impacts of climate change' (UNFCCC, 2016). The network of international NGOs working in climate change in Vietnam, the Climate Change Working Group (CCWG), also prepared for a scenario of a rise of 1.5 degrees Celsius (CCWG, 2015). In the beginning, in the INDC of Vietnam, the national agreement aimed at an increase of 2 degrees Celsius. Later at COP21, the international initiatives proposed the new aim of 1.5 degree Celsius. How would local organisations struggle to adapt to the new battle of reducing 0.5 degree Celsius globally?

Change is a local NGO in Ho Chi Minh City in the South of Vietnam, doing advocacy for the alternative energy. With the aim of reducing the average temperature rise from 2 to 1.5 degree Celsius, Change chose to encourage clean energy such as wind and solar power to replace the coal-burning power plants in Vietnam. According to an official of Change, Change had been doing advocacy to close down several coal power complexes in Vietnam (VB, 2015).

However, the Vietnamese government has a strategy to increase coal power for the next two decades. The EVN reports a continuous growth in the percentage of coal power in the structure of electricity sources. It is estimated that coal power will contribute 49.3% to the total national power consumption in 2020, 55% in 2025, and 53.2% in 2030 (Tinh, 2017). At a general meeting of national energy corporations in 2017, including the EVN, petroleum corporation

(PVN) and VINACOMIN, it was concluded that developing coal thermal electricity is the only way for Vietnam (Tinh, 2017).

According to Change, most of the financial investment for coal power plants has been from international donors through international banks. For this reason, Change created a campaign calling for foreign banks to stop using coal and to change to cleaner and renewable energies. By September 2015, Change had organised public events for young people in Ho Chi Minh City, including a public lecture, flash mob dancing and clip contests about environmental issues. Materials generated from these activities were published on social media to target general the international public and were also displayed for exhibition in the Vietnam Pavilion (the exhibition area for Vietnam) outside the main venue of COP21. Change also released periodical newsletters, sent via an email database, to keep stakeholders updated of their activities in clean energy advocacy.

Thus, to fulfil the mission of putting an end to fossil fuel plants in Vietnam, Change's target public was the foreign banks. The initiative to control the rise in average temperature started from international stakeholders. The international stakeholders, however, had most of the influential resources, particularly in finance and expertise, for the successful implementation of the initiative.

Despite Change's efforts since 2015, by mid-2018, international banks were continuing to fund thermal coal projects in Vietnam. Mr Rainier Haryanto, the Program Director of the Committee for the Acceleration of Priority Infrastructure Delivery, Jakarta, Indonesia, said at a function with the ASEAN Leaders at the HSBC headquarters in Jakarta on September 13, 2018:

All countries want renewable and sustainable energy, it's the vision. But in reality, the huge population of South East Asia still depends on the available energy in the region: coal.

This helps explain why the giant banks of South East Asia, such as HSBC and DBS, continue their investments in coal-burning power projects in Vietnam. According to Dr Noralene Uy, the project manager of 'Investing in climate change and disaster resilience project', Ateneo Manila University, Philippines, the banking industry cannot immediately stop the funding for these coal-based energy projects. Instead, they are releasing new policies to address global warming issues. For examples, DBS, the bank of Singapore, started a pilot implementation of a sustainable guidelines for assessment before an investment decision. Asian Development Bank (ADB) also drafted a policy leaning toward the investment in cleaner technology. The World Bank has stopped funding gas and oil projects from 2019. Apparently, the efforts of one local NGO are not sufficient to achieve a global commitment to COP21 and to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) introduced by UNDP after COP21. The NGO Change cannot work alone although it is continuing with its long-term mission of converting coal-burning countries to cleaner energy.

The success of international initiatives, therefore, does not depend only on international media platforms (in Save Son Doong), finance (Change and foreign banks), and expertise (the Zoologist from UK), but it is also largely determined by mutual trust and the capacity to adapt. International stakeholders need to win the trust of local public, while their local counterparts need to be able to adapt quickly to international patterns. The use of international rules is appropriate and effective in addressing local issues, for example, using UNESCO conservation guidelines to prevent the construction in Son Doong. Learning from this lesson, in 2016 one activist approached a firm of international lawyers in an attempt to file a lawsuit against Formosa, and sought to collaborate with Taiwanese Members of Parliament to find a solution to the marine disaster in four central coastal provinces of Vietnam.

7.5. Criticism of the use of social media for activism

Despite the power of social media to create a public sphere, it has been argued that the online platform cannot on its own automatically construct a public sphere. The public sphere emerging from social media is also weaker than activism in the offline world (Fuchs, 2014, p. 184). Fuchs (2014 pp. 185-189) cites Zizi Papacharissi, Jodi Dean, Malcolm Gladwell and Evgeny Morozov to highlight the weaknesses of the social media-based public sphere. Morozov (cited in Fuchs, 2014, p. 188) coins the term ‘slacktivism/clicktivism’ to indicate an illusion that online activism has meaningful impacts. This is a phenomenon of an internet-centric generation, who thinks they are politically active by just ‘joining a Facebook page’, ‘signing a petition’, or ‘responding to an article on a blog’ (Dean and Morozov, cited in Fuchs, 2014 p.187-188). Even when the online collective actions turn into a real online protest, it can prove to be harmless (Papacharissi cited in Fuchs, 2014 p.186) and lacks a critical dimension to address power asymmetries. As Gladwell asserts, social media ‘are well suited to making the existing social order more efficient’ (Fuchs, 2014, p. 188).

Roger Silverstone suggests the term ‘mediapolis’ as a concept similar to the public sphere. He describes a mediapolis as a mediated space, in which thorough communication, public and political life increasingly come to merge (Silverstone, 2007, p. 31). According to Silverstone, while the public sphere depends on a strong commitment to rational debate and argument, a mediapolis recognises the imperfections of the communication process of its participants (2007, p. 34).

The case studies of the NGO Change and the wildlife park Safari are two examples of these weaknesses of a social media-based public sphere. The mixing of pop culture with green movements can increase the proportion of the public concerned about the issues. Flash mob dancing (in Change) or the celebrity Ho Ngoc Ha (in the relationship with the farmer owner in South Africa)

can generate more followers to Change's Facebook, or more readers for the media about the Sarafi Phu Quoc. However, increasing the number of followers and readers does not lead to the shutting down of coal-burning power plants, nor does it stop wild animal trafficking. More media coverage about the farm and the Safari makes a mediapolis situation, where everyone knows about the Safari, but few protest for animal rights in the Safari.

The Save Son Doong, however, is not a phenomenon of slacktivism or clicktivism. The activists proved their strong commitments to the campaign. The campaign developed from a Facebook page to a local NGO, with a leader, core team, budget and clear plans to fulfil the mission of preserving Son Doong. The 280,000 followers of the Save Son Doong page also take due responsibility in protecting Son Doong cave. On January 27, 2018, one day before an important football match by the Vietnamese national team, when the public's heart followed every news item about the game, there was a rumour that the real-estate company FLC was doing a feasibility survey in Son Doong cave. The campaign followers shifted their attention from the football match to Save Son Doong. Responding to the campaign followers, FLC issued a press release denying their involvement in building anything around or in Son Doong. The public were strictly following any move by the authority and business sector around Son Doong cave.

On the very first day of the protest, one of the campaign leaders asked the question 'Is Son Doong an assessment just for Quang Binh's authority, or even Vietnam's authority?'. The participation of people from 39 countries in the Save Son Doong campaign answer eloquently that the cable car to Son Doong is not merely a local or national issue. The essential role of international agents in green issues is obvious. On the one hand, international agents help to raise awareness of the issues and mobilise resources to address the issues. On the other hand, international can initiatives encounter poor handling at local level,

as well as inconsistency across international and local levels. Slactivism is not a problem at the Save Son Doong campaign, but it is a threat to the dissolution of the public sphere that emerges on social media. ■

Chapter 8:

'Man-for-tree' and the maturity of the social media-based green public sphere

This chapter depicts the maturity of the social media-based green public sphere during the protests against the removal of 6700 trees in Hanoi in March 2015. It identifies the themes of topics in newspaper coverage and Facebook posts about the tree felling. Based on such analysis, it elucidates how people used discussions and arguments to influence the realm of policies and practice around the tree removal issue. Through an in-depth interview with one of the primary activists, the chapter highlights the peer-to-peer co-operation among the activists involved with the Facebook page Man-for-Tree. This co-operation mirrors the flat hierarchical structure of social media and ensures the sustainable growth of the tree public sphere. The chapter investigates the tree felling protest as a signal for the formation of the entirety of the green public sphere, in which tree-activists supported green protests in other places, creating solidarity among the green activism network. Furthermore, the tree-activists founded the Green Trees group, the activities of which mimic those of green parties in the western world. The chapter argues that during the protests against the tree felling, the green public sphere evolved from non-political to political politics, posing a significant challenge to the single-party status of the CPV.

8.1. The context of the tree public sphere

Hanoi experienced a heatwave in the first week of July 2018. The National Centre for Hydro-Meteorological Forecasting announced the temperature was over 40 Celsius degree in Hanoi centre.¹²⁹ An actor posted a live video on his

Facebook page, showing himself making an omelette in the unbearable 50 degrees Celsius heat. In a traffic jam during peak hour, people rushed to the shadow of the city's sky railway construction, which had been left unfinished for nearly a decade. As in many other extremely hot days in Hanoi, local people blamed the former mayor, the Chairman of Hanoi People's Committee, Mr Nguyen The Thao, for the streets denuded of trees. Mr The Thao, whose name in the Sino-Vietnamese language means 'replace trees', was in charge of the program to fell over 6700 trees in Hanoi in March 2015. This program resulted in a massive protest to protect the trees. During the protest, Facebook became the platform on which users exercised their freedom of expression and contributed their critical arguments to the massive discussion about the tree-felling program.

Hanoi, the capital city in the North of Vietnam, inherited French-style urban architecture as a legacy of the French colonization of Vietnam from 1887 to 1940. Long Bien Bridge, the Hanoi Opera House, the Presidential Palace, the Government Guest House, the Great Church, Hanoi Train Station, Hanoi General University and many other buildings¹³⁰ are the heritage left by French colonisation. Many roads, drainages and grid street systems were planned and constructed during this time (Duong, 2017, p. 133). However, the city plan devised by the French accommodated a population of just under 100,000 people (Duong, 2017, p. 133). By the end of 2017, Hanoi's population was 9.6 million, and it is expected to reach 10.4 million by 2020.¹³¹ By the end of 2017, Hanoi had six million privately owned cars and motorbikes, while the infrastructure for a metro train system had been under construction since 2011.¹³² Pham and Nakagoshi (2008, p. 32) provided evidence to prove that Hanoi's authority had once planned to build a green belt around the city to resist the sprawling urban growth. The green belt, made up of green trees, was expected to absorb the carbon emissions generated by human activities. However, instead of the green

belt, the city has been surrounded by many industrial zones, including Nam Thang Long, Thuong Dinh, Sai Dong, Vinh Tuy, Duc Giang, and Van Dien. Air quality, the most important and available indicator to assess a city’s environment (Pham & Nakagoshi, 2008, p. 27), had become an increasingly serious issue. According to the GreenID’s Air Quality Report, in 2017 there were 275 days on which the average concentration of particulate matter smaller than 2.5 micrometres (PM2.5) exceeded the WHO’s air safety guidelines (GreenID, 2017, p. 12).

In late January 2015, Hanoi’s Department of Construction released a list of over 6700 trees to be cut. The article about this plan, titled ‘Hanoi will replace 6700 trees’, published on *VnExpress* on January 26, 2015, recorded a balance in the number of opinions from those for and against the tree removal. The author selected the top 20% of the total audience’s comments under this article, which were 21 over 103 total comments. In which, there were 5 (25%) comments supporting, 6 (25%) protesting, and 10 (50%) stating a neutral view on the trees cutting. However, the New Year long holidays (Tet) in February 2015 marked a discontinuity in the plan’s execution, as well as in public discussion about the trees cutting. There were no news articles about the tree felling in either *Tuo Tre* or *VnExpress* newspapers published in February 2015.

On March 10, 2015, Hanoi’s Department of Construction began cutting down trees on Nguyen Chi Thanh Street. This is a wide street connecting the centre and the west of Hanoi. In 2002, the Labour Union of the Ministry of Construction had awarded Nguyen Chi Thanh Street the title ‘the most beautiful urban road of Vietnam’. Important national organisations, namely VTV, the University of Law, the National Academy of Public Administration (in 2015 it was an affiliation of the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics), have their headquarters and main campuses along this street. A journalist, who

was an environmental activist, argued that the location was so visible that local people easily noticed the tree felling. He said:

Dong Nai River was partly filled at the same time when the trees in Hanoi were being cut down. In my opinion, cutting down the trees in Hanoi does not generate so much serious impacts like filling the river does. However, not many people confronted the authority to save the river. It is hard for laypeople to understand the long-term impacts of the filling of the river basin. Meanwhile, they can obviously see with their own eyes that the trees were falling down. (MQA, 2015)

Thus, the geographical location of the tree removal project made it impossible to hide and local people rapidly became aware of it.

On March 16, 2015, Mr Tran Dang Tuan, the former Deputy Director of VTV who had resigned to start the Poor Mountainous Philanthropy Foundation, posted on his Facebook page an open letter to Mr Nguyen The Thao, the mayor of Hanoi.¹³³ The letter requested that the authority release a detailed plan of the tree removal program. Responding to Mr Tuan, on March 17, 2015, during a weekly media briefing session, Mr Phan Dang Long, the Deputy Manager of Hanoi's Propaganda and Training Committee, said '[The city authority] doesn't have to ask people to make the decision of cutting trees' and 'Mr Tuan is just a layperson now',¹³⁴ implying that Mr Tuan, who had resigned from his former high-ranking government position, was just an ordinary person and not entitled to request a response from the authority. This response raised two issues: the trees removal project which was an environmental issue, and the authority's unwillingness to listen to the people's requests, an issue that went to the transparency and accountability of the authority. These two issues instantly provoked a wave of criticism against the Hanoi authority for its tree removal project.

At 9 am on March 17, 2015, NT, a woman in Hanoi started a Facebook page titled Man-for-Tree and called for 6700 people to protect 6700 trees.¹³⁵ On the first post of the page on March 17, 2015, she introduced herself, writing: 'I'm nobody. I'm an ordinary housewife, have been living in Hanoi for seven years.' On a post on March 18, 2015, the admin announced there were 9120 Facebook accounts hitting the page's 'like' button. On the next day, March 19, 2015, several prestigious intellectuals joined the board of admins for the page. According to the admin of the page, by May 18, 2015, the page had over 62,000 members. The majority of the members were in the 18–24 and 25–34 age groups; and 62% of them were women, as illustrated in figure 8.1.

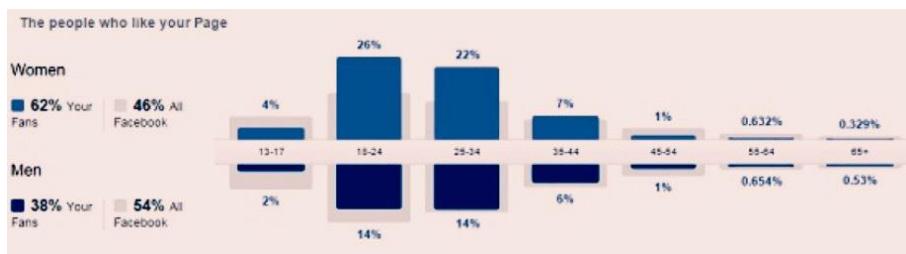


Figure 8.1: Demographic analysis of the Facebook users who 'liked' the page Man-for-Tree, at May 18, 2015 (admin of the page)

To express admiration for NT's ability to attract such a large number of followers, one Facebook user commented on NT's Facebook page:

Social movements and revolutions that want success cannot ignore the force of desperate housewives. Look at this mother, she can speak foreign languages, but she does not care to be an officer, does not care to obey her husband. She just stays at home, making dough, baking cakes, watching detective soap operas, and now she can work as a think-tank [of the tree movement].

The economic reforms had shifted the state-subsidised economy to a multi-stakeholder economy, allowing individuals like this housewife to earn her

living without attaching herself to any organisation in the state's power structure. NT, for example, baked cakes and used Facebook as a virtual shop. She posted the menu, took the orders, and received customers' feedback, all on the free-of-charge platform, Facebook. Online sellers like NT were independent of the state control and dependent on the growth of social media to reach to their potential customers. Using a Facebook page to attract public attention is a daily task of online sellers who need to push their products onto the market. In this case, NT was able to use the platform to bring the issue of the tree removal and the need for tree protection to the public's and the media's agenda.

8.2. Development of the tree public sphere

Buchanan (2018) points to 'communicative actions' as a concept introduced by Jurgen Habermas to argue that language has the capacity to serve as not only a tool for information exchange but also to convey instructions to society. In this way, arguments about the tree removal were able to generate instructions for both sides, both for tree removal and for tree protection. Such communicative actions were elements in the developments of the tree public sphere. Since such arguments were archived on social media and in journalism, I selected three media outlets for content analysis: the Facebook page 'Man-for-Tree' which carried the arguments of Facebook users; and *VnExpress* and *Tuo Tre* newspaper, to identify the arguments of the authorities.

First, on the Man-for-Tree Facebook page, I selected the posts that gained the highest number of interactions, i.e. the ones for which over 1000 Facebook users had hit the 'like' button under the main content. Only posts generated by the Facebook page admins were included in the material for content analysis. Posts showing links to other media outlets, such as to online newspapers or YouTube, were excluded. In this way, I selected 50 posts on the Man-for-Tree Facebook page. All posts were from March to June 2015. The selection was conducted in June 2016. Second, on *VnExpress*, I followed the thread 'Hanoi

replaces 6700 trees’, under which *VnExpress* grouped all its articles about the cutting down of the 6700 trees. There were 39 such articles published from March 2015 to February 2016. Third, I searched on *Tuo Tre*, using the search engine embedded on *Tuo Tre*’s website, with the keyword ‘6700 green trees’ (*6700 cây xanh*). The result showed that nine articles containing the keyword had been published in March 2015.

I then scanned all the texts, photos and video in the selected posts, articles, and comments to identify the key topics in the arguments around the tree removal and protection. The following paragraphs review the key topics as they appeared in chronological order.

The first topic was the un-organised activities for tree protection that occurred from March 17 to March 19, 2015. Man-for-Tree Facebook page called on people to join the page, sign the petition for the trees, tie yellow bows around the trees, hang protest posters on the trees and camp overnight at the trees. Man-for-Tree simply reported these activities with texts, photos and videos, and did not organise for such activities to occur. *VnExpress*, on March 18, 2015, published two news articles reflecting the viewpoints of the Hanoi People’s Committee. The first article reported that the Committee was reviewing the trees renewal plan. The second article was a response from the Committee to the public, claiming that ‘a majority of the people approved the tree removal’.

The second topic to emerge was whether the public supported or objected to the plan. To seek evidence for the claim that ‘the majority of the people approved the tree removal’, the Hanoi People’s Committee stuck 150 polling boards on the trees, asking whether people agreed or disagreed with cutting down the trees. This development was reported in the news article ‘Hanging up signs to seek public opinions about the tree removal’, published on *VnExpress* on March 20, 2015. I analysed 20% of the top comments for this article, i.e. 35 out of

177 comments. The audience's comments reported in this article indicated 60% (21) of the audience held a neutral view, 28.5% (10) protested, while just 11.5% (4) supported the tree removal. *Tuo Tre* newspaper ran a poll on their website on March 20, 2015. The poll result was released in a *Tuo Tre* news article on March 21, 2015, indicating that 73.8% of its audience did not support the trees cutting plan.

The third topic emerging in the discussion was about sponsorship of the tree removal plan. On March 20, 2015, *VnExpress* interviewed the Deputy Mayor, Nguyen Quoc Hung. He said' 'Sponsors are eager to cut down the trees.' However, the following day, *VnExpress* interviewed representatives from three of the sponsors, Vingroup, VPBank, and Binh Minh Company. The sponsors said that while they provided financial support for various projects in Hanoi, they did not interfere with how the money was spent.

The fourth topic was organised activities for trees protection. This topic was promoted on the Man-for-Tree Facebook page on March 20, 2015. The activities included a to-do-list for tree protectors, a call for a petition to stop the cutting down of trees, selection of a logo for the page and the protest campaign, a call for a collection of Facebook users' questions to be sent to Hanoi People's Committee, information about a t-shirt as a uniform for protesters and planning for a tree-hug picnic in Hanoi on Sunday, March 22, 2015. These activities were different from the un-organised activities that had occurred before March 20, 2015. After discussion, the Facebook users agreed to drop the actions of tying yellow bows and posters on trees because it was argued that bows and posters could generate more rubbish on the street and cause trouble for people who were found sticking them on the trees without the local authorities' permission. Arguments from March 17 to 20, 2015, among the members of Man-for-Tree transformed the site into a form for self-regulation and self-correctness in the practice.

Man-for-Tree successfully managed the tree-hug picnic on Sunday, March 22, 2015. The protest thus moved from online to offline. The growing community on Facebook was able to expand to include non-social media users, including children and elderly people, whose photos of joining the tree-hug activities were posted in the comment sections of the posts on Man-for-Tree from March 17 to 21, 2015. Another offline activity organised by the Man-for-Tree members was to draft a list of questions for the Hanoi People’s Committee. The local authority then ran a press conference to listen to the questions. However, none of the questions were answered (see the news article ‘Press conference about the tree removal project: all questions left unanswered’, on *Tuo Tre* newspaper on March 20, 2015). The unanswered questions were the topic of discussion for a seminar on March 23, 2015, attended by environmentalists, urban landscape architects and scientists. One seminar member suggested that the questions be raised with the Prime Minister and the Government Inspectors Board. With this move, the social media-based initiatives directly challenged the accountability of the authorities.

The fifth topic to emerge was *Manglietia Fordiana* (*Vàng tâm*) or *Manglietia Phuthoensis* (*Mõ*). The Hanoi Department of Construction confirmed that the newly planted trees along Nguyen Chi Thanh Street were *Manglietia Fordiana*, which was listed in the red book of extinct flora species (see the *VnExpress* news article ‘Hanoi confirms the newly planted trees on NCT Street are *Manglietia Fordiana*’ on March 25, 2015). However, experts argued the trees were a different species, one that was common in Phu Tho, a Northern midlands province of Vietnam, and that their scientific name was *Manglietia Phuthoensis* (see the *VnExpress* news article ‘Experts refused Hanoi’s opinion on *Manglietia Fordiana*’ on March 25, 2015). According to the Man-for-Tree post on March 27, 2015, one of the experts, Professor Vu Quang Nam, received a letter from his employer, the Vietnam Forestry University (VFU), warning him not to further discuss the

trees on Nguyen Chi Thanh Street. As mentioned in chapter three, Decision 97/2009 prohibits scientists from publishing any criticism against the authorities under names associated with science and technology organisations. VFU informed Professor Nam that the Cultural Police (PA83) of Hanoi had sent a warning to the university about Professor Nam's comments in the seminar on March 23, 2015. However, after the warning letter was posted and shared on Facebook (see the Man-for-Tree post on March 27, 2015), PA83 claimed that they had not sent any warning to VFU about Professor Nam. This topic involved many groups, such as the leaders of Hanoi People's Committee, scientists, the professor and his university, and the police, making for diversity in the public discussion. By the end of the discussion, the trees along Nguyen Chi Thanh Street had been removed for a second time, and were replaced by *Chukrasia Tabularis* (*Lát hoa*) (see the news article on *VnExpress* on July 30, 2015 '*Chukrasia tabularis* replaces *Manglietia Phuthoensis* on NCT Street'.)

The last topic raised in discussion of the trees was the long-term tree protection action plan, designed by Man-for-Tree members. The plan included activities such as making a map of trees in Hanoi (see the post on Man-for-Tree on April 4, 2015), sending a wish-list to Hanoi People's Committee, the Hanoi Police and the Centre Committee of Propaganda and Training (April 6, 2015), providing frequent updates on how the tree removal was proceeding (April 10, 2015), and listing pending questions and issues (April 19, 2015). From the authority's side, several initiatives were introduced to control the tree removal. A special government inspection board was established to control trees removal in Hanoi (see the news article on *VnExpress* on April 15, 2015, titled 'Government establish a team to inspect Hanoi's management of the replacement of 6700 trees'). Some high-ranking officers who had been responsible for the tree removal plan were demoted (see *VnExpress* on July 21, 2015, titled 'Hanoi has demoted many officials involved in the trees replacement

project’). Hanoi People’s Committee sent staff members overseas to study tree management (see *VnExpress* on February 24, 2016, titled ‘Hanoi sends officials overseas to learn tree removal technology’).

The developments in the tree public sphere highlight the involvement of a combination of media and the diversity of stakeholders, as well as the rising quantity and quality of arguments. State-run journalism and Facebook joined together to depict an overall picture of the evolution of the tree public sphere. For example, in the sixth topic, to understand how the trees in Hanoi were to be managed in the future, the audience needed to read both journalism and Facebook to learn about the authorities’ plan and the Man-for-Tree Facebook page to learn about the community-initiated plan. Both professional journalists and Facebook users contributed to the materialisation and documentation of the developments of the green public sphere. This is different from the case of Song Tranh 2 (Chapter Four), in which only journalists raised concerns about the construction of the water dam. The voice from the public was absent from the media in that debate. It is also different from the case of blogging against the bauxite projects (Chapter Three), in which only intellectuals using social media raised the issues. As analysed in Chapter Two, state-run journalism is opposite to social media in terms of how they are controlled, resulting in a contrast in the content. Journalism tends to reflect the positive actions of the authorities, while social media report the negative side. The combination of both state media and social media in the tree public sphere provided a comprehensive overview of green issues. This paved the way for a diversity of stakeholders from multiple sectors to enter the public sphere. As a consequence, the number of arguments increased. For example, while there were only 14 Facebook posts with more than 1000 interactions on Save Son Doong, there were 50 Facebook posts with over 1000 interactions on Man-for-Tree. The impact of the arguments also

increased since they led to a discontinuity in tree removal, and to the formulation of inspection boards for urban tree management.

8.3. Horizontal power structure of Man-for-Tree

Section 2.3.2. pointed out that communities on social media have a horizontal power structure, in which social media users share equal status with their peers on social media platforms. This is different from the top-down, vertical power structure of Vietnamese society and state-run organisations. The trees activists on the Facebook page Man-for-Tree applied the law of horizontal power structure on social media to their protests. This is a distinguishing feature of the social media-based green public sphere. The power structure of Man-for-Tree was flat: no admin had a higher position than the others in coordinating the movement, regardless of their gender, age, education, social status and position in their affiliated organisations.

It is impossible to identify a leader of the tree movement. On March 17, 2015, NT created the Man-for-Tree Facebook page. However, she is neither the leader of the page nor the initiator of the tree protection activities. On March 19, 2015, a group of elite intellectuals approached NT and formed an ad hoc management board for the Man-for-Tree movement. The number of managers of Man-for-Tree reached 40 core members and hundreds of helpers on the days of tree-hug picnics (HDM, 2015). According to one of the admins of the Man-for-tree Facebook page, HDM, some key reputable social activists joined the ad hoc management board of Man-for-Tree, including Mr Le Quang Binh, Mr Giang Dang, and Mrs Nghiem Hoa. Mr Binh was the Director of iSEE (Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment). Mr Giang was the Deputy Director of CeCodes (Centre for Community Support Development Studies). Mrs Hoa was a prestigious human right expert. HDM, one of the admins, said:

Some of them were close friends before the movement. This is just another project they work, and play, together. You don't need a leader play in a game. (HDM, 2015)

HDM went on to describe how the group worked:

We created a to-do-list and everyone can voluntarily choose what he/she can do. It was a very well-intentioned group, with mature and smart people. They don't have to say much because they know how to work together. And this was not the first time they worked together. (HDM, 2015)

Although the management board members held high positions in reputable non-governmental organisations, they abandoned their job titles when they joined the board. Their organisations (for instance, iSEE and CeCodes) work in areas promoting people's participation in making social decisions; however, they participated in the movement as non-affiliated individuals. This was not just because joining the movement was one of their personal interest. HDM explained:

People participated in this movement as individuals rather than as representatives of organisations. First, organisations are not obliged to perform such tasks [the movement]. Second, international organisations in general are connected to the local government at a certain level to be able to work locally. If they join a movement that confronts the government, it is difficult for them to gain trust from the local [authority]. So, in terms of safety, organisations do not have the need to show up officially in campaigns and movement like this. (2015)

To elaborate on the reasons why individuals, not their organisations, make better stakeholders in activism, he said:

I think social movements always need people who are willing to stand up as individuals working voluntarily without being forced. Organisations still have certain constraints. Organisations are big and generate huge impacts, but bigger they grow, the stronger control from the government they are under. Individuals appear, then they disappear. Individuals have less fear. They have nothing to lose. They are more courageous. I have to admit organisations 'has hair to hold', and thus organisations are not as resolute as individuals in social movements. (HDM, 2015)

Not only did they keep the names of their organisations confidential, but the members also tried to remain anonymous. They claimed that most of them did not know each other since they mostly contacted each other via social media (Quang Binh et al., 2015, p. 29). The 'About us' section of Man-for-Tree Facebook page did not list the names of any admins. All this caution was an appropriate self-protection if we remember the intimidation against the bauxite bloggers (Chapter Three). On the last week of March 2015, Nguyen Chi Tuyen, who proclaimed himself to be one of the admins for Man-for-Tree, was brutally assaulted on the street by masked people. There was no concrete evidence to link the violence with his identity as an activist. However, it consolidated the belief that anonymity on social media movement was a wise decision to protect activists' safety. In fact, when the ad hoc management board dissolved in late April 2015, there had been no recorded incidents of physical attacks or legal intimidation against the Man-for-Tree admins.

The horizontal, anonymous network of power structure of the tree movement created diversity in decision making. As analysed in the previous chapter, traditionally a decision is made within a group of leaders and is then transferred downwards to the lower levels. With the emergence of social media,

however, a decision can pop up from discussions among social media users. A social media user chooses to implement the decision upon his/her personal judgment of the appropriateness of the decision, rather than knowing who made the decision or feeling a need to obey the decision-makers. This adds a sense of democracy to the decision- and policy-making process, and to some extent, causes a rupture in top-down authoritative practices. This only happens when the leaders of social media-based activism are willing and have the technical know-how to abandon their own fame and interests and enter the movement anonymously as simply one of the many social media users. In the tree protest movement, the management board on social media was ad hoc, it popped up quickly and dissolved when the objectives of the movement were achieved. By the end of the movement, no one added a line in his/her CV claiming that ‘I successfully led the tree movement’. For the social media activists, the ability to remain anonymous became a qualitative measure of success, besides quantitative indicators, such as the number of followers, ‘likes’, ‘shares’ and comments.

8.4. The evolution of the green public sphere

The Man-for-Tree Facebook page and the protests against the removal of the 6700 trees marked a milestone in the maturity of the green public sphere. The tree public sphere became an inclusive arena for activism, in which all members of the public could join the activism. It established a network among supporters of the green public sphere, linking them with many other green movements all over Vietnam. It also paved the way for the establishment of a green political organisation, marking the institutionalisation of green issues in political realm.

8.4.1. Inclusive activism

Many different demographic groups joined the tree public sphere, including scientists, journalists, housewives, children, elderly people, celebrities, sport-clubs, urban Hanoi citizens and others. The public in this case was much wider

than just intellectuals (as in the bauxite movement), journalists (as in the Song Tranh movement), the English-speaking community (the public who were the target of Save Son Doong) or urban youth (the target group of Boo Fashion Company). The tree public sphere was a bricolage of all walks of life, drawing together people with accumulated expertise and abilities. The tree movement took full advantages of the lessons learned from the previous public sphere. It inherited the best practice and techniques from the bauxite and Save Son Doong campaigns, such as: open letters, online and offline petitions, running a website to get petitions signed, using green t-shirts with a tree-hug icon as branding. As in other green public spheres, the tree public sphere was initiated and led by intellectuals. However, to avoid intimidation, the intellectuals remained anonymous. They promoted the movement on social media but they did not make public their engagement in the movement.

8.4.2. Network of the green public sphere

The activists for trees in Hanoi not only protested about the trees but also for green issues in other cities. When the trees were removed in Hanoi, the river in Dong Nai, a Southern province of Vietnam, was filled. In the calls for protests against the tree removal, the Man-for-Tree also called public attention to the issue of the Dong Nai river. The Man-for-Tree' post on March 24, 2015, presented a link to the Facebook page 'Save Dong Nai River'. The solidarity of activist groups nationwide was observed in other movements. For example, in March 2019, the movement Save Tam Dao, formed to save the forest in Tam Dao, Hanoi, declared they had received support from the Green-Trees movement (a political group for the environment in Hanoi, founded after the tree movement), and from the group Give back the Route to Ba Na (formed to save the forest in Son Cha, Da Nang). The activist groups in different cities, addressing different green issues, worked together to push all the issues onto

the media and political agenda, not just to call for participation from social media users.

8.4.3. The politicisation of green issues

As discussed in Chapter Three, from the beginning of the green public sphere, it was the ideology of Phan Chau Trinh that provided guidance for the green movement. Phan Chau Trinh’s method of activism was to address the issues by educating the public, not by overthrowing the authorities. From the bauxite movement to the Save Son Doong, most of the activist groups dissolved and became inactive once they had achieved certain outcomes to resolve their issues. The tree movement in Hanoi was different. Some protest groups dissolved but others continued, protesting for the environment and shifting their aims to political purposes.

Together with Man-for-Tree, several other Facebook groups and pages were established to save the 6700 trees. Among these was a Facebook group run by a group of urban architects. They started an online collection of photos and movies about the trees in Hanoi. According to the iSEE’s report (Quang Binh et al., 2015, pp. 27-28), the architects’ Facebook group was overwhelmed with the tremendous materials they received every second. The architects then had to invite the public to join the management board for the group. The number of managers of the group reached 22, many of whom were not architects. They argued about whether the architects should lead the page since the architects had become a minority in the group. The architects did not have enough experience to handle a large Facebook community and could not be legally responsible for the group’s activities. Eventually, the architects decided to permanently close down the page on March 29, 2015, 11 days after its establishment.

On the next day, March 30, 2015, several admins from the group that been closed down launched another Facebook page, titled 'For a green Hanoi' (*Vi mot Ha Noi xanh*). By June 2018, the Green-Trees Facebook page had 10,500 members. On the 'About us' section on the page,¹³⁶ Green-Trees defined themselves as:

A community of Vietnamese environment protectors, emerging from the trees movement in 2015. The group is open to all Vietnamese people to act for a cleaner, greener and more beautiful Vietnam ... The posts on this page address environmental issues. We could accept to discuss other issues, for example humanism, education, and public health ... Our community is willing to support and work with other groups and movements in trees protection and environmental protection.

On the Facebook Page, Green-Trees claimed they sent representatives to attend a meeting with the Hanoi People's Committee on May 6, 2015, and another meeting with Hanoi's Members of Parliament on May 8, 2015. After the Formosa's issues in 2016, Green-Trees published a book, *An overview of the Vietnam sea disaster*. Until March 2019, Green-Trees consistently targeted the political goals through the angle of environment. On March 16, 2019, Green Trees launched *Don't be afraid*, a documentary film about green issues in Vietnam. Nguyen Anh Tuan, one of Green-Trees leaders, asserted on his Facebook page that 'The film is made by the reactionary, about the reactionary, and for the reactionary'. Apparently, tree activists pushed the movement to the realm of being reactionary in politics, and directly challenged the government's authority. Green, from being the colour code for environmental issues, had come to convey a new meaning of 'the opposite to Red', the colour code for Communism, the ruling ideology in Vietnam.

The protests against the removal of 6700 trees in Hanoi were a triumph for the green public sphere in the decade of Facebook in Vietnam. This movement helped to stop the project to cut down 6700 trees, and started a new political oppositional group, shifting the green public sphere from a non-political to a political movement. The tree movement, however, only gained success in 2015 and failed to prevent the removal of 1300 trees in 2017 along Pham Van Dong Street in Hanoi. The people of Hanoi sacrificed trees for urbanisation and modernisation. Over three years, from 2015 to 2018, Hanoi removed and then re-planted over one million trees.¹³⁷ The tree movement in 2015 was the peak of the green public sphere before green issues worsened and shifted the public sphere towards violence and politics from the Formosa disaster in 2016. ■

Chapter 9

Formosa and the politicisation of the green public sphere

This chapter identifies the politicisation of the green public sphere, in which the green issues were seen as a crucial arena to challenge the legitimacy of the CPV. It works with the case study of the massive death of fish that occurred in four provinces in the centre of Vietnam in April 2016, that was believed to be due to contamination by the Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation (FHS). First, the chapter analyses how the massive death of fish had been documented, and highlights the fact that mainstream journalism had failed in providing truth for the public debates. Second, the chapter examines the involvement of political parties and civil society organisations in the green public sphere surrounding the Formosa scandal, and the emerging green political institutions in Vietnam. Third, based on some practices of the stakeholders in the Formosa fish death disaster, the chapter discusses the evolution of non-political and non-reactionary politics to the politics of green issues.

9.1. Vietnamese media's coverage of the Formosa marine life disaster

9.1.1 Journalism

It is astonishing that there has been not much documented evidence of the massive marine life disaster that occurred in April 2016 along four coastal provinces in the centre of Vietnam. As described in section 1.4 of Chapter One, the activist NAT, who stayed in the Ky Phuong commune, Ky Anh District, in Ha Tinh province, near the Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation site, observed that journalists withdrew from Ky Anh, and no longer filed reports from the seashore of Ky Anh from the last few days of April 2016 on (NAT, 2017). On May 13, 2016, the Ministry of Information withdrew the licence of the magazine *Marketing World* (Thế giới tiếp thị), which is a supplement of the newspaper

Rural Today (Nông thôn ngày nay) and banned it for three months (MIC, 2016). The reason for the ban was that the magazine had published two articles, titled 'The whine of fish' and 'People are always the latecomers'. The articles were said to have violated Article 8.6.b of Decree 159, which imposes a fine on publications that 'Publish and broadcast information that can cause harm to national interests' (Government, 2013). Section 3.3 of chapter 3 also discusses the ban on reporting at the early stage of the incident. Cain (2014) describes this practice as 'Kill one to warn one hundred: The Politics of Press Censorship in Vietnam'.

The policy of 'kill one to warn one hundred' worked. Some newspapers ceased to cover the mass death of fish. For example, *Tuois Tre Cuoi*, the monthly satirical supplement of the *Tuois Tre* newspaper had to change the cover page of issue no. 547 twice. According to Le Nguyen Huong Tra, a former journalist of the People's Police newspaper and a social media influencer, the first version of the cover page had a drawing of the Vietnamese King who lost the country because of a factory spilling oil (left-hand picture in photo 9.1). The second version was about the fight between the water saint and the mountain saint, with the former dying because of pollution. Both versions of these Vietnamese folk lore stories were modified by updating some elements of the stories, such as factories leaking oil, chimneys smoking, and the mass death of fish. In her Facebook post on May 17, 2016, Le Nguyen Duong Tra wrote that *Tuois Tre* recalled the copies with the first and the second versions of the cover pages, and eventually published the paper with a cover page about problems of doctorate education. Because of the recall, issue no. 547 came out two days later than the intended day of publication.

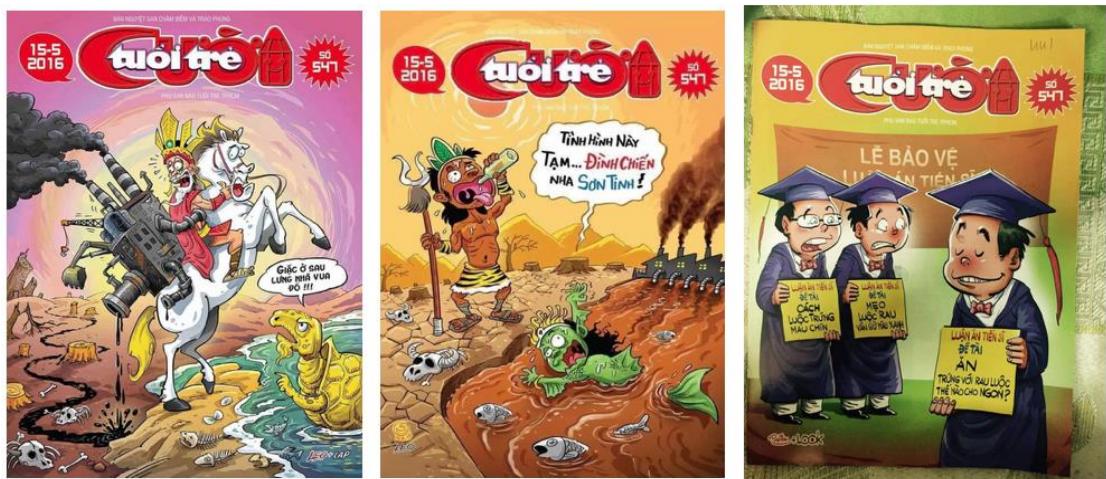


Photo 9.1: Three versions of the cover page of Tuoi Tre Cuoi issue no. 547 (Le Nguyen Huong Tra, former journalist of People's Police newspaper, May 17, 2016)

The removal of news articles was another measure occurring in Vietnamese newspapers during the months after the incident. For example, the article 'Vung Ang dead fish whiten the Central Coast, suspected cause is intoxication from Vung Ang' by three reporters, Duy Tuan, Hai Sam and Quang Thanh, published in *VietNamNet*, an e-newspaper, on April 20, 2016 was no longer found on the Internet (Green-Trees, 2016, p. 20). The article 'Kiểm tra Formosa đúng đắn sai đó/Inspection at Formosa: errors found in every inspected unit', by reporter Le Thanh, was published in *Tuoi Tre* at 17:20, on May 22, 2016, but was then withdrawn and deleted from the content management system of *Tuoi Tre Online*. Before the article was removed, it was copied and re-published in various blogs.¹³⁸ This practice has both positive and negative elements to it. Positively, publishing news items for just one minute is long enough for blogs to scan and re-publish them. When newspapers have scoops but are not granted permission to publish, publishing in blogs is one of the alternatives for the news to be delivered. Some blogs are anonymous and the identities of the owners are not disclosed, consequently, the authorities cannot ban them. Three versions of one cover page were also published on the principle of one-minute publishing being

sufficient for social media copying, which became a practice adopted by journalists during times of restrictions.

Negatively, the removal of content hinders journalists in playing their role in the public exercising its 'right to truth'. Nash asserts that journalism is similar to history in the way that they both 'placing facts and truth claims on the public record...[that] creates objects for future retrievals and analysis' (2016, p. 229). Once the mainstream newspapers censor what they publish or rather suppress news altogether, the audience cannot have trust in the authenticity of the news they get in blogs, especially if the blogs declare that the contents have been scanned from verified mainstream media. This causes public scrutiny and distrust, which in turn points to the inadequacy of evidence and confidence in the public debates of issues. Instant removal has become a common practice in Vietnamese journalism, particularly shown during the contamination of the sea in April and May 2016. What drove the instant removal is still unknown, maybe it was because the mass death of fish was a forbidden topic or maybe the newspapers did not have enough evidence to claim that the disaster was a fact.

As a consequence, to be safe, journalists use the reports issued by the authorities (government, police) to cover stories, rather than carry out their own investigation. Since journalists were prevented from gaining access to the shore site, they did not have photographic evidence of the massive death of fish. Instead, some newspapers used illustrated photos from the Internet, which showed massive death of fish but not in Vietnam. For example, an unpublished work of one environmental engineer indicated that the photo with the caption 'Need to find the reason for the massive death of fish in central province', published in *Nha bao va cong luan* (Journalists and Public Opinion, a newspaper by the Vietnam Journalists Association) on April 28, 2016, was a photo of fish death in Tianjin, China (Dao 2016, p. 10) (see photo 9.2). Another issue of evidence is the use of edited photos. For example, to illustrate the red tide (algal

blooming), which was supposed to be one of the possible causes of the massive fish death, the *Nhan Dan* newspaper (the mouthpiece of the CPV) published the article ‘Red-tide in Nghe An’ on April 22, 2016. In the photo, the water was red, but the wooden poles were red too (see photo 9.3). Because of this, it was argued that the red colour had been added to the photo, that the photo was a fake, and that this was therefore fake news (Green-Trees, 2016, pp. 93-94).

The image shows a screenshot of the Nha bao va Cong luan website. The left side displays the website's navigation bar with links to Trang chủ, Liên hệ, Bản điện tử, and Mobile version. Below this is the main content area featuring a large red banner with the text 'CÔNG LUẬN' and 'CỘ QUỐC HỘ KHẨU TRUNG HỘI NHÀ BAO VIỆT NAM'. A sub-banner for 'VINHOMES' is visible. The main headline reads: 'Cá chết trắng dọc biển miền Trung: Dũng đánh đổi môi trường cho phát triển!' (Thousands of dead fish wash up on Tianjin coast fuelling toxic water fears). Below the headline is a smaller text: '(NBC) Hiện tượng cá chết hàng loạt ven biển miền Trung từ Hà Tĩnh tới Thừa Thiên - Huế đã đặt ra nhiều nghi vấn về nguồn thảm họa. Chính thời điểm này lại nhắc nhở chúng ta về ô nhiễm môi trường từ công nghiệp nhất là từ sản xuất thép gây ra.' To the right of the text is a large photograph of a vast expanse of dead fish washed up on a beach. Above the photo is a caption: 'Thousands of dead fish wash up on Tianjin coast fuelling toxic water fears'. Below the photo is another caption: 'Eight days after a series of deadly explosions at a warehouse killed at least 100 people and injured hundreds more, thousands of dead fish have washed up on the shores of the northern city.' At the bottom of the page, there is a sidebar with several small images and their corresponding titles.

Photo 9.2. The article in Nha bao va Cong luan (left-hand photo) used a photo taken from an article about fish death in Tianjin, China (right-hand photo) (Dao, N.D., 2016)

Nhân Dân ĐIỆN TỬ

CƠ QUAN TRUNG ƯƠNG CỦA ĐẢNG CỘNG SẢN VIỆT NAM
TIẾNG NÓI CỦA ĐẢNG, NHÀ NƯỚC VÀ NHÂN DÂN VIỆT NAM

NĂM DU LỊCH QUỐC GIA
Hè Lặng - Lặng Việt 2016

VISIT VIETNAM
Việt Nam
Vô tận hồn cát

Kinh tế Văn hóa Xã hội Pháp luật Du lịch Thế giới Thể thao Giáo dục Xem thêm ▾

Trang chủ

Thủy triều đỏ xuất hiện ở Nghệ An

Thứ Sáu, 22/04/2016, 02:21:39

NDĐT - Từ đầu năm đến nay, một số đợt thủy triều đỏ xuất hiện khiến nước sông Hoàng Mai, thị xã Hoàng Mai (Nghệ An) lúc có màu đỏ, lúc màu bùn. Nước thủy triều đỏ xâm nhập đã gây thiệt hại và khó khăn cho việc nuôi trồng thủy sản.



Photo 9.3. The photo of a photoshopped 'red-tide' published in Nhan Dan newspaper (<http://www.nhandan.com.vn/khoa-hoc/moi-truong/item/29385902-thuy-trieu-do-xuat-hien-o-nghe-an.html>)

While mainstream journalism depended on the authorities' reports, the government did not release much evidence in the case of the massive fish death. On April 27, 2016, the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment organised a press conference about the massive fish death. The press conference was rescheduled from 4pm to 8pm, making hundreds of journalists wait, eventually taking eight minutes and with the Minister answering no question (Green-Trees, 2016, p. 26). On June 30, 2016, during the Governmental Office's press conference, the Minister of Information and Communication, Mr Truong Minh Tuan, justified why journalists were restricted from writing reports about the massive death of fish:

‘The Party and State do not have any policy to conceal the truth. Not only the People, but also the Party and State need to know the truth. It requires all ministries and local governments to involve [in seeking for the truth]. However, not long after the incident, to make the favourable condition for investigation process, we request Vietnamese journalism adhere the Press Law, reduce the volume, temporarily cease the journalistic investigation, stop any inference, and wait for the conclusion from the authorities. The requests are necessary to stop the inference which could cause obstacles or interfere the investigation.’¹³⁹

Apparently, journalism was excluded from truth-seeking practice. Journalism merely played the role of the mouthpiece, disseminating the Party's truth to the People, rather than seeking the truth itself. This is consistent with the theory of ideology of Vietnamese journalism (discussed in section 2.1.1 in Chapter Two), in which the media expert Huu Tho asserted ‘Since journalists are the spokespeople for the Party, the first and foremost truth for journalists is the Party's truth’ (1997, p. 25). The restriction was not only applied to journalism, but also extended to other institutions. A district in Ho Chi Minh City banned any document about Formosa from being photocopied (BBC, 2017).

A group of scientists from the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology (VAST) was granted the right to conduct the survey, and the VAST's full report of investigation was accessible only to the Party and the Government (Dao, 2019).

Before the ban on journalists by the Ministry of Information and Communication, some journalists tried to investigate independently with guidance from experts and scientists. For example, on April 26, 2016, VTC1 broadcast a video in which two fish were put in a bowl of seawater that, VTC1 claimed, was taken from Vung Ang Bay, near Formosa Corporation's site. The fish died after over two minutes in the water.¹⁴⁰ The experiment was not conducted in a scientific framework, and because of that, it was not certified by any lab. However, it visually demonstrated that the seawater was contaminated, which was a horror for the tourism season to come, and raised public concerns over the safety of seafood in the central provinces of Vietnam. The video was posted on the Facebook of MC Phan Anh, a celebrity. Because of that, he was invited to the live talk show '60 minutes' on VTV on the evening of May 27, 2016.¹⁴¹ On the show, MC Phan Anh was criticised heavily for sharing an uncertified experiment. However, the talk show provoked anti-VTV sentiment among Phan Anh's fans, and caused more public tension over the massive death of fish.

In the same vein, the interview on VTC on April 24, 2016 with Mr Chou Chun Fan, the head of Formosa's public affairs department, was a disaster. In the interview, Mr Chou posed the alternatives as 'Steel or Fish'. One of Formosa's PR staff said on April 25, 2019:

In 2016, Formosa Ha Tinh Steel (FHS) Vietnam copied exactly
Formosa's mother model in Taiwan, and copied how the
corporation deals with the press in Taiwan. Taiwanese press

practices in a less government-controlled milieu than the press in Vietnam.

Looking back to Chapter Four about the Song Tranh 2 hydropower plant, we acknowledge that the Vietnamese system of information is circulated vertically, i.e. organisations report up to the organisation they are affiliated with, and then the information is circulated down to the media. However, the interview on VTC with Mr Chou followed a horizontal flow of information, in which the information was circulated directly from the organisation to the media. Because Formosa is a mega-project which rents Vietnamese land for 70 years, which is 20 years longer than the maximum rental term of a regular foreign investment project, the approval for Formosa was given by both the Government and the Central Committee of the CPV. In this system, the information from Formosa to the media should have been circulated vertically up to the CPV and the Government, then vertically down to local government and the relevant ministries in the form of reports, and then to the media. By making a horizontal ideas exchange with the reporter, the Formosa PR person created a rupture in the system of vertical reports. What was said during the interview had not yet received approval from the higher-level management of FHS, and especially was not pursuant to the guidance from higher management levels in the Vietnamese Government and the CPV.

Since the Vietnamese media are often considered a mouthpiece of the authorities disseminating certified reports, the message ‘Steel or Fish?’ was misunderstood as a firm conclusion by the authorities. In a nation with over 90 million fish-sauce eaters, fish is in the DNA of people. The question ‘Steel or Fish’ caused a communication crisis unprecedented in the history of Vietnam. Protests against Formosa occurred nationwide, not only in the four central provinces, but also in almost all the big cities, and in Vietnamese communities living overseas. Arguably, this chaos had its roots in the dysfunctionality of the

media, in which journalism generates fake news, fake photos, non-professionally ‘certified’ reports, defamation of celebrities, offended fandom, and misunderstood messages, rather than providing truth and quality evidence-based arguments.

9.1.2. Social media

Public concern about the sea contamination attained critical mass when the various Facebook posts about this issue reached massive volume, numbering over one hundred thousand. To reduce the volume of sample, this chapter discusses the usage of social media of an activist, Mr NAT. From the incident in April to the end of December 2016, NAT generated 70 Facebook posts about the sea contamination and the protests against Formosa. In an interview with the author, NAT said he applied the norms for professional journalism to his Facebook posts, for example the norms of objectivity, sources protection, and double-checking (NAT, 2017). To respond to the government’s claim of natural red-tide being the cause, NAT posted a video in which an old fisherman said he had never seen red-tide in the area in the whole of his life. To protect the local assistant who accompanied the Taiwanese media delegations to Formosa, NAT kept the identity of the assistant confidential. To check the accuracy of the video, NAT built the relationship with the reliable sources living in Ky Phuong commune, near Formosa, to seek for verification of the video, before he posted the video on his Facebook. He said: ‘I try not to comment or give my opinion. I just provide facts and figures in my Facebook post, and the audience can make conclusion for themselves’ (NAT, 2017).

Parallel to the high frequency of Facebook posts, the readership of NAT’s Facebook increased greatly. Before the incident in April 2016, NAT’s Facebook posts hardly got over 100 interactions. After the incident, each of his Facebook posts attracted thousands of likes, shares and comments. As of May 2019, NAT’s Facebook had over 72000 followers. NAT said he often received notification

messages that someone was trying in vain to access his account, but the account was secured by the blue-tick, a symbol for the account of well-known person whose identification had been verified by Facebook. While Facebook was the vehicle used to communicate to the Vietnamese community, the activist used WhatsApp to contact international professional groups, such as the group for international lawyers discussing the potential for a lawsuit against Formosa, and the group for Taiwanese media.

In the previous social media-based movements, the protesters created Facebook pages or groups as the media channels to mobilise the public, for example, the page Save Son Doong, the Page Man-for-Tree. In the sea contamination incident, no such group or page was found. NAT's Facebook was a focal point for the news from the communities living around Formosa in Ha Tinh province, a 'mouthpiece' for the fishermen those were voiceless in mainstream journalism. Instead of standing behind a specific page or group, the activist used the verified personal Facebook account, which added credibility to the activist contents. During the incident, the usage of social media for activism reached the high bar of professionalism and flexibility.

Discussing a comment made on his Facebook page in April 2019, NAT said: 'Social media was not yet fully controlled [by the government in 2016], as the result, no one, no organisation, regardless of how powerful it was, can confidentially assert it can manipulate the public opinions. Any claim from the government was questioned by the public, and the public was getting more and more aware. The media power is no longer centralised [in the hands of the government] but it is decentralised, resulting in the decentralisation of power. Decentralisation is the foundation for democracy and social pluralism'.

9.1.3. New forms of documentation

At least two new forms of documentation were observed during the sea contamination public sphere. First, creative writing was a new medium for recording green concerns. A high school teacher in the centre of Vietnam, Tran Thi Lam, composed a poem 'How strange our country' to succinctly complain about the disaster. The following quote is four lines extracted from the poem:¹⁴²

It is too sad for our country, isn't it?
Silver sea, green forest, and our rice harvest
The forest was not any more, the sea had died
The fishing boats were sleeping and missing the sea waves

The poem conveyed both emotions and facts in a way that is easy to remember: the emotions of anxiety and anger at the pollution, and the fact that the fishermen were banned from fishing for over two months. The poem was read out-loud during the protests in big cities in Vietnam and overseas. Another form of creative arts was implemented when groups of artists wearing dead fish costumes performed on streets in Hue city and Hanoi. Wearing clothes printing the image of fish or sea patterns was regarded as a visual arts demonstration in May 2016.

Second, activists produced books to record the protest. This was an unprecedented practice in green movements in Vietnam. During the protest to protect 6700 trees, a group of architects proposed to collect and curate protest materials, however, they failed to produce any documents due to the huge volume of videos, photos and textual records that the public sent them (see Chapter Eight). In the movement to protect the sea, this group kept the same name they got from the tree movement as 'Green Trees'. In late 2016, Green-Trees published a book of activism, titled 'An Overview of the Marine Life Disaster in Vietnam'. The book has four chapters, recording the developments of the sea contamination, and is a compilation of journalism articles and social

media posts around the issue (Green-Trees 2016). This book was published in English and Vietnamese, and was printed outside of Vietnam and sold on the Amazon commercial website.

Books are conventional media, but publishing a book of press and social media posts is an alternative usage, and more trustworthy than mainstream journalism in this case. As discussed before, the practice of removing news articles after publishing was so common that the public cannot trust the newspapers as the archived sources of evidence for facts. However, a book, in hard-copy, that could be held physically by the audience and be considered as concrete and tangible evidence, was a better means to store the history. This book was published by an unregistered, non-governmental publishing house, and was sold on Amazon. Thus, the Vietnamese government cannot recall it, or ban its purchase. In this way, the conventional media became a new initiative in the public sphere around the sea contamination issue.

Apparently, the governmental restriction on producing and delivering publication about the sea contamination issue no longer worked when the activists used the international media channels. In March 2019, Green-Trees released a documentary film about the sea contamination, titled 'Don't be afraid'. Because of this, one of the Green-Trees members, Mrs Cao Vinh Thinh (an activist against Formosa, who was professionally trained to be a journalist and film producer) was arrested. She was released from the police station within 48 hours after being arrested, and she continued to do promotions for the documentary film. After the Cyber Security Law, the activists diversified their channels of protesting beyond social media, to the new form of books, films and artworks.¹⁴³

9.2. The involvement of political groups in the fish death public sphere

9.2.1. The political parties

Two activists mentioned in section 9.1 were both trained in special academies of the CPV. NAT graduated from the National Academy of Public Administration (NAT, 2017) while Cao Vinh Thinh was trained in Academy of Journalism and Communication. Both academies affiliate to Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, the leading training institution of politics in Vietnam, the cradle to nurture potential staff of the Communist Party. An opinion was left among the comments on the Facebook account of NAT on a post on February 18, 2019 that, from the movement for environment, there emerged some capable figures with the ability to lead to democracy. CPV planted the seeds of Communism which bloomed into the tree of activism for environment. The green public sphere had been rising as the internal needs from within the graduates of CPV's schools. Even the CPV trained persons participated in the green public sphere, let alone other groups from the spheres of activism and politics.

Among such groups, Vietnam Reform Revolutionary Party (VRRP) or Viet Tan was accused of taking the dead fish as an excuse to provoke mass protests and social disorder. According to the self-description on its website (viettan.org), Viet Tan was established in 1982 in America by a group of Viet Kieu (the Vietnamese diaspora). On its website, Viet Tan defines its mission as 'to overcome dictatorship, build the foundation for a sustainable democracy, and demand justice and human rights for the Vietnamese people'. The Police of Ho Chi Minh City concluded Viet Tan paid for people to join the protests in the city on May 1 and 8, 2016, and intended to escalate to the nationwide massive protests from May 15, to cause obstacles for the National Assembly and Local Government Election on May 22, 2016.¹⁴⁴ Viet Labour Movement or the Free Viet Labour Federation was another political party involving in the protests against Formosa.¹⁴⁵ On its website (laodongviet.org), Viet Labour declares its mission as

'to protect the rights of the labours in Vietnam', and lists some of its activities including organising strikes and protests of workers.

According to a local economic manager in Ha Tinh province, the sea pollution occurred during the a 'hiatus of political power' (HTT, 2019). April 2016 was the last month of the former local governments at cities and provinces, while the new local governments would be elected in May 2016. For example, the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources was newly assigned to the position in the same week of the sea pollution. The power transition within the CPV system in April and May 2016 was an opportunity for another political party to implement reactionary activities, including financial support for aggressive protesters, physical attacks against volunteer guards, providing foods and water for protesters, and vandalism.¹⁴⁶ Throughout the developments of the green public sphere from 2009 to 2016, it was the first time the CPV mentioned political parties as the reactionary forces that make the full use of the problematic environmental issue to conduct against the Party and state.

9.2.2. The religious groups

It was the first time the religious groups participated in the green public sphere in Vietnam. Formosa is located in a geographical area with many followers of the Catholic religion. As described in Chapter One, the activist NAT settled in a church in Ky Anh commune during the fish death in April 2016. On Sunday, October 2, 2016, around 13000 Catholics people gathered in the front yard of Formosa Plant in a church-led non-violent protest (Green-Trees 2016, p. 44). The protest lasted one day without any physical attack but it highlighted the fact that Catholics could gather *en masse* to cope up the Formosa's armed guards. Then in early 2017, the priest Nguyen Dinh Thuc, who was the church leader in My Khanh parish in Nghe An province, published an open letter to call for an anti-Formosa movement, and then organised a walk of about 5000 Catholic fishermen to submit the documents for a law suit against Formosa. The walk

was brutally suppressed, and the Catholics failed in logging a lawsuit against Formosa. Ironically, in May 2017, another government-led rally, with around 700 participants, was held in Song Ngoc parish in Nghe An province to criticise the priest Thuc. In brief, Catholic communities were major stakeholders in the protests in the neighbourhood of Formosa. The Catholics, however, were severely divided into two groups for and against Formosa. Interestingly, it was the first time the religious groups joined the green public sphere and it was also the first time that local government actively held a counter-protest against the protesters.¹⁴⁷

To manage the dynamic developments of the movements of the coastal Catholic communities, the local government in Ha Tinh province has been planning a serial of religious control programs. According to the local governor (HTT, 2019), the first program was to re-locate the communities to other areas far away from the industrial zone. More interestingly, the second program was for 'Buddhism-isation' of the area. The local government has a plan to build a Buddhism pagoda in Ky Phuong commune, Ky Anh District, Ha Tinh province, just some minutes' drive from Formosa. The church where the activist NAT stayed during the fish death month will be demolished, and the land given to build a pagoda. Formosa also has the plan to insert its facilities into the lists for tourism sites in the centre of Vietnam. In some promotion materials, Formosa maps its factories as a connecting point between the hometown of Ho Chi Minh President in Nghe An province, the cemetery of army hero General Vo Nguyen Giap in Quang Binh, and the network of Buddhism pagodas along the central provinces. As discussed in Chapter Two (section 2.3.2), Buddhism tries to teach people to respect harmony. A Buddhist pagoda in the former land of Catholics can be seen as an attempt to keep a religious balance in the vicinity of the industrial zone, and contribute to the harmony between Formosa and the local people (HTT, 2019).

9.2.3. The civil society organisations

Associations that are supposed to be established and managed by the people in fact are Party and Government-led associations. They obtain financial subsidies from the government budget, and have their human resources appointments by the Party and Government, including for the Women's Association, Youth Union, Veterans Association, Labour Union, and so on (Dang, 2006). However, during the Formosa-related green public sphere, some significant CSOs emerged and have been growing independently from the authorities. This section discusses the role of some CSOs in the Formosa-related green public sphere.

Green-Trees is a CSO established in March 2015 in the tree movement. This group raised a call on Facebook for the contribution of photos, videos and other documents with an intention of establishing a collection and curation of materials about the tree movement. However, the initiative failed due to the huge volume of materials submitted by Facebook users. During the Formosa-related movement, Green-Trees succeeded in publishing the book 'An overview of the marine life disaster in Vietnam' (Green-Trees, 2016). While mainstream journalism about the fish kill was mostly censored (see Chapter One, section 9.1), and paid-commentators manipulated the contents on social media (see Chapter Two, section 2.5), the publications of Green-Trees became the reliable additional sources of information for activists and the public. Pham Doan Trang, one of the prominent members of Green-Trees, then published several other books for the activists, such as 'Politics for the general audience' (Chính trị bình dân) in 2017, 'Handbook to respond to policemen' (Cẩm nang làm việc với công an) in 2018, and most recently 'Handbook for family members of prisoners' (Cẩm nang nuôi tù) in 2019. These books indicated the fact that Green-Trees prepared for long-term activism and was ready to fight against intimidation.

On its website (en.greentreesvn.org) Green-Trees defines itself as a CSO for the environment. Besides, Green-Trees strives to promote the state's transparency and accountability through exercising basic human rights. Torgerson (1999, p. 67) describes the agenda of the green parties in some western democratic countries as going beyond a narrowly construed environmentalism with the concerns focusing on protection of life, nature and environment, peace, human rights, workers and women's movement, and the Third World. The agenda of Green-Trees is expanding from environment to human rights, and is covering the similar areas in the agenda of many green parties. In November 2016, Green-Trees consulted with Greenpeace for advice on the long-term strategy of activism.¹⁴⁸ Apparently, Green-Trees has emerged as a political force that is similar to the international green parties and green activism organisations, with an aim to increase public participation in the green perspectives of decision-making.

The meeting of US President Barrack Obama with CSOs representatives on May 24, 2016 was a milestone for Vietnamese CSOs, in which Obama said 'Civil society organisations in Vietnam have friends in the US'.¹⁴⁹ Interestingly, journalism had a representative in this meeting. It was Mr Mai Phan Loi, the General Manager of the HCMC Law Newspaper in Hanoi, and also the General Manager of the Young Journalist Forum (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/nhabaotre/>). This is a Facebook-based forum with around twenty-seven thousand members in May 2019. Before the meeting with Obama in May 2016, the Forum served as an association for journalists, independent from the control of the government. It ran the monthly 'Vanh Khuyen' journalistic award, with financial contributions from the public and forum members. One month after the meeting with Obama, Mr Mai Phan Loi was banned from being a governmental certified journalist, due to an offensive Facebook comment about an explosion on a military aeroplane, and

then he was demoted from his newspaper and removed from the forum.¹⁵⁰ Although Mr Mai Phan Loi and his Forum did not directly make any reports about the fish kill incident, it created an inspiring sense of liberation and freedom of expression in April and May 2016.

However, it is notable that the CSOs for the working class were absent from the fish death public sphere. There are two main reasons for this absence. First, the majority of the workers in Formosa in the construction phase were from China. In 2014, Formosa had 8400 Chinese workers, hired because they can use Chinese language and understand the masterplan of Formosa which was written in Chinese.¹⁵¹ In April 2019, the number of Chinese workers was 850, about 10% of the Formosa labourers, according to the Formosa's public relations manager. These workers get married to local women and stay in Formosa's housing in Formosa's complex. They create a Chinese-speaking community in the industrial zone, who have not participated in any local protests and public sphere. The phenomenon of Chinese community around the factories also occurs in bauxite projects in the Central Highlands, which is discussed in Chapter Three. Second, the local fishermen living around Formosa migrated to other countries, mostly to Laos, to find jobs. Within one year after the fish kill, over 18000 fishermen in four central provinces were assisted to learn new work skills, change jobs, and work overseas.¹⁵² The geographical distance undermines the ability of these workers to participate in the public sphere. The Manifesto of the Communist Party asserts the role of the working class as the vanguard in the struggle against the bourgeoisie, and the major force of the communist party (Le-Duan, 1996). In the case of dead fish and Formosa, the local vanguard force was replaced by an imported one, causing the absence of the class of workers in the green public sphere.

9.3. The evolution from non-political to political politics

Before the fish death, the mosaic of the social media-based green public sphere in Vietnam consisted of non-violent and non-political movements, and was often initiated by the intellectuals. The activists in the previous movements, such as the protesters against bauxite projects, measles breakout, Save Son Doong, and 6700 Trees did not aim to overthrow the government (as discussed in Chapter Three). However, the protests against Formosa recorded violence from both sides, the government and the movement participants. From the government side, intimidation by arrests and imprisonment occurred. Some activists were imprisoned because of their protests against Formosa, namely the dissident Bach Hong Quyen who had to seek asylum in Canada after being arrested in Vietnam;¹⁵³ the doctor Ho Hai who was imprisoned for four years because of posting anti-Formosa contents on his Facebook;¹⁵⁴ Nguyen Van Hoa, a RFA reporter, was sentenced of 7 years due to drone-filming the anti-Formosa protests, which was interpreted as an anti-state move.¹⁵⁵ Violent attacks aiming at protesters also occurred in October 2016, February 2017, and July 2017, during the marches of Catholic protestors in Nghe An province to the local town halls to submit the application for a lawsuit against Formosa.¹⁵⁶ Protests on the first three Sundays in May 2016 were also intimidated since many protesters were arrested and brutally attacked (Anonymous, 2016). From the side of movement participants, online character assassination was observed in the case of Mr Vo Kim Cu, for example, fake photos to make the rumour about his residency in Canada, and satire memes against him and his family.¹⁵⁷ When he was the Chairman of People's Committee, he signed the legal documents allowing Formosa to lease the land and seaport in Ha Tinh for 70 years. Responding to the anger of the public aiming at Mr Cu, the CPV decided to withdraw all the employment benefits that he had before.¹⁵⁸ This CPV's practice of previous position demotion was applied to at least two people because of the

Formosa scandal, Mr Vu Huy Hoang, the Minister of Industry and Technology, and Mr Vo Kim Cu.

Formosa became a multi-perspective icon for Doi Moi. First, it is an outstanding achievement in economic growth. Without Formosa, Ha Tinh was among the hungriest provinces in the country. With Formosa, the economic growth rate of Ha Tinh has been over 20%, and reached over 32% in 2018, while the average rate of Vietnam was about 6-7% annually. Before Formosa, over 90% of Ha Tinh population were peasants and fishermen. With Formosa, the number of industrial workers has been increasing.¹⁵⁹ Second, Formosa is an example for the Chinese presence in Vietnam, provoking the public's anti-Chinese sentiment. The land was identified for an Indian company's cooperation but then assigned to Formosa, raising the question of transparency in bidding among business community.¹⁶⁰ The growth of the Chinese-speaking community in and around Formosa was similar to the problem challenging the national security of Vietnam as analysed in Chapter Three, section 3.1. Third, Formosa is also now a shorthand term for environmental disaster due to industrialisation. For example, local people living near the waste dumping site Da Phuoc, in Ho Chi Minh City, called it 'the Formosa of Ho Chi Minh City'.¹⁶¹

The public sphere leverages the accountability of Formosa. According to the chief engineer of Formosa, the corporation further enhances its accountability in environmental protection by adjusting its indicators of waste processing to fit the barometers of QCVN (Quality Control of Vietnam). In the case of any problem in wastewater treatment, the system automatically alerts the management, and sends the alarm reports to MONRE. The Formosa PR staff said on April 25, 2019 that from 2017, the corporation opened its factory for public visits after a long time keeping its distance from the local people. Formosa turned their water processing zones into a complex, named 'Eco-park', with several lakes, water plants, fish and ducks, making it a wildlife zone with

small creatures living vividly in industrial wastewater. It was observed in April 2019 that MONRE staffs collected the sample from the wastewater reservoir twice a day, and generated two wastewater reports per day. The reports were made available for the public. Formosa leaders discussed the possibilities of opening a cafeteria in the Eco-park, making the water processing zone into a friendly hub for visitors and an evidence of the Formosa's commitments in environmental issues (see photo 9.4).



Photo 9.4: Formosa's Eco-park, with two furnaces of the thermal power plant (right) and the coking plant (central)

Formosa was a unique case study for the issues of environmental disaster, the incapability of state-owned journalism in truth-seeking, the freedom of expression on social media, the anti-Chinese sentiment, religious conflicts, and the political groups challenging the legitimacy of the CPV. Interestingly, three years after the fish death, Formosa has become a symbol for the green consideration in industrialisation. In the latest phase of the green public sphere in Vietnam, the industrial furnaces and the eco-park fit within a photo frame. The green perspective became an un-detachable component of the industrialisation in Vietnam. Arguably, it took Vietnam a decade of dynamic

evolution of freedom of expression on social media to reach the stage of trying to balance economic growth and environmental protection desires. This pushed CPV and Doi Moi to the starting point of the second lapse of Doi Moi. At this point, development is not to be pursued at all cost. Development could only be achieved in a democratic milieu with greater integration of the green perspective to all aspects of life. ■

Chapter 10

Discussion and conclusion

This chapter analyses the formation of the green public sphere and ideological transition in Vietnam in the context of global integration during *Doi Moi*. It chronologically summarises the evolution of the green public sphere with the developments of social media in Vietnam, from blogging against the bauxite projects in 2009 to the movement against Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation that started in 2016. The chapter concludes that the conditions underpinning the green public sphere in Vietnam are the national open policy toward global social networks, the impacts of international agents and the young generation's adoption of advanced media technologies. The freedom of expression which is generated on social media encourages political pluralism and opposition forces, challenging the legitimacy of the ruling Communist Party. Journalists have been playing the role of non-political politics stakeholder by bringing the green issues into public debates using both mainstream and social media. The intellectuals are leading stakeholders in the formulation of the green public sphere. The green public sphere is based on connective collective actions which have been impeded by governmental intimidation and legislative barriers since the enactment of the Cyber Security Law in June 2018. The growing importance of internal agents fosters the return of the intellectual-based green public sphere in Vietnam.

10.1. Chronological summary of the green public sphere 2009-2018

This book has analysed the evolution of the social media-based green public sphere in Vietnam from 2009 to 2018 without any hiatus. Blogging against the bauxite projects was the starting milestone for the green public sphere on social media. The movement was initiated by the elites, and was strongly participated

in by intellectuals. The founding principle for the green public sphere in the bauxite case, and for the cases afterwards, was contentious activism, non-violence, non-reaction, and non-political politics. From 2009 to 2013, open letters, blogs and online petition emerged as the communication tools with the power to reach beyond the limits of the state-controlled media, while Yahoo terminated its blogging service and Facebook was still temporarily blocked in Vietnam. Examining how journalists worked to cover the construction of Song Tranh Hydropower Plant number 2 (Song Tranh 2) helps to identify the role of journalists in the green public sphere. Due to the state-dependent journalism management system, journalists played the role of subordinates to the authorities rather than investigators of issues and change agents. During 2010-2012, journalists used email groups for collaboration in truth-seeking. Approaching the source in groups of journalists was more effective in enhancing the source's accountability and responsiveness than journalists working individually.

The measles outbreak in 2014 was a milestone for the green public sphere. In 2014, the Facebook ban had been lifted. As a consequence, collective activities were easily connected using Facebook. It was the first time a Minister was requested publicly to resign, by Facebook users, using real names and real profiles. Responding to the public criticism, the Minister was a pioneer, among party and governmental staffs, in using Facebook for public communication. It was during the measles outbreak that the public implemented various form of social media-based activism, namely protesting by online posters, pictures, and public donation. Journalists started using Facebook sources as the primary definers, and social media entered the realm of agenda-setting. Dissident groups emerged on Facebook, and the business sector also started to participate in the green public sphere. The case study of green commercialisation at Boo Fashion Company indicates the dynamic of the business section in using social

media to convey green issues. However, since the business has its own target publics, the range of message delivery was limited to just within some specific groups, not the broad public.

The involvement of international agents ensured the success of the Save Son Doong campaign, starting from October 2014. Aiming to raise the voice of the international public to stop the cable car construction to Son Doong cave, the activists used both languages, English and Vietnamese in the protest contents. Non-mainstream, international platforms were employed for the campaigns, with international-based blogs, Facebook, and petitions in international format. Save Son Doong activist group institutionalised into a non-profitable and non-governmental organisation, and has been managing edutainment projects about Son Doong cave preservation since 2015. Since this movement, a nomenclature of 'Save ...'has been formulated for the public sphere around green issues, for example Save Son Tra was the movement to protect Son Tra mountain, Save Tam Dao was the movement for Tam Dao forest preservation.

The public sphere campaign against the cutting of 6700 trees in Hanoi in March 2015 marked the new success of the green activism. It had the involvement of many groups, such as scientists, journalists, celebrities, former governmental officials, and the business sector. However, to join the public sphere, such groups kept anonymity and declared themselves as 'the people'. By doing this, they were safe from intimidation that was often applied to the dissidents. From this movement, the activist group Green-Trees institutionalised into civil society organisations, and then started to perform as a quasi-political party. In 2016, sea pollution killed the marine life *en masse* in four central provinces of Vietnam. In the movement requesting a closedown of Formosa Steel Corporation, which was accused of discharging toxic wastewater into the sea and causing the massive fish kill, Green-Trees played a vital role in documentation of the green public sphere. While mainstream media failed in

disseminating truth and knowledge, and social media was manipulated, books and films of Green-Trees were regarded as the alternative media, providing sufficient valid information to be the material inputs for quality arguments.

The movement against Formosa brought the involvement of political parties (Viet Tan, Viet Labour) and religious groups into the public sphere. Also, Green-Trees developed its agenda shifting the focus to environmental issues, human rights, and transparency, which was the early signal of the formulation of a green party. From the movement against Formosa, the green public sphere in Vietnam changed to politics. The outcomes of Doi Moi were assessed by both economic growth and the green perspectives. With the enactment of the Cyber Security Law in June 2018, it is argued the stricter control over the use of social media could cause certain hesitation and reluctance in opinion expression among social media users. In brief, a decade of technical restriction, followed by extreme openness, and then legal restriction of social media had paved the way for the revolution of the public sphere around green issues, redefining the belief and concept of development in Vietnam, and resulting in tremendous changes in all aspects of society.

10.2. Impacts of social media on the discursive process

10.2.1. Changes in journalism

The Vietnamese media landscape witnesses the rise of pluralism and the emergence of agents for independence in journalism.

Sphere of controversy: Before the popularity of social media, especially Facebook, and because of the impacts of the Party first policy in media, the policy of consensus was promoted to maintain the stability and consolidation of society to maintain the legitimacy of the Communist Party. As a consequence, the favoured topics of Vietnamese journalism are about positivity, good people and good deeds. However, this research identifies a dramatic rise of the sphere of

controversy in the theme of media topics, emanating from green issues. Accordingly, the room for criticism of authority and negativity have been expanded.

Social media agenda-setting: Apparently, mainstream media are reduplicating the existent structure of power in Vietnamese society where the government and bureaucrats have the prominent voice in mainstream coverage, for example in the measles controversy. However, mainstream media has brought the agenda set by social media to the authorities, forcing the authorities to respond to the questions that lay people raised on social media. Mainstream media shows greater caution in reporting facts and figures from verified, powerful sources, which helps the powerful maintain their accountability. Meanwhile, lay people use social media to insert their concerns into the agenda, creating an apparent equal position for the powerful and laypeople in participating in constructing opinions and arguments for green public sphere.

Journalists engagement on social media: Journalists engage with social media in a broad spectrum, including the social media influencers, hybrid media producers and social media refuters (analysed in section 2.4).

New structures in media management: Before the popularity of social media, all Vietnamese media houses affiliate to state organisations, forming a strong dependence of journalism on the Party and State. The formal and informal processes within the structure impede the model of freelancers and Western-style journalism. The structure allows just Party and State-based professional associations, such as VJA at central level and Journalists Association at provincial and grassroots levels. Social media has changed this landscape dramatically. Many non-Party and non-State based journalists' associations have emerged on social media. There are hundreds of Facebook-based journalists associations, which could be categorised by geographic locations, by

ages, by hobbies, by the topics they cover, and even the associations of the anti-journalism people and group for sharing second jobs opportunities for journalists. Some journalist associations identify themselves as “independent from the Party and State”. Social media has indeed created pluralism in journalism by forming the social media-based professional association for journalists. On many professional social based fora, the discussions between journalists across media organisations have become highly routinised and mechanised. The arguments generated from these fora are transferred into journalistic works that improves journalism quality.

Parallel to the Party and State structure of media management, the social media-based structure has been established and enhanced both in quantity and quality. With the increasing journalists' engagement with social media, a self-regulating process has established among social media-based professional groups, which enables the media gain a rather independent status vis-à-vis the Party and State political-administrative structure. The great number of lay people in discussion on social media empowers ordinary citizens to obtain a relatively even participation with governmental officials and experts, who are primary definers on mainstream media, in constructing certain spheres of public opinion. The independent media and the inclusion of citizens in public discourse are two factors activating the correct “rules of the game” to facilitate the existence of a public sphere (Habermas, 2006, p. 420).

The social media-based opposition groups: Different versions of the Vietnamese Constitution have constantly declared the Communist Party's role in leading the State and society and being the representative for the whole nation, as Article number 4 of the latest Constitution issued in 2013 stated “The CPV - the Vanguard of the Vietnamese working class, simultaneously the vanguard of labourers and of the Vietnamese nation, the faithful representative of the interests of the working class, labourers and the whole nation...” (Government,

2013). Since the performance of the Party and State is strongly based on the principle of democratic centralism, the majority of political candidates from grassroots to central level is elected by the Party on a verified and accredited basis. As a result, non-CPV partisan forces do not exist in the governmental structure in this one-party state. The concept of opposition parties or shadow cabinets or shadow parties that exist in many political system is unconstitutional in Vietnam.

However, the power structure has radically changed in the social media era. Many social media-based groups are policy-criticising, truth-tracking, and questioning the working agenda of government offices, which mirrors the roles of the opposition counterparts in the political systems that allow the opposition or shadow Parties. Although the group members identify themselves as normal citizens who are just providing feedbacks to the public services they are using, and as such, the groups are non-political, they demand of government offices to maintain accountability and make modifications to address the problems in public services. This adds some extent of homogeneity, pluralism and competition to the realm of politics which has been in monopoly mode for decades.

In the early years of Doi Moi, the sphere of consensus was easy to be achieved among Vietnamese politicians as they are from the same Party and adhered to democratic centralism - the key principle of the Party. However, with the growing acceptability of the opposition to realm of politics, the sphere of consensus is harder to obtain while the sphere of controversy is on the rise. Journalists from BRT, QRT and VTV said the Hydropower Plant number 2 on Tranh River (Song Tranh 2) was constructible because it was before the Facebook to rise. Many construction plans launched during the Facebook era have been delayed because of the protest waves generated by Facebook groups. For example, the plan to build an electricity cable car system to Son Doong cave

has been delayed since 2014 because of the demonstrations on the Facebook page Save Son Doong. Many governmental plans, that would have been easily doable from the viewpoint of the CPV members before the social media era, have become arguable for everyone on social media. Some government plans were withdrawn under the pressure of social media users gathering together on anti-plans Facebook groups, such as the plan to host Asian Games 18, the plan to dump one million cubic meters of industrial mud in Binh Thuan sea, and many others or the plan for further construction on Son Tra Peninsula in Da Nang city.

10.2.2. Rationale for the changes in journalism

Besides the development of digital technology, Internet and mobile divides, the radical changes in journalism and society can be understood by enhancement of the communications capacity of journalists and social media users.

International media training: From the journalists' side, the professional capacity of journalists has much improved over the last decade. Although media tertiary education is still strictly government-controlled in terms of curriculum and method of teaching, media training for journalists is moving forward to international standards. Since 1997, the media training project Fojo (For Journalists) sponsored by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) has provided training in all journalistic aspects. As of 2013, over ten thousand Vietnamese journalists are on-the-job trained by Fojo.

Other countries also can offer media training services in Vietnam, including the Philippines, Denmark (Danida project), France, UK (MediaNet project), Germany (Media Talk series) and even the USA, the former enemy. International organisations also provide media training for journalists working in some specific fields, for example the World Health Organisation offers training on reporting on epidemic and traffic accidents. Compared to the Fojo projects,

media training from other countries is less intensive and is allowed to involve mostly in technical perspectives, such as design and layout, photojournalism, audio and video editing, interview techniques, multi-media production and so on. After several decades of benefitting from international training, Vietnamese journalists are on the same professional technical standards with international peers.

Financial independence: The financial investment from affluent private sector and international ventures into the media industry is also one of the agents for journalistic development, as in the case of VCCorp and Zing (discussed in Chapter Two).

Dynamic young media consumers: As of 2009, Vietnam's young demographic group (aged 15-24) accounted for 19.4% of the country's population (UNFPA, 2011). As of 2016, 40% of the total population are under 24 years old (Long, 2016). Vietnamese Millennials, or the 8x and 9x generations, whose years of birth are in the 1980s and 1990s respectively, were born after the Vietnam wars and grew up during the Doi Moi economic changes. They became around eighteen years old in the year when "Que Huong" - Home Town, the first online magazine – was launched in Vietnam in 1997. This generation got used to using social media for self-representation since they experienced the wave of blogging with Yahoo! 360° during the 2000s and then Facebook, Youtube and Instagram during the 2010s. After Vietnamese Millennials, the younger Vietnamese generation who were born after 2000 are consuming social media first, before mainstream media is introduced to them. More and more Vietnamese young people are integrating social media in many aspects of their lives. Both media producers (including journalists and bloggers) and media consumers (most of them are young people) are becoming proactive in using social media for personal and professional purposes, leading to fundamental changes in Vietnamese media landscape and society.

In summary, financial investment, international influence and the dynamic technologically savvy young generation have a causal nexus with the adoption of western-style democracy and freedom of expression in Vietnamese society. These are the central perspectives of public sphere recognition, which are the changes in democratic procedures, the reconstruction of the economy and the reshaping of society (Eckersley, 2004, p.245).

10.3. Key features of the green public sphere

10.3.1. Stakeholders of the green public sphere

International effects

Targeting international audience is a common approach in recent green protests. In April 2016, a call to sign a petition about the massive death of fish and pollution in the central seas of Vietnam was circulated on Facebook. It collected 100,000 signatures within 48 hours and was submitted to the US government before the visit of the US President Obama to Vietnam in May 2016. Protesters even invited delegations from the Taiwanese government to visit Formosa Vietnam and make the Vietnam sea disaster a top agenda item for the Taiwanese government. The involvement of international public and organisations was expected to create a pressure for faster solutions to local and national green issues.

The following example emphasises the cruciality of international effects in the formulation of the green public sphere. Many other electric cable cars have been built in Vietnam, such as Vin Pearl Land in Nha Trang, Yen Tu Mountain in Quang Ninh, Ba Na in Da Nang, and Sapa in Lao Cai. All these cable construction plans raised concerns of sustainable development. However, only the plan in Son Doong was stopped, for now at least. Like Son Doong, Sapa is located in the core area of a national preservation park, which is restricted for mass construction and tourism. The construction of the cable to Sapa, which

was launched at the same time with the plan in Son Doong, had been executed without any protest. Although the cable car in Sapa would cause the similar risk of damage to the preservation forest, as if it would in Son Doong, the cable car in Sapa was listed as an exemplary construction for the success of the 12th Communist Party National Congress. Without international involvement, the cable car to Son Doong would have been accomplished like the cable car in Sapa.

Another example of the importance of international agents is the INDC of Vietnam. Vietnam committed to cut off 8% of its carbon emissions, but also committed to cut 25% if the international institutions provided support (MONRE, 2015).

Local effects

The success of international initiatives depends heavily on the willingness to be open to, and abilities to adapt to the new things of local people. However, there are big gaps in local and international approaches. The locals interpreted international initiatives in the ways they prefer rather than in the appropriate way. Unlike the traditional local approach, which is often in top-down mode, international NGOs would like to transfer the bottom-up model of participation and decision-making. These claims are made from the interviews with local organisations and international NGOs regarding sustainable tourism development in Quang Binh province (GIZ-Staff, 2015).

In most of the cases, the involvement of local people in addressing green issues was essential and vital. The toxic chemicals dumped in Nicotex Thanh Thai, or the VeDan's discharge of untreated wastewater to Thi Vai river in 2008, for instance, were only detected by the local people. The proximity between local people and green issues, in terms of geography and endurance, makes the locals become the most suitable force to raise the issues and to seek the

solutions for the issues. However, due to the limitation in resources, knowledge and skills of the local people (for example, the ethnic minority peoples living in the vicinity of geological disturbances in Hydropower plant number 2 on Tranh River), there is very little chance for the local people themselves to contribute meaningfully to the construction of green public sphere without the involvement of a critical popular mass, that could be attracted via social media.

While the local, national and international public are separated because of resources limitation and geographical distance, social media is an essential channel to construct public concerns with green issues, looking forward to a public sphere in green issues on the global scale. With the age of social media, people can be grouped by the proximity of their interests and concerns, forming a community bound together by their concerns, not by their locality.

Indirect effects

Business sector, non-governmental and non-profitable organisations (NGOs-NPOs) are generating indirect effects in construction of the green public sphere in Vietnam. The business sector, moreover, tends to use social media indirectly, even for business purposes. Boo Fashion company, for example, separates the Fashion company from its Environmental Projects Unit. Accordingly, Boo Fashion company develops different social media strategies for doing business and addressing environmental issues. Using social media with caution and reluctance is the common pattern in the other businesses examined in this research. Being dependent upon governmental policies thwarts business sector in being directly in conflict with governmental and authorities' economic initiatives. Meanwhile, NGOs-NPOs in Vietnam have a tendency towards environmental preservation rather than actively performing activism in green issues.

Direct effects

Direct effects in constructing the green public sphere come mostly from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and non-affiliated members of the public. Being free from both the economy and the State, the CSOs and non-affiliated public can actively generate the content in the sphere of criticism. Individuals who are employees of organisations often identify themselves as non-affiliated before joining the construction of the green public sphere. In the protests against the felling of 6700 trees, up to 22 people from different organisations joined the administration board of the Facebook page “Man-for-tree”, including housewives, social activists, journalists, NGO staffs, CSO staffs, and workers, all of whom identified themselves as non-working individuals in March 2015 when they built the green public sphere discussion of this issue.

Intellectuals are the exceptional occupation among the stakeholders of the green public sphere. In order to re-affirm their claims and arguments, they often made themselves visible in green debates and often affiliated with their institutions. In blogging against bauxite mining projects, starting in 2009 until the time of writing this research, as well as in other green movements, the intellectuals are consistently in the forefront of the social media-based green public sphere.

The involvement of different stakeholders, in the end, is affected by how each stakeholder answers the dilemma of economy vs environment. Although each stakeholder can set different priorities in different periods of time, the common patterns are the following. First, the elite intellectuals are the most proactive in constructing the green public sphere. Second, the public often becomes non-affiliated with their former or current working organisations to gain the necessary independent status from the business and the State before they join the public sphere. Third, the green public sphere in Vietnam during 2009-2018 has been initiated, executed and regulated by the intellectuals combining with

the technical resources (social media platforms, languages, and websites) of international sector.

10.3.2. Connective collective actions

Collective actions cannot be done without the participation of many people who share the same thinking and motivation, or concerns about the same issues. Social media enables members of collective actions to be visible and disseminate their messages so that they can connect to like-minded people. The green public sphere in Vietnam witnesses the prominence of the following connective collective actions.

Fundraising is an extremely successful collective action on social media. The necessary condition for these fundraising successes is the popularity of the fundraisers, or the popularity of the problems that need to call for funding. The sufficient condition is that their fundraising messages reach a critical mass so that it can turn into collective actions. Facebook, with over 46 million Vietnamese users, is the platform for the fundraising campaign reach such critical mass.

Protesting has shifted to Facebook since the measles outbreak 2014. According to the Decree number 38 issued in 2005, any group meeting at public space without permission from local authorities is under scrutiny as it potentially leads to protest and demonstrations (Government, 2005). However, with flexibility in terms of time and space, cyber protests can be accessed universally at any time. On the 25th October 2017, the National Assembly of Vietnam started to discuss about the tentative Cyber Security Law, which would be passed and effective in 2018. According to the Article number 9 in chapter 2 of the Law, cyber protests would be regulated which definitely discourages the direct participation of the public into cyber protest.

Petitions became one of the popular collective actions, using international platforms, such as change.org, or Vietnamese developed platforms, such as WakeItUp.net. Even Vietnamese law and regulations had not yet regulated how the authorities respond to online petitions, the authorities could not neglect the public concerns. Personal self-disclosure of positions in controversial issues itself was the triumph of the public in gaining the right of free expression.

Voting on social media became more and more popular. In October 2017, a Vietnamese Facebook user living in Paris initiated a general election on Facebook in which social media users can nominate candidates and vote for a new cabinet of Vietnamese government. In November 2017, the newly voted, social media-based cabinet, released its first working agenda. The first working item in this agenda was to discuss the forming of projects working on renewable energy for Vietnam, reduce the dependence of the country on fossil energy.

In general, social media users were connecting to the like-minded others to perform connective collective actions. Most of these actions could not be done in physical environment because of the restriction in law and resources. Many groups started as social media-based collective action groups but then gain equal status to legal entities.

10.3.3. How Vietnamese government responses to the change

The Vietnamese government was taking measures using technology, manipulation, imprisonment and legislation in response to the changes in media and society that are triggered by social media.

Control by technology

In term of technology, there is evidence that the government has set up barriers for social media and mobile device usages to some extent in some specific

circumstances. For example, whenever social media users plan for offline protests, they cannot send any SMS or text message via mobile phone containing the term “bieu tinh” - protest. The black list of terms also includes but is not limited to “ca chet” - dead fish, “Formosa” during the sea disaster in April and May 2016, names of candidates during the general elections and name of leaders during the Party’s national congress in January 2016. Local government in Da Nang city in the centre and Dong Nai province in the South encourage their employees to use Zalo, the Vietnamese developed social media, instead of other international developed social media. Internet service is often disrupted on some special days so that the international connection speed becomes too slow for people living in Vietnam to visit international webpages. Internet service providers often claim that sharks have destroyed the Internet cable under the sea. However, it is easy to recognise that internet disruption often occurs during important Party congress or national events. Blocking SMS, encouraging the local social media platform, and “sharks destroy cable” metaphor are a miniature version of the Chinese Great Fire Wall policy. Communication via social media has been technologically moving toward the Chinese model of control.

Cyber troops

Cyber troops have been established initially in Hanoi with 900 online commentators in 2012, to manipulate opinions on social media. The cyber troops are not only employed by the government but also by big businesses. Their jobs are to interact on the internet to reinforce and support government ideology or business’s reputation by generating positive comments about their employers. At the same time, they suppress dissidents’ negative comments to disrupt the potential protests. Cyber troops scan profiles of members in Facebook groups as well as the contents they generate to detect the dissidents among public servants. In An Giang province, an official had to pay the fine of

five million VND (250 AUD) because of his negative comment “cai mat khen kieu” - “nose in the air” - under a photo of a local authority leader. In July 2017, a doctor in Hue city also had to pay the five million VND fine because he posted on Facebook that the Minister of Health should resign. Ironically, the Minister then commanded Hue city authority to return five million VND to the doctor. The term “five million dongs” has become a metaphor of warning for negative comment about authorities, as well as the confusion of the authorities in censorship over attitudes on social media.

The capture of Dissidents

Bloggers imprisonment has been never been so harsh as currently. In the first ten months of 2017, over 30 dissidents were captured and sentenced, including students, religious officials, former journalists, engineers, bloggers and even housewives who used social media to raise their voices. Blogger “Me Nam” – ‘mother mushroom’ - was sentenced 10 years in prison because of publishing her opinions on the policemen’s wrongdoing. Blogger “Me Nga” - mother Nga - was sentenced to nine years because of negative comments over injustice. Blogger “Dieu Cay” was sentenced and but then agreed to live in exile in America. Blogger “Nguoi Buon Gio” - the wind trader - stays in Germany after he won a writing grant from the German government.

Legislation reinforcement

Last but the most important is the development in legislation. The Cyber Security Law enacted in 2018 regulated cyber protests and many other connective collective activities. The Law marked the end milestone for this period of a social media-based movement in Vietnam, starting from the blogging against bauxite projects in 2009 to the protests against Formosa in 2018. As of May 2019, the Vietnamese government has a disposition to prevent connective collective actions. The admin of the Facebook group for young

journalists, journalists Mai Phan Loi, for example, has been removed from the group and replaced by an anonymous admin after Mr Loi initiated offline activities, such as professional prizes, seminars and training for members of the forum. Significantly, there is evidence indicating that authorities are imposing the exclusion of the public from the green public sphere. The local authority in Ky Anh district banned the circulation of documents about Formosa. Many universities prevent their students from joining protests.

The challenges for democratic centralism

As discussed in the previous chapters, democratic centralism is the keystone for the formulation of CPV's power. The principle of democratic centralism is regulated in the article eight of the Constitution, which affirms that it is obligatory for the Party's organisations at lower levels to execute the decisions made by the Party's organisations at upper levels (Government, 2013). The green public sphere during 2009-2018 made it impossible to execute many Party's decisions. For example, the plan to build the cable car to Son Doong cave has been postponed since 2014; the plan to cut down the trees in Hanoi in 2015 was terminated. Such plans were decided by the Party and local governments in Quang Binh province and Hanoi city. In the green public sphere, the public can form a force to stop the plans. The public can have their voice in the decisions, can discuss, revisit, re-evaluate, and re-decide what the Party had done before. This somehow gives the equal importance of the two terms "democracy" and "centralism" in the Party's principle, and makes "democracy" no longer just "democratic" – an adjective decoration for centralism. However, the green public sphere was more successful at the local level, rather than at the central government level. While the local authorities cancelled, postponed and terminated their plans in the green issues, the central government continues to conduct the plans at national level, such as the bauxite projects and the Formosa steel project. It could be concluded that the CPV's

democratic centralism had been transformed to democracy centralism at local Party and government level, and it had been seriously challenged at the national level by the 2009-2018 green public sphere.

10.4. Arguments, justification and clarification

This section introduces some critical arguments about the evolution of the green public sphere in Vietnam, followed by the author's discussion and response to such arguments.

Audience of this research may argue that protests occurred before the prominence of social media in Vietnam. However, from the beginning of *Doi Moi* in 1986 until before the blogging against the bauxite projects in 2009, mass protests, especially around the green issues, did not exist. The Constitution of Vietnam claims that citizens have the right to protest within the framework of the relevant law. The first Constitution of Vietnam in 1946 claimed that "freedom of holding meetings as one of the basic rights of the citizens". This claim remained in Vietnamese Constitution throughout many amendments. Constitution 2013, the latest version of the Constitution, states: "The citizen shall enjoy the right to freedom of opinion and speech, freedom of the press, of access to information, to assemble, form associations and hold demonstrations. The practice of these rights shall be provided by the law" (see article 25 of Constitution 2013).¹⁶² As of October 2019, the law about protests has not yet listed on the website for drafting law of the National Assembly of Vietnam.¹⁶³ The Government of Vietnam introduced the Decree 38/2005/NĐ-CP¹⁶⁴ in 2005, and then the Ministry of Police introduced the Circular 09/2006¹⁶⁵ in 2006 to regulate the practice of protesting. According to these legal documents, the Government bans the posters that criticize CPV's strategies and Government's policies (article 2.7 of the Circular 09). The gathering of more than five people in public spaces is also prohibited (article 4.1 of the Circular 09). During the 1980s, Thai Binh, a northern rural province in Vietnam, witnessed some riots of the peasants

fighting against corruption of authorities in some villages. After the protests during the struggle for national liberation during 1930-1945, and during the wars in Vietnam from the 1960s to 1975, the riots in Thai Binh was recorded as the early protest in Vietnam before the emergence of social media¹⁶⁶.

The public sphere has been moribund after some years of emergence. It is arguable that the green public sphere has been moribund because of the stricter control over social media management after the enactment of 2018 Cyber Security Law. That is not true to some extent. The green public sphere is still alive and thrives in the deeper layers. The Facebook pages established during the earlier phases of the green public sphere, such as Bauxite Vietnam, Call for Resignation of the Minister of Health, continue posting activist contents. The activists have still been using the social media-based activism tools, such as petitions, open letters, and calls for participation. However, the social media metrics change. Social media-based movements would be measured by the impacts, while the number of members, number of like, share, and comments would be less highlighted.

For example, the page Save Tam Dao (<https://www.facebook.com/savetamdao.vn/>), was established in October 2018, after the legislation of the Cyber Security Law. The admins of Save Tam Dao are also the core team members of the Man-for-Tree page. As of May 2019, the page had around 7000 members, an insignificant quantity compared to 56000 members of Man-for-Tree page. Despite its small number of participants, the page serves as an opposition force against the power that wants to convert Tam Dao forest into commercial real estate. With the stricter law, the success would be no longer assessed by quantity, but by the long-term commitments and influence of the activists. With the Cyber Security Law, it is envisaged that slacktivism would become moribund since the participants must bear more responsibility for their activist opinions.

There is an absence of the climate change movements in the green public sphere. It is arguable that the topics relating to climate change have been not much discussed throughout the book. The topic just “sits alone” in a section (numbered 7.4.3) discussing the preparation of Vietnam for the COP21. It is justifiable that the book should not neglect the topic of climate change. In reality, there was not any apparent public sphere activity around climate change during 2009-2018. According to Professor Tran Thuc, Vice President of Vietnamese National Climate Change Advisory Council, who talked in a Seminar on Climate Change on February 22, 2019 in Goethe Institute in Hanoi, Vietnam had not yet issued any specific law on climate change as of early 2019, instead climate change issues had been still regulated by the law and regulations on environment. He said this was due to the fact that there had not been many conflicts and disputes directly on climate change issues recorded in Vietnam.

When discussing the emergence of social media, this book puts an over-emphasis on Facebook. It is arguable that the book “The emergence of the social media and the green public sphere in Vietnam” discussed the movements emerged from Facebook only, and Facebook is not the equivalent of social media as a whole. It is true that Facebook is not the only social media platform used as the communication tools of the green public sphere. However, Facebook is the dominant platform. Others, such as Quora or Reddit, were introduced to Vietnamese speaking community on Facebook. In some cases, the activists used several other social media platforms, such as blogs for the anti-bauxite movement and the blog about Safari on Phu Quoc island, but they quickly converted the blog contents to Facebook contents.

Many other public spheres emerged with the rise of social media, and they have significant impacts too. With the peak of Facebook development in Vietnam (over 55 million users in 2018, as analysed in Chapter 3), there have been many public

spheres simultaneously generating impacts on politics and society, such as the movement requesting the removal of unreasonable toll-fee collecting stations (anti-BOT movement), the movement against the illegal extra-charging at the Embassies of Vietnam (Embassies and me), and the movement for land preservation and anti-relocation, etc. Each public sphere has its own distinguishing features. The Anti-BOT movement is a civil disobedience protest by drivers. The Embassies and Me legal movement is based on the participation of Vietnamese people living overseas. The movement for land and anti-relocation is about the violent resistance of land and homeowners against the authorities, namely the fights in Dong tam village, in DakNong or in De La Thanh street. Compared to other public spheres, the green public sphere is the oldest (since 2009) and influences the largest population. It is also non-violent, notionally non-political, has become a nationwide concern and forced the CPV to change its implementation of Doi Moi policy.

The green public sphere has many restraints. The author agrees with this argument. Many barriers for the green public sphere have been recorded. In terms of technical barriers, a report released by Facebook in May 2019 indicated an increase of 500% of Facebook content restrictions in Vietnam within six months after the Cyber Security Law (Pearson, 2019). The report highlighted the fact that Facebook had teamed up with the Ministry of Information and Communication of Vietnam to remove and block the access to 1,553 posts and three profiles in Vietnam in the last six months of 2018. In term of legislative barriers, Amnesty International reported that 10% of 128 prisoners held in Vietnam for expressing dissenting view were jailed for posting on social media (Pearson, 2019). The platforms themselves have many internal weak points, particularly the quantification of arguments and the algorithmic bias. For example, the platforms for petitions (change.org in the case of Save Son Doong, and wakeitup.net of protecting 6700 trees) measure their success by the number

of account users, regardless of for who the accounts represent, how many accounts each person uses, and if the account users are verified as the elites or the intellectuals or not (in the case of the bauxite project petition).

In conclusion, the decade of social media development in Vietnam, 2009-2018, witnessed the rise in discursive relations, dialogues and debates. The decade had been the implementing phase of the CPV's strategy on national development in transition to socialism, which focuses on boosting industrialisation and modernisation while protecting the environment. In reality, the industrial growth leads to many conflicts and generates negative impacts on the environment and sustainable livelihood, which ends up in protests, movements and the public's struggles. Social media served the role of a theatre for exercising the rights of freedom of speech and freedom of expression in the conflicts of industrial development and environmental preservation. By the end of 2018, with the legislation of a new law, the government can control social media platforms to some extent. However, the public and different specific stakeholders of the green public sphere have learnt the lesson of using media to interfere the policy and decision-making process. Public political participation had been more proactive and dynamic, while the consideration of the green issues has been embedded as an undetachable issue in most of the development plans of the Government and the Party. The revolution of the green public sphere was indeed a new chapter in the history of the Communist Party, in which democracy, pluralism, political diversity had been growing steadily. Understanding the green public sphere stretches out the knowledge to the future development of the nation, and the formulation of democracy in a single-party country.

Component 2 Exegesis

Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter begins by providing a brief overview of emerging social media and the green public sphere in Vietnam, as a background to understanding the research. It then explains the originality of the research, the significance of the research findings and the scope of the research. The final section of this chapter outlines the structure of the this component, the exegesis.

1.1. A brief overview

Vietnam is a country in South East Asia with a population of over 96 million people in 2018, and a total land area of 310,000 square kilometres. Vietnam proclaimed its independence in 1945, after having been colonised by France from 1862. In 1954, Vietnam defeated France in a nine-year war from 1945 to 1954. The country was then divided into two separate administered zones: the communist-led Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North and the US-supported Republic of Vietnam in the South. The Vietnam War between the North and the South began in 1955 and ended in 1975 when the Northern communist forces entered Saigon in the South (Saigon was subsequently renamed Ho Chi Minh City), and the Southern government surrendered. After the reunification in 1975, the National Congress renamed the country the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Established in 1930, the CPV led the country to the Independence Proclamation in 1945 and through the two wars of 1945–1954 and 1955–1975, and has been the leading authority over the country since the reunification of Vietnam in 1975 (Lansford, 2017).

The Vietnamese Constitution, legislated in 2013, acknowledges the absolute leadership role of CPV. Article four of the Constitution states that:

The CPV—the Vanguard of the Vietnamese working class, simultaneously the vanguard of labourers and of the Vietnamese nation, the faithful representative of the interests of the working class, labourers and the whole nation, acting upon the Marxist-Leninist doctrine and Ho Chi Minh's thought—is the leading force of the State and society. (Government, 2013)

Article four of Constitution is fundamental in justifying policies and practices in Vietnam. Two cardinal principles are embedded in this article. First and foremost, the CPV is the leader of the whole nation. The CPV has a representative board in every government organisation. These boards play the roles of decision-making and guiding the organisational management board. Consequently, all leaders in the government sector, from national to grass-roots levels, are CPV members.

Second, the CPV claims Marxism, Leninism and the thinking of the late President of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, as the ideological foundation and guidance for all CPV agenda and programs. This principle is further elaborated in Article eight of the Constitution, which affirms that the CPV governs its members and organisations by democratic centralism (Government, 2013). The model of democratic centralism was initiated by the Russian leader Vladimir Lenin in the early 20th century. In line with this model, any decision is made by the Communist Party and then implemented by the working class. Only Party members are allowed to participate in debates and discussions before the decision is made. Within any organisations ruled by the CPV, opinions of the majority have an impact on final decisions, rather than the views of the minority. After the Party has released its decisions, the working class carry out these decisions without any further argument. Democratic centralism is believed to control potential conflicts and create sustainability in organisations (Whitefield, 2018).

During the 1980s, the former Soviet Union applied the *perestroika* reform, aimed at achieving a political restructuring that would be followed by changes in the economic system. The *perestroika* reform failed in the early 1990s, causing the collapse of the Communist bloc, including the Soviet Union and other countries that had adhered to communist ideology after World War II, such as East Germany, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Albania, Hungary, Bulgaria and so on. As a member of Communist bloc, Vietnam, however, targeted changes in economics, not in politics. In 1986, the CPV's sixth National Congress introduced what is called the *Doi Moi* policy or economic reform, which is principally aimed at economic growth and further engagement with the global market. The CPV declined to make changes in the ideological grounds of communism (Liow, 2015). At this Congress, Mr Vo Van Kiet, a member of the Politburo and Deputy Prime Minister of Vietnam, stated that the mission of the CPV in *Doi Moi* was:

‘To innovate the economic management policies by removing the centrally planned and subsidised regime, amending the economic leverage policy, and formulating the planning regime aligned to the democratic centralism and transition toward the socialist market economy.’ (CPV, 2014)

Doi Moi—economic reform—has accelerated rapid changes in various socio-economic and technological aspects. These changes have helped the CPV maintain its legitimacy in leading the country despite the collapse of the communist bloc and the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Among the positive changes, it is worth mentioning that Vietnam has seen continuous economic growth despite the global financial crisis. A report released by the Vietnam State Audit Office in late 2014 ranked Vietnam as the

second-fastest growing economy in the world after China (SAV, 2014). Vietnamese economic expert Le Dang Doanh, has asserted that:

'Vietnam has survived the severe dangers [food shortage] in the 1990s, obtained food sovereignty, became an important rice and aqua-product exporter, increased the average income to enter the group of middle-income countries.' (Le, 2016)

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Vietnam has risen sharply. This was the most dynamic sector in the Vietnamese economy during the 1990s, and has contributed significantly to industrialisation and exportation (Tran & Pham, 2003).

With *Doi Moi*, the country has gradually become integrated into the global market. In 1994, the US lifted the trade embargo against Vietnam, and the two former enemies established the formal normalisation of diplomatic relations in 1995. A Bilateral Trade Agreement between the US and Vietnam was enacted in 2001. Vietnam joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1995 and became a member of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2013. Vietnam has been an official member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) since 2007 and of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) since 2016. As of 2016, Vietnam had signed and negotiated to join Free Trade Agreements with 57 markets, including the G7, the European Union, India, Japan, Korea, China, and many other regions and nations (Le, 2016).

Paradoxically, in the thirtieth year after *Doi Moi*, it has been suggested that 'Development in Vietnam, which is vastly based on natural resources exploration, cheap labour, and FDI, has reached its limits' (Le, 2016). According to Le Dang Doanh, this means there is a need to launch another reform, or a second *Doi Moi*. As indicated at the Vietnamese National Assembly Congress in early 2016, the country conceded failure in its goal of industrialisation. One of

the causes is slow reform in the heavily agricultural-based economy, which has been severely damaged by environmental deterioration, climate change and unsustainable development (Bao, 2016). Vietnam is among the countries most seriously affected by the rising sea level, which could undermine fruitful reform outcomes and render unsustainable the development of the country (Thao et al., 2014). Three decades of economic development have raised many problems in natural resources management, environmental protection and public health, resulting in many conflicts on green issues between the people, authorities and businesses.

From this point forward, the term 'green' is used to refer to environment, climate change, sustainability, and many other associated themes. Figure E1.1. illustrates the collection of words deriving from the term 'green' in the Vietnamese context. It is developed from an analysis measuring the most-used terms in the self-descriptions of the top ten Vietnamese green organisations. According to this analysis, the term 'green' in the Vietnamese context covers three major themes: the environment, climate change, and sustainability. Other topics that associate with 'green' include natural disaster, products trading and consumption, waste and water, energy and environmental-friendly technology, communities, youth, resilience, protection, prevention, campaigns to increase awareness, recycling, pollution and treatment, animals, gardens, and so on. A detailed discussion of this word cloud is presented in the section 'Conceptualisation of the green issues' in chapter one of the book manuscript, and in appendix A of this research project.



Figure E1.1: Word cloud 'The conceptualisation of green in the Vietnamese context'

It is notable that from 2019 onwards, “forest” and “forest fire” were introduced to the conceptualisation of green in the Vietnamese context since there has been a lot of fire occurring in the dry western mountainous areas in the central of Vietnam. This conceptualisation and the word cloud describe the green concept as of 2018.

The 2010s also witnessed the rise of social media. To facilitate further global market integration, the Vietnamese government repeatedly expressed a commitment to free access to internationally-based websites and social media (BBC, 2015). As indicated in the commitment of Vietnam to access to the World Trade Organisation, the connection between Vietnam and international telecommunication services, including the international internet backbone, was on an unlimited and unbanned spectrum (WTO, 2006). In the process of negotiations to access a Free Trade Agreement with the EU, Vietnam committed to allowing EU companies to have the best possible access to Vietnamese markets in four crucial sectors, of which telecommunications is a major part.

In terms of connecting to the global telecommunication service, Vietnam's commitment with the EU went beyond the commitment with the WTO and other free trade agreements that Vietnam has concluded (FTA, 2016). These

commitments were contrary to the Golden Shield policy or the National Public Security Work Information Project imposed by China, Vietnam's neighbour and communist country, which restricted people in mainland China from approaching international online media. According to Live Statistics on the internet, as of June 2017 Vietnam had about 64 million internet users or 68% of the total country population. In 2017, Vietnam ranked twelfth among the countries with the largest populations of internet users, after China, India, United States, Brazil, Indonesia, Japan, Russia, Nigeria, Mexico, Bangladesh and Germany (Statista, 2018). Estimates suggested that the number of Facebook users in Vietnam was 55 million in 2018, and that the country ranked seventh as a Facebook market, as indicated in figure E1.2 below.

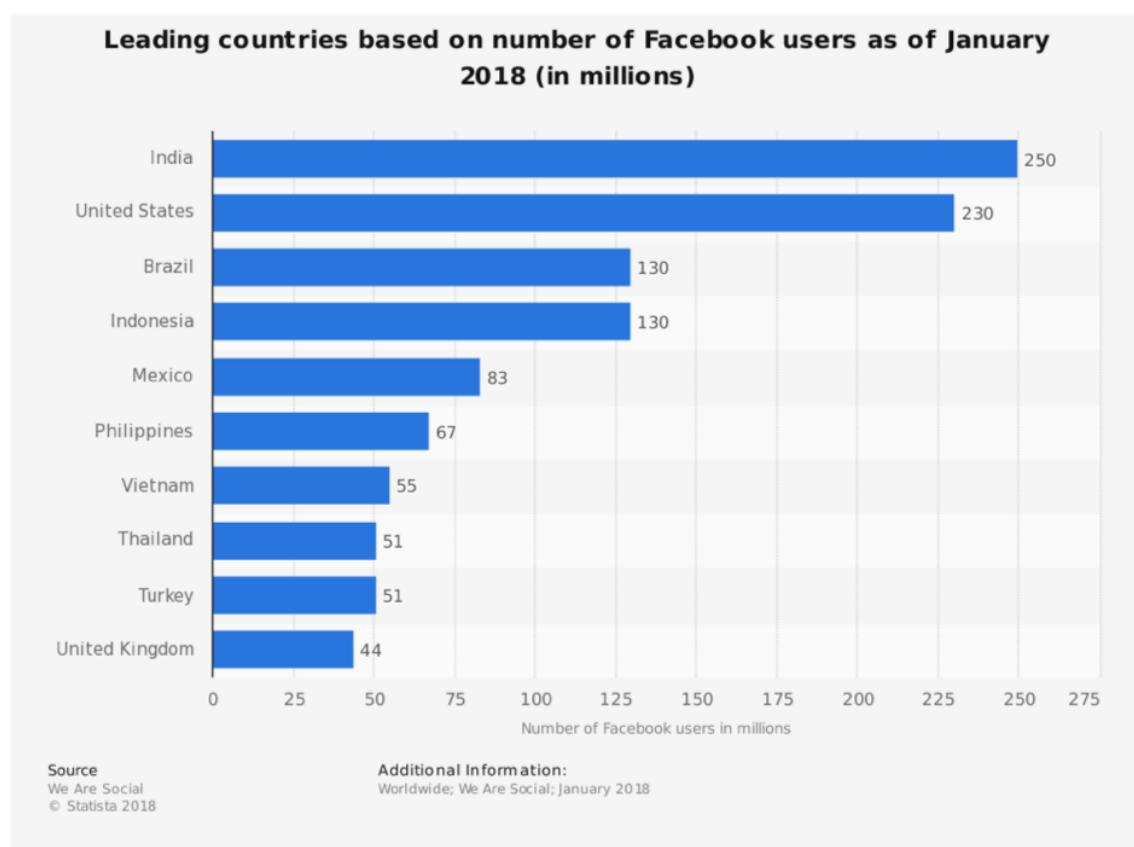


Figure E1.2: Top Facebook-using countries in January 2018 (Statista, 2018)

In this rise of social media, journalism and social media formed a dichotomy in the Vietnamese media landscape. Being owned and controlled by the

government, journalism has been interchangeably referred to as the mainstream media, the state-run media, traditional media, the Vietnamese Communist Party's media or the propaganda press. By contrast, social media has been called the public's media or 'the left-hand side' media. The term implies a contrast to journalism, which was described as 'right-hand side' media by the former Minister of Information and Communication, Mr Le Doan Hop, in an interview with *Tuoi Tre* newspaper in 2007 (Trang and Kinh, 2007). Social media has been the focus of widespread debates in the Vietnamese National Assembly since early 2016, centred on the question of whether social media should be legislatively regulated by the Press Code, as mainstream journalism is. The Deputy Manager of the Press Department, Ministry of Information and Communication (MIC) Mr Luu Dinh Phuc, concluded on behalf of the National Assembly in 2016 that the Vietnamese government should control social media and, to this end, a new law on social media performance should be constructed (Luu, 2016).

The contrast in management schemes and legislative boundaries plays a vital role in bringing about different types of content across the two media. While Vietnamese journalism promotes Party-guided content about positivity and achievements in enforcing the power of the CPV, the user-generated content (UGC) on social media has enabled an unprecedented freedom of expression. This freedom exceeds the control of the CPV and the State and, in some situations, forms an opposition force challenging the ruling Party. This force, in its turn, broadens the scope of journalistic practice by using social media as sources, covering topics that were previously restricted, and adding pluralism to media management structures. Social media has redefined Vietnamese journalism. Before the prominence of social media, all journalists were bound by the Vietnamese Press Code, which required that all journalists work for government-affiliated media houses. As such, journalists were

considered as government media servants. Together with the integration of social media in many aspects of life, a new group of Vietnamese journalists has emerged. These new online journalists can build their own audiences and directly publish on social media without an affiliation with any media house. Journalists in this category include Truong Huy San, Le Nguyen Huong Tra, Truong Duy Nhat, Pham Doan Trang, Bach Hoan, and others. Press cards, which are issued by the MIC, are no longer necessary for those who publish on social media. Throughout the 2010s, social media, has been playing an influential role in the restructuring of the Vietnamese media landscape.

In placing the conflicts around green issues at the centre of public conversations on social media, the public has generated a large volume of opinions, some of which have the potential to provoke public movements. From the social media platform, some movements have carried over into physical environments and created impacts that have produced changes in green issues. Examples include the protests against bauxite projects that started on blogs in 2009; an anti-Fan page on Facebook calling for the resignation of the Minister of Health in 2014; the campaign against a cable car to Son Doong cave, which started on Facebook in 2014; protests against the felling of 6700 trees in 2015; and the outcry after the sea disaster caused by Formosa in 2016. These examples have shown that when laypeople become proactive in taking part in discussions and debates, the core rules of democratic centralism are challenged. This has caused a rupture in the fundamental operating model of Vietnamese politics. Initiated as non-political movements, the movements at some certain points turn into political ones that challenged the legitimacy of the CPV. Any history of contemporary Vietnam cannot be comprehensive or complete without an analysis of the social media movements to address green issues.

Such movements are referred to as ‘the public sphere’, a term coined by Jürgen Habermas, a German sociologist and philosopher. In his book, which

was published in Germany in 1962 and was translated to English in 1989 as *The Structural Transformation of Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Habermas described the bourgeoisie as an emerging middle-class of rich men, initiating public debates to challenge the rules imposed by feudalism (Habermas, 1989b). Habermas argued that when private people come together as a public to discuss and debate, their quality arguments can redefine social life (Habermas, 1989b). These public debates were converted into movements from the European High Middle Ages in the 11th to the 14th century, and escalated into revolutions in Germany, Great Britain and France in the 17th and 18th centuries (Habermas, 1989b). By the 19th century, the power of money and class had achieved a new status that is referred to as 're-feudalism'. This new power dominated the debates and hindered open and rational discussions. For this reason, Habermas argues that, the bourgeois public sphere was contaminated and had faded by the 19th century (Franklin et al., 2010).

The exploration of the public sphere in Vietnamese contexts will bring new insights for theory and practice. It will contribute Vietnamese perspectives to the theoretical framework of the public sphere. And, in turn, the theory could help to construct a systematic framework for analysing the formation and development of the green public sphere operating within the complexity of Vietnamese political, cultural, technological, and media conditions. This research project aims to analyse the nexus of the two emerging phenomena in Vietnam: social media and the green public sphere. Because the public sphere flourishes on the grounds of liberty of thought and discussion that generate critical and quality opinions (Crossley & Roberts, 2004), this research investigates the green public sphere in Vietnam by examining the most prominent opinions about green issues. Such opinions are documented in news articles, website content, social media content, Facebook posts, work reports, and so on. In addition, the research draws on in-depth interviews with the

opinion generators, including journalists, bloggers, Facebook admins and media managers. In this way, the green public sphere is examined from the media production end, focusing on media products and producers, not from the consumers or the opposite end of the spectrum.

1.2. Research originality

Media and publishing in Vietnam operate under the control of the CPV and the State. Since democratic centralism is a consistent principle in all units of the Party and State, almost all the decisions and policies are in the hands of unit leaders and management boards, which are then delivered top-down to the public to follow. Topics that reflect the contestation against the authorities, therefore, are often excluded from the mainstream media. The following coverage by the media exemplifies this exclusion. In an interview in *Thanh Nien* newspaper, which was broadcast live on the 27 April 2016, the Deputy Minister of the MONRE, Mr Vo Tuan Nhan, accused the journalist of 'doing harm to the country' after the journalist asked about the cause of the massive death of fish in the central provinces of Vietnam (Phuc, 2016). Local authorities in some communes in Ho Chi Minh City, Ha Tinh province and Da Lat province imposed bans on printing and photocopying the materials about Formosa, the company that had discharged toxic waste causing the marine disaster (BBC, 2017). The leader of the Journalism Department at the CPTC, answered in an interview for this research 'For the sake of our Motherland, you should not raise questions about governmental paid commentators' (Thuong, 2017). Overall, public participation in policy-making, social activism, freedom of expression and the public sphere are restricted topics in the Vietnamese mainstream media, as well as in academic literature.

Internationally, the previous studies of social media and green public sphere in Vietnam have dealt only with separate cases of green issues. For example, Marston's study (2012) examined the expansion of civil society in protesting

against bauxite mining projects. Nguyen (2017) investigated environmental activism in the Save Son Doong campaign and Vu (2017) looked at the tree movement. These previous studies did not analyse across the cases to generalise about the bigger picture of the emerging social media and the green public sphere in Vietnam. By contrast, this study chronologically reviews 11 cases of the green public sphere emerging on social media from 2009 to 2017. It covers the many facets of the development of the green public sphere, including politics, socio-economics, culture and media. It examines the involvement of multiple stakeholders from local to international levels, in the three sectors of government, business and non-government organisations. Moreover, the study explores both government media as well as the social media platforms that the activists and dissidents are employing to form the green public sphere. I interviewed people from two sides: government officials and the activists protesting against them. This diversity in research participants creates a balance in points of view, contributing to the comprehensiveness of the whole project.

Together with the research comprehensiveness, the distinguishing characteristics of this research are presentational format, methods and particularly the research findings, which are discussed in the following chapters.

1.3. Research significance

Research on social media and the green public sphere in Vietnam is very timely. In 2016 the National Assembly of Vietnam initiated construction of new legislative frames to control social media. In addition, decentralisation in media management structure, international integration and global concerns about green issues are new contexts that indicate the urgent need for research on social media practice and theoretical models. As a result, this research has the potential to validly influence policy-making decisions in the Vietnamese media industry.

In terms of theory, this research offers significant insights into the conditions of the green public sphere, the levels of engagement and activity of different stakeholders in the formulation of the green public sphere, and the justifications for the stakeholders' engagement in the green public sphere in Vietnam. This contributes to our understanding of the theory of the public sphere in the context of a developing, one-party state country in the digital and social media era.

Who can use this research? This reflexive analysis of the people working in the green public sphere is essential for journalists who are reporting on green issues, activists using social media to address green issues, policy-makers, scientists and NGO staff working in media management and green issues. The research will help them acquire the big picture of the media landscape, as well as the green movements that arise on social media, then self-analyse their work and make the appropriate adjustments for their professional performance. This research provides them with solid theoretical foundations to construct sound arguments about the green public sphere in Vietnam.

One of the possible implications of the research is that it can serve as an historical document about Vietnamese politics and society from 2009 to 2017, a period during which Vietnam witnesses unprecedented movement in using social media to express concerns about growing tensions on the topics of the environment, climate change and sustainability. This research provides facts, figures, narratives and stories that are discussed objectively and independently. Many other documents report based only on either government sources or dissidents' sources. For example, the government's official report about the sea disaster in 2016, which was released on June 30 2016, highlighted efforts taken in recovering from the disaster and Formosa's compensation to the victims of the disaster, while neglecting the protests calling for the closure of Formosa. In contrast, the report 'An overview of the marine life disaster in Vietnam', printed

in the USA in 2017, provided by Green-Trees, a civil society group, emphasised the viewpoint of dissidents and the misery of the people in the disaster areas.

Moreover, as discussed above, by early 2018, most of the studies available investigated just one case study of the green public sphere. A comprehensive investigation about the bigger picture of the green public sphere in Vietnam, therefore, is still lacking and justifies the accomplishment of this research.

Overall, this research will reduce the paucity of academic literature about the green public sphere in Vietnam. This study records an historical period of the green movement that is neglected and restricted by the Vietnamese mainstream media. The research will help journalists, activists, policy-makers, scientists and NGO staff to formulate quality arguments on media, freedom of expression and the green public sphere. The study provides new perspectives about social media in Vietnamese political and social contexts to help understanding of theories about the green public sphere.

1.4. Scope of the research

1.4.1. The author's position

The facts, figures and stories included in the research were selected on the basis of providing meaningful truth to the audience, regardless of any media guidance from the CPV, authorities or employers.

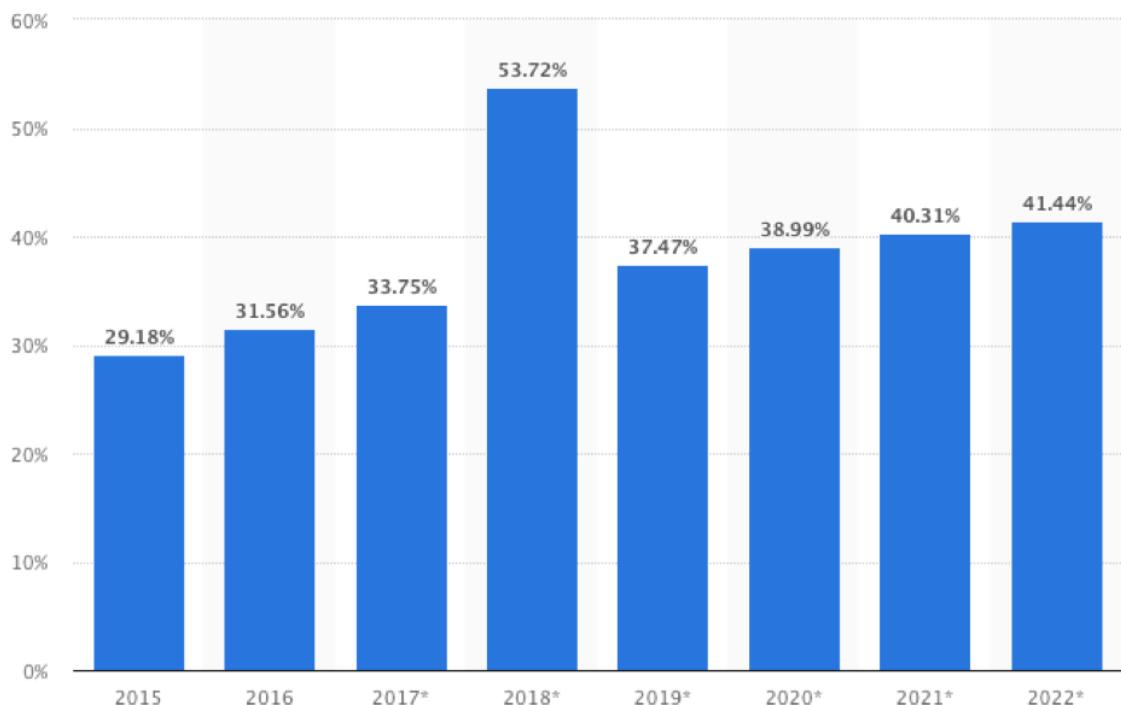
Although I have been associated with organisations and online or offline groups, the purpose of these associations was to collect data, including facts and opinions, for the research. For example, I have used my Facebook and Twitter accounts to join fan-pages and social media activism groups. However, I am neither a supporter nor a critic of such pages or groups. Whenever contacting the page and group admins, I identified myself as a PhD candidate in Journalism and declared that the purpose of my membership was to collect data for research. I sent the *Explanatory Statements, Consent Forms and the*

Questionnaires approved by Monash University's Human Research Ethics Committee to admins of these groups the first time I contacted them. After completion of the research project, I withdrew my membership of the fan-pages and groups.

1.4.2. Research time and space

This research examines the formation of the Vietnamese green public sphere under the influence of social media. As the result, the starting and ending dates of the events selected for this research are marked by milestones in the development of social media in Vietnam. There are two significant milestones for social media: July 13, 2009 and June 12, 2018.

On July 13, 2009, the blog platform Yahoo! 360° went out of service. After that, social media users scattered to many other platforms such as Multiply, Wordpress, Opera or Blogspot, before they gathered together on Facebook (Quinn & Kierans, 2010). This milestone marks the end of the Yahoo! 360° and the blogging phenomenon on that platform. Before Yahoo's closure, the phenomenon reached its peak in 2006 when *Vietnamnet* e-newspaper nominated the 'writing blog' as one of the ten advances of information and communication technology in Vietnam. Strong evidence indicates occasional technical blockages of Facebook in Vietnam from 2009 to 2012 and of some important events for the CPV after 2012 (Gallup, 2015). After the removal of technical blockage on Facebook, the number of Vietnamese Facebook users increased exponentially. The popularity of Facebook reached its peak in 2018, when Facebook penetration in Vietnam reached 53.72%. However, Facebook penetration was estimated to drop in subsequent years, as indicated in the figure E1.3.



**Figure E1.3: Facebook usage penetration in Vietnam from 2015 to 2022
(Statista.com in January 2018)**

On June 12, 2018, Vietnamese National Assembly passed the law on Cyber Security. According to the law, Vietnamese government can control the data of social media service including Facebook. The police can easily trace the identities and social media activities of Facebook users. Therefore, dissidents would no longer be able to remain anonymous when they perform activism on Facebook. Vietnamese government discouraged the use of Facebook by introducing Party- and government-run social media platforms from 2019. For example, VCNet, a social media platform run by the CPV was launched in July 2019¹⁶⁷. The Lotus, a social media platform run by VCCorp was launched in September 2019¹⁶⁸.

At the same time, Facebook was involved in a scandal that required it to make radical changes itself. An UK based company, Cambridge Analytica, through a Facebook app *thisisyoursdigitallife*, had scraped data of 87 million Facebook users. Based on this data, political communicators tailored their

political advertising so that message matched the psychological feature of individual voter. Users joined the ‘delete Facebook’ movement in March, which called for users to abandon Facebook, accusing it of being a platform ‘for fake news, foreign interference in elections, and hate speech’. Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook, personally apologised for the inadequate protection of users’ privacy. He had to answer two inquiries by the American Congress in April 2018. A range of possible technical improvement were discussed during F8, the Facebook Developer Conference in May 2018. For the first half of 2018, Facebook was on the threshold of another round of development, especially in terms of privacy protection technology and policy. With the accumulated reasons (the government’s discouragement of Facebook using in Vietnam and the scandal of Analytical) may result to the predict of a drop in the number of Facebook users in 2019, and the slow increase in the number after 2019 (as showed in the Figure E1.3).

With such key developments within Facebook in Vietnam and the world, the scope of time for this research was from 2009 to 2018. The nine-year time frame is marked by the end of Yahoo! 360° blogging service and the end of the prevalence of Facebook. The distinguishing characteristic of Facebook’s development in Vietnam within this timeframe was freedom. From 2009 to 2018, Facebook was free from major technical interference and legal restrictions and was much less controlled than it would be after 2017 when both the Vietnamese government and the Facebook company changed their policies towards social media. These conditions nurtured the practice of using Facebook for expression and activism purposes, which was greatly restricted in state-run media.

Since green issues accelerated in seriousness in the same time frame, using Facebook to express green concerns became a common practice. This research analyses the green issues that were discussed prominently on Facebook from

2009 to 2018. The green issue events and their locations are illustrated chronologically and geographically in Appendix M.

1.5. Structure of the exegesis

Although the two thesis components are separate, in different formats and writing styles, they are complementary components in the academic purpose of my research. While the findings and discussions are presented in the creative component, the research contexts and procedures, justification, explanation, subjective evaluations and consideration are synthesised in the exegesis. The exegesis consists of five chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, overall evaluation, and conclusion.

This chapter, Chapter One, has provided an overview of the Vietnamese political system and social and economic conditions, as well as the media landscape, consisting of the government-controlled mainstream media and the less controlled social media. This chapter has also introduced the timeframe for the research (2009 to 2017) and outlined the nine locations in Vietnam of the green events analysed in the research.

Chapter Two presents a critical literature review, reviewing arguments on the two themes of the green public sphere and social media in Vietnamese contexts. The chapter explores theories and concepts about the construction of the green public sphere in the global context and in Vietnam. It also reviews the contrast between social media and mainstream media and the contrast between social media practices and Vietnamese traditional cultural values. Based on this theoretical discussion, the chapter identifies the gaps in the literature on social media and the green public sphere in Vietnam, and subsequently justifies the research questions. The chapter then briefly discusses the justification for the selected case studies.

Chapter Three explains and justifies the qualitative methodology which was applied in this research and explains why I selected content analysis and in-depth interviews as the two main methods. The chapter describes how the data was collected and processed, the sampling strategy and the professional ethical considerations to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. All the data, including the news articles, blog posts and spreadsheets that were used for coding, the codebook, interview transcripts, interview explanations and consent forms are separate from this report but can be submitted upon request. Demographic information about research participants, excluding their names and affiliated organisations, are sketched in the appendix of this report.

Chapter Four evaluates the empirical research of the case studies. It compares literature reviews about the public sphere and the green public sphere in Vietnam, highlights the similarities and differences between the theories of the public sphere and the findings about the green public sphere in the Vietnamese context. This chapter draws out the research findings from across the case studies, provides suggestions to the government, journalists, media managers, media trainers of activists in environmental, sustainable and climate change issues, officials in development sectors, and other key stakeholders in the green public sphere. It reaffirms the contribution of this research in generating further knowledge about social media and the green public sphere in Vietnam in particular and in transitional countries in general.

Chapter Five concludes the exegesis by highlighting the limitations of the research and identifies possible avenues for further research into the social media-based green public sphere in Vietnam. ■

Chapter 2 Literature review

This chapter discusses the theoretical developments of the public sphere and the green public sphere in the world and in Vietnam. The literature review about the Vietnamese state-owned journalism and the developments of social media in Vietnam should have been presented in this chapter. However, because journalists are the primary target audience of the book, the literature review about journalism and social media is presented in the Chapter Two of the book manuscript together with the discussion and commentaries about the unique characters of the Vietnamese media landscape, and is not repeated in this chapter.

2.1. The public sphere

The concept of the public sphere is introduced by the theorist of the Frankfurt School, German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas. The Frankfurt School comprised the researchers of the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt on the Main River in Germany, which was founded in 1923 as an adjunct of University of Frankfurt. They constructed the critical theory, analysing the roles of large corporations and monopolies, technology, the industrialisation of culture, and the decline of the individual within capitalist society. Since the Nazi Party rose to power in Germany from the early 1930s, many scholars of the Institute sought refuge in the USA, and the Institute became affiliated with Columbia University until 1949. Jürgen Habermas was a prominent scholar in the Institute from the 1950s. He has been postwar Germany's leading philosopher and social thinker. Jürgen Habermas's influential theories include the public sphere, communicative action, and modernity. These theories have been shaped through historical West Germany

political events, and post-World War II helped to re-orient German political thought and culture toward the liberal-democratic model (Specter, 2011)..

Habermas describes the public sphere as the confrontation with authority and the formation of democracy through rational and free communication. Constructing the public sphere is a standard of democracy in which the public have free access to information, rights to form political organisations and deliberation (Gitlin, 1998, p.168). The public sphere does not directly govern but influences government in an indirect fashion through the communicative opinions cultivating from provoked debates and disagreements (Torgerson, 1999, p.161).

In the book published in Germany in 1962, and translated to English in 1989 as *The Structural Transformation of Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Habermas describes the bourgeois public sphere as the fundamental driver for transition to democracy in Europe in the eighteenth century. The bourgeoisie is made up of an emerging middle-class of rich businessmen, coming together to discuss and debate the rules imposed by feudalism (Habermas, 1989, p.27). With the development of the Enlightenment, people had more opportunities to meet at bourgeois salons, balls, banquets, theatres, libraries, coffee-houses, and so on, where they freely exchanged opinions to criticise the authorities, recognise their mutual interests and their common identity. This space is “a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to this domain is open in principle to all citizens who may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicise their opinions freely” (Habermas, 1989, p.231). Their opinions and arguments expanded both in quantity and quality so that they confront the authorities, such as the established church and the monarchy. This confrontation then converted into movements, and escalated to many

revolutions in German, Great Britain, and France in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century (Habermas ,1989, p.xvii).

By the nineteenth century, the power of money and class had grown to a new status that Habermas describes as re-feudalism. This new power dominated the debates, hindered the open and rational discussions. Moreover, when the public can gain certain satisfaction in their political interests, they often shift their concerns toward economics, doing business, and consumption. Because of that, the bourgeois public sphere was contaminated and faded by the nineteenth century (Franklin, Hamer et al., 2010, pp.220-221). However, when the authorities manipulated the physical public spaces that were used for opinions exchanges, the independent mass media, emerged as a forum for objectively facilitating the free public opinions and gradually took the role of shaping the public sphere. From the late twentieth century, internet and social media, with their wide ranges of sources and views, have marked the mushrooming of public opinions and confronting arguments that leads to another generation of the public sphere.

The central task of this research is to apply such notions of the public sphere to analyse what happened in Vietnam in 2009-2018. In the Habermas-described European society in the eighteenth century, the bourgeoisie gathered together since they recognised their own interest in doing business, and to advance those interests. Similarly, in Vietnam, during 2009-2018, the public gathers in social media groups and pages to express their concerns of the green issues. For examples, the parents of measles children in the measles outbreak in 2014 used Facebook to inform each other of the new measles cases, and mobilise the fundraising for respiration aid equipment for children hospitals. During the protests against tree felling in Hanoi in 2015, the protesters gathered together to make the treemaps and protect the trees. While the bourgeoisie used physical places, such as ballrooms or coffee houses, for opinion exchange, Vietnamese

people took advantage of social media as a free and open virtual public space to deliver their ideas. The challenges to feudalism and capitalism in the classic theories of the public sphere were similar to the challenges to the one-party state with its industrialisation-prioritised policies.

One of the typical conditions for the public sphere in Vietnam was the emerging social media as an oppositional force to journalism. Journalism in Vietnam is controlled by the CPV, and serves as the mouthpiece for CPV's organisation. To this end, journalism promotes the contents of consensus, harmony, positivity, and achievements to create the sustainable environment for carrying out the CPV's vision in industrialisation and modernisation, which is analysed in detail in the Chapter Two of this book. On the contrary, reporting on social media first and foremost serves the public interest. Particularly, in the research participant NAT's story of staying in Ky Phuong's church to report the massive kill of fish, NAT identified himself as the "reluctant reporter" (NAT, 2017). While the press-carded reporters did not fulfil their professional duties, citizen reporters naturally adopt assignments serving the public's interests. It helps the victims of the green traumas speak out about their stories. They helped the other people know about the situations, based on which, they can have evidence and data to form quality and critical opinions, arguments, and debates. In their turns, these social media users participate in the decision and policy-making process. Social media users, in this way, stimulates democracy in the one-party state.

The social media challenges the professionalism of journalism in Vietnam. Journalism should be "the production of contemporary facts and records" and as "the contemporary modalities that produce history as maps of meaning for the present" (Nash 2016, p.225). However, the propaganda function of Vietnamese journalism makes it report the environmental disasters in ways that reinforce the legitimacy of the CPV. The story in the fishing village

on May 1, 2016, is an example for this practice. The reporters stopped reflecting the facts of the polluted seawater, and more seriously, some reporters produced the illusions that the seafoods were safe. In this case, journalism produces the “alternative fact”, a term coined by the authority of the USA President Donald Trump for the facts that the authority wants the public to accept. Journalism in Vietnam failed to provide facts and meanings during the green traumas. In this situation, social media rigorously plays the roles that journalism should have played in recording the contemporary, providing evidence by photos and images, interviews and stories from the grassroots, and then constructing the foundation for understanding the meaning, forming knowledge, and influencing the political realm.

The same points apply to the accountability of journalism. Journalism shares its power with social media in challenging the authorities to answer the public, and in fact-checking the answers. When the Deputy Minister of MONRE refused to answer the reporter of Thanh Nien newspaper, social media users kept asking and repeating the reporter's question until the MONRE replied in a press conference. The authenticity of the present and the past is another typical characteristic of journalism. However, with quite a few technological aids, social media can produce more understanding of the time and space, or the contexts for the knowledge. The public sphere in Vietnam does not only challenge the leading role of the Party, but it also challenges the professionalism of journalism, leading to a sharp separation between the mainstream, state-run journalism and the citizen social media reporting. As the results, audiences of different types of media construct different, and sometimes opposite understanding, knowledge, and beliefs, causing serious social conflicts.

Poster (Schirato, Buettner et al. 2010) argues that public opinions on the internet space tend to be mediated and for mediating. This characteristic could place social media in a paradoxical position. On the one hand, it serves as the

platform for greater freedom of expression. On the other hand, the opinions on social media could be manipulated. Technological barriers are set up to reduce the accessibility to social media. Censorship is also a common practice both on e-newspapers and social media. For example, according to the data collected on the Facebook Group “Young Journalists Forum”, during a sea disaster that occurred in the central sea of Vietnam causing the massive death of fish, from April to June 2016, at least thirty news articles about the Formosa disaster were removed from online newspapers. Paid key opinion leaders, cyber troops, the army-based ‘47th force’, the ‘three million dongs’ commentators, and ‘paid likes’ or ‘astroturfing’ were the new jargon arising in the milieu of increasing manipulation of social media in Vietnam. Legislative barriers were also obstacles for the free flow of expression on social media. Social media users were arrested and sentenced because of their opinions violating the Articles number 79, 88, and 258 of the Penal Code, which were changed to numbers 109, 117, and 331 respectively from January 2018. The Vietnamese Cyber Security Bill requiring all service providers on the Internet to keep users’ data in Vietnam, that could turn the internet into an intranet like it is in China. The quality of public opinions on the Internet, and on social media, in particular, was heavily influenced by how the authorities and business powers control the media. Thus, it is essential to consider both positive and potential negative aspects of the public opinions arising on social media of the country.

2.2. The green public sphere

Green public sphere, as the combined meanings of “green” and “public sphere”, could be considered as the open public arguments about green issues to solve problems arising from the green issues. Throughout her book, Eckersley (2004, p.245) asserts the green public sphere is recognised in four perspectives: (i) the appearance of constitutional renovations; (ii) the changes in democratic procedures; (iii) the reconstruction of economy; and (iv) the

reshaping of society. Eckersley affirms the green public sphere is absolute crucial in facilitating the broad cultural shift toward an ecological sensibility, and she compares this with the bourgeois public sphere, that Habermas introduced, facilitating the shift toward the widespread diffusion of liberal market values.

The revolution of the green public sphere in Vietnam resonates with that of China. Yang and Calhoun, in their paper analysing the green public sphere of China concludes that “the constitution of a Chinese green public sphere depends crucially on citizens and citizen organisations and on their creative use of the internet, alternative media, and the mass media” (Yang and Calhoun, 2007, p.230). In this paper, the green public sphere in China starts from the technological perspective of the green issues, and uses the well-structured platforms of books, scientific journals, journalists’ fora, scientific websites, and so on. The green public sphere in China focuses on technical and communicative angles, so it is argued that it should adopt more neutral terms such as “public space” or “social space” rather than the “public sphere” (Yang and Calhoun, 2007, p.213).

In Vietnam, since social media was open and much less controlled, it became the primary platform for the public sphere in general and the green public sphere in particular. Initially, the green public sphere in Vietnam dealt with non-political issues, such as the construction of mines or cable cars, the cutting down of trees, the measles outbreak, the fish market, and so on. In its dynamic development, the green public sphere evolved to politics when it demanded government resignations and legislative changes. Especially, the protests against the Cyber Security Law and the Bill on Special Economic Zones, are typical political movements. The Cyber Security Law, that controls social media as China does, is an attempt of the Vietnamese government to deal with the public sphere in its transition from non-political to political issues. The

green public sphere in Vietnam during 2009-2018 has developed in multifaceted dimensions. It would start from the public health issues, as it was in the measles outbreak. It would be initiated from consumption of the daily life commodities, such as the clothes and coffee for the youth in Boo Fashion Company. It would arise from within the community of trekkers and cave discoverers, many of those even do not plan to travel to Son Doong cave, but still sign in the petition to stop the construction in Son Doong area. It would begin as small as an emotional social media post of a housewife, and which then attracts the involvement of 22 think-tanks from various Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), to protect the tree in Hanoi. From public health, consumption, tourism, conservation, youth, women, global-local community, and many other dimensions, the green public sphere emerges. Thus multifaceted green issues transform public opinion to an extent that influences politics, democracy, the state, and the changes within the CPV.

As Calhoun concludes “A public sphere adequate to a democratic polity depends upon both quality of discourse and quantity of participation” (1992, p.2). The green public sphere is dependent on the quality of public opinions about green issues, which have been expressed on the state-controlled mass media and journalism, and more importantly, on social media. Facebook and other platforms are competing with journalism in offering spaces for rational-critical discourse. However, social media has more advantages in stimulating greater openness to free popular participation. In addition, the quantity of participation can be examined through the increasing engagement of the informed public in the green issues. Another note is that the core questions about the public sphere stress “the issue of rational, critical debate and the questions of from whence it came, whether it was ever reality as much as ideal, and why it declined” (Calhoun, 1992, p.3). With this theoretical guidance, the research investigates the green public sphere in Vietnam by analysing its initial

conditions as of 2009, the people and organisations that were involved in the green debates, the capacity of each key stakeholder in the green debates, the impacts of the arguments in the policies, the changes in politics and democracy, and the conditions that cause contamination in the green public sphere in 2018.

Calhoun's theoretical analysis of the public sphere is rather Eurocentric. When it is examined in Vietnamese contexts, it is strongly evidenced that there have been radical changes in policymaking and implementing because of the green public sphere. For example, the cyber protests against the cable construction to Son Doong cave have caused the postponement in the construction plan since 2014. Anti-fan groups emerging from social media against the Minister of Health, the Vietnam Embassies in foreign countries, and the Ministry of Transportation have functioned as 'counter-ministries', creating an unprecedented political pluralism in this one-party country. While the traditional media ranks journalists by the level of professional seniority, social media has re-classified them based on how much attention they can create on Facebook. Social media has reshaped the media landscape by the way it promotes an open and free public access to public debates and conversations. This, in its turn, provides the larger volume of ideas and opinion inputs for the formation of the public sphere. Vietnamese political regimes and authorities maintain their positions, which is different from the Arab Spring movements. However, the green movements emerging from social media have created a rupture in democratic centralism, the operation principle of the ruling communist party. They significantly construct new beliefs and broaden the viewpoints for the nation in the way that is different from what CPV constructed.

2.3. Research questions

The literature review highlights the significance of research on the emerging social media and the green public sphere in Vietnamese context. From the literature analysis, the following research questions are proposed.

1. Why social media enables the formulation of the green public sphere in Vietnamese context?
2. How social media and Vietnamese journalism has covered the green issues?
3. What are the roles of different groups of stakeholders in the green public sphere in Vietnam?
4. What are the political changes in Vietnam under the impacts of by the green public sphere?
5. What are the changes in Vietnamese journalism under the impacts of the green public sphere? ■

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter explains the epistemological view of the author and details the methods adopted in the study “The emerging social media and the green public sphere in Vietnam”. It delineates the procedures and steps the author followed to explore both the phenomena and materiality of social media as a new medium for green public sphere. A large part of this chapter provides rationales for the two methods content analysis and in-depth interview, and describes how the author ensured the research validity and ethical concerns when conducting this research, such as the sampling, coding, data analysis strategy, the selection of research participants, the research merits, safety of the researcher and research participants against the cyber-attacks when conducting online interview, and so on. The last section of this chapter introduces the recent tools and techniques that emerged after the author had finished collecting data for this study that could be considered for use in future research.

Marshall McLuhan, with the statement “The Medium is the Message”, proves that “the content of any medium is always another medium” that can “amplify or accelerate existing processes” (McLuhan, 2003, p.203). The medium is the transduction between the organism and the environment that constitutes life, or the exteriorization of the living, the selective actualization of the environment, the creation of a surplus of significance. The medium, as Hansen stresses, has the role of facilitating the occurrence of epiphylogenesis or human’s evolution culturally (Hansen 2006, pp.299-300). From this analysis, it is inferred that in order to study a medium, researchers should consider what content (or message) the medium delivers, and more importantly, what kind of medium the content (or message) becomes, and what existence has been

accelerated by this content and what evolutionary potential it creates for human beings.

However, Hansen (2006, p.298) argued “the shift from message to medium never fully takes place...but is more of an expansion in the scope of hermeneutic analysis to include the material-technical support for the message”. He asserts the techniques don’t determine the situation because it depends on the cultural ideology. Similarly, McLuhan believes “the latest approach to media study considers not only the “content” but the medium and the cultural matrix within which the particular medium operates” or the total environmental situation in which the medium exists (McLuhan 2003, p.204). Therefore, a study about a medium should cover the study of the environment surrounding the medium, including the cultural, technological and other contexts.

Understood in this way, content and context are the two primary elements for an understanding of a medium. As well, another research point of a medium is the roles that the medium plays in accelerating an existence or creating change and evolution in life. This study examines the production-end of the media, not the consumption-end. It explores the content patterns in each media and the underlying contexts of meaning described by the media generators. In this sense, for the study of social media as a medium for green public sphere, the two main research methods are content analysis and in-depth interview, which will be elaborated as followed.

3.1. Content analysis

Content on social media and journalism were qualitatively and quantitatively described. Comparative content analysis would help to identify which media is taking the lead in reporting and creating public sphere around the issues. According to Frey et al. (2000, p.237), content analysis is one of the

dominant methodologies widely employed in mass communication research and has been developed in two approaches: quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

Riffe et al. (1998, p. 20 cited in Frey et al., 2000 p. 237) defined quantitative content analysis as:

the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, in order to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption.

Using this approach, the researcher will identify in the selected texts the occurrences and enumerate the frequencies of categorised themes (for instance ecology, security, economics ... in case one; and vaccination, disease prevention, political resignation, donation ... in case two) and sources (for instance authority, bloggers, scientists, citizens, journalists ... in case one; and doctors, parents, authority, facebook users, citizens, journalists ... in case two). This quantitative analysis of content could help to "reflect cultural patterns of groups, institutions or societies; reveal the focus of individual, group, institutional or societal attention; and describe trends in communication content" (Weber, 1990 p. 10, adapted from Berelson, 1952).

Weber (1990, p.11) asserted that "the best content-analytic studies use both qualitative and quantitative operations on texts", arguing that quantitative analysis of texts based on frequency counts rather than socio-historical reality may be misleading. Qualitative content analysis is attribute-based, which helps researchers focus on the meanings associated with messages, not on the number

of times message variables occur. The qualitative researcher focuses on the characteristics of languages used in the selected text, with attention on the political, socio-economical contextual meanings of the text. The aim of this is to achieve the goal of qualitative analysis as “to provide knowledge and understanding of phenomenon under study” (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p.134). From this researchers identify the dominant ideology in the text to understand how ideology works within a society’s culture (Brennen, 2012, p.202). As the qualitative content analysis was defined by Hsied and Shannon (2005, p.1278) as “the subjective interpretation of the content”, it is important that the researchers understand the context of the interpretation process, and have strong insights regarding the historical, cultural and economic relationships that exist between a text and a specific society at a particular place in time (Brennen, 2012, p. 199). In this study, the author strives to be cognisant of the social environment of the text to elaborate the different layers of meanings, the contradiction in statements, counter arguments and the hidden messages.

Comparative content analysis techniques in some specific areas of communication, such as news and journalistic practice, can be identified as putting an emphasis on the application of content analysis techniques to compare messages (Rossler, 2012 p.6). Content analysis comparisons were classified into three types: messages originating from different cultures, countries and systems with different functions (Esser and Hanitzsch, 2012, p.6). Functional comparison, for example, is comparing the public service and commercial broadcasters, the workflow of offline and online newsrooms, or the content generated by social media users and marketing organisations (Esser and Hanitzsch, 2012, p.6). Similarly, comparing social media content and journalism coverage about the different green issues is comparative content analysis between different functional media.

One of the advantages of comparative research is that it is “valuable, even indispensable, for establishing the generalisability of findings and the validity of interpretations”, allowing us to “test theories across diverse settings and evaluate the scope and significance of certain phenomena, which itself is an important strategy for concept clarification and verification” (Esser and Hanitzsch, 2012 p. 4). In my research, the comparison of social media and journalism content helps to identify the themes that obtained high frequency on one medium but were absent in the other medium, indicating which medium has the dominant role in creating public concern about green issues.

Data collection for content analysis

The procedure of content analysis involves selecting texts, determining the units to be coded, developing content categories, training observers to code units and analyzing the data (Frey, Botan et al. 2000, pp.239-243). The major steps of the content analysis are elaborated as followed:

Selecting texts: To examine which medium can generate the greater concern of the public; as the result, the researcher selects the contents that gained the most attention of the public. With this criterion, the content will be selected from the following outlets:

From mainstream media:

- VnExpress: vnexpress.net On the top banner of its site, this online newspaper has advertised itself as the most read Vietnamese news site, as of June 2019.
- Tuoi Tre Newspaper: tuoitre.vn One of the top circulated daily printed newspaper in Vietnam, with strong liberal modes of practising journalism. All coverage on VnExpress and TuoiTre Newspaper with the key terms relating to the analysed events (such as “bauxite” in 2009-2010, and “measles” in April-May 2014, “Song Tranh 2” in May 2014 - May 2015, “Son Doong” in May 2014 - May 2015) were archived for content analysis.

- Nhan Dan newspaper: nhandan.org.vn, The Communist Party's newspaper, delivering the official point of views from key personnel from the Central Committee of the Party and the State. Nhan Dan's newspaper views were used as juxtaposition to the views in other newspapers and social media.
- International, local or ministerial newspapers: in the case study that required comparisons between newspapers at international, national and local levels (Eg. Save Son Doong, Safari Phu Quoc, the measles outbreak), the researcher selected specific international, local newspapers and the newspapers run by the specific ministries to compare with the coverage of VnExpress, Tuoi Tre and Nhan Dan.

From social media:

- Boxitvn.blogspot.com: all blog entries about bauxite in 2009-2010 were analysed and compared to the bauxite coverage on VnExpress and TuoiTre newspaper.
- On the following facebook pages: the texts (including notes, statuses, photo captions...) that received over 1000 interactions (like, share and comment...) were archived for content analysis.
 - Facebook page that called for the resignation of the Minister of Health: <https://www.facebook.com/ytevietnam1/>. All posts in April and May 2014 are analysed and compared to the coverage on VnExpress, TuoiTre newspaper, Nhan Dan and Suc Khoa va Doi Song (a newspaper of the MOH).
 - Facebook page Save Son Doong: [https://www.facebook.com/NoCableCarInSon Doong/](https://www.facebook.com/NoCableCarInSonDoong/) The posts which were uploaded from October 2014 to the end of 2015 were analysed and compared to the coverage on VnExpress and TuoiTre newspaper.
 - Facebook page Man-for-Tree: <https://www.facebook.com/manfortree/>. The posts which were uploaded from March 2015 to the end of 2015

were analysed and compared to the coverage on VnExpress and TuoiTre newspaper.

- Other Facebook posts relating to the environment and Boo fashion company, Facebook posts about Formosa on the Facebook account of NAT were scanned and skimmed to identify the themes of the posts.

By the end of 2017, 402 news articles and social media posts had been selected for content analysis. After the enactment of the Cyber Security Law, several Facebook posts were set to private and made inaccessible. As of June 2019, the number of news articles and social media posts used in this study were 397. Please refer to Appendix L for the details of all selected items of content. The spreadsheet (Excel) used for content analysis is uploaded and now available on Figshare (the platform to share research data) for public access. The URL to the data set is listed in Appendix L.

Sampling of comments

Comments in this context refer to the readers' opinions listed chronologically under each post on social media, and after some news articles. Because I selected the posts with over 1000 likes, shares and comments for analysis, the volume of comments was extremely large. For the event of the measles outbreak, all comments were analysed. For other events, to reduce the number of comments for analysis, the following sampling strategy was applied:

- Any news article or social media post with less than 20 comments: analyse 100% of the comments;
- Any news article or social media post with 20 to 50 comments: analyse 50% of the comments, select the first comment from every two comments;
- Any news article or post with 50 to 100 comments: analyse a 25% of the comments, select the first comment from every four comments;

- Any news article or post with 100 to 200 comments: analyse 10% of the comments, select the first comment from every ten comments; and
- Any news article or post with over 200 comments: analyse 5% of the comments, select the first comment from every 20 comments.

The Ministry of Information and Communication issued a ban on Tuoi Tre's website from July to October 2018. After the ban was lift, Tuoi Tre newspaper removed all social media users' comments from the previous news items. The analysed comments were archived before they were removed in 2018.

Coding

"Content analysis stands or falls by its categories" (Berelson, 1952, p.147). This statement emphasises the essential requirement of developing appropriate descriptive categories to code messages embedded in the selected contents. Once researchers have identified the units of analysis according to the physical features or meanings, they will develop the categories into which units can be classified (Frey et al., 2000 p. 241). A codebook has been constructed by the researcher to match the categories with definitions and explanations. Appendix K is the compilation of the codebook.

Next step of content-analytic procedure is training coders to analyzing the data. To ensure the intercoder reliability, Frey et al. (2000, p. 115) suggested the content should be analysed by two or more individuals who are "blind" to the purposes of the study, using the same codebook. If their codings are highly related (showing 70% agreement or more), then it is considered reliable. Inter-coder reliability is enhanced when coders provide their arguments and reach to agreement to chance. I trained one of my colleagues in Vietnam to be my co-coder. The co-coder is employed because of her journalism practice background, ability in understanding both English and Vietnamese, familiarity with the methodology and immersion into the context of selected cases. The co-coding is

bound by the terms declared in an agreement between the coder and co-coder to ensure the validity and confidentiality of data. I provided face-to-face training for the co-coder in 2015 and continued discussion with the co-coder online. The content was coded twice, once by me and the other by the co-coder. The intercoding result was tested with the reliability coefficient of over 70%.

Another reliability and validity consideration of this research is the equivalency in comparative content analysis. According to (Rossler, 2012, pp.460-463), equivalence can be constructed via a common system of collecting representative samples, designing equivalent measurement units, and applying the consistent coding and encoding procedure. In this study, the contents of social media and mainstream media in each case are comparable in the themes of topics, the use of sources, the attitudes in the comments, the length (word-count), the time of being published. This strategy has been applied throughout three events of the study: bauxite, measles, and 6700 trees. The study of Save Son Doong analysed the location of social media users who commented on the Facebook page. In the study of coverage about Song Tranh 2, Boo Fashion Company, and Formosa the data was mostly taken from in-depth interviews.

3.2. In-depth Interview

The author analysed the content to explore the occurrence of certain themes and topics on social media and conventional media; meanwhile the underlying reasons for this occurrence was explored by consulting with those involved in the generating the contents. In-depth interviews with key stakeholders answered the questions about why they select which media to deliver facts and opinions around the green issues. Frey et al (2000, p.273) provided a definition and functions of qualitative in-depth interviews as follows:

“Qualitative in-depth interview ... uses an unstructured format consisting of open questions. Researchers use interviews to understand particular social

phenomena by developing intimate familiarity (Brenner, 1985, p.148) and a detailed, dense acquaintanceship (Lofland, 1976, p.8) with interviewees. They want to understand the other person's inner-view, comprehending the essence of an individual, his or her emotions, motivations, and needs (Chibam, 1996, p. ix).

The length of an in-depth interview with an informant was often within one hour. Most of the face-to-face interviews use semi-structured formats, which, according to Frey et al. (2000, p.277) enabled the inclusion and exclusion of more or fewer questions according to the interview contexts and the prompt answers of interviewees. The lists of questions for semi-structured interview is in Appendix I of this thesis.

Whom to interview

Warrent (2002, p.83, cited in Brennen, 2012, p.28) holds the view that qualitative interviewing is heavily influenced by a constructivist theoretical orientation, which considers reality to be socially constructed. From this perspective, interviewees are seen as essential meaning-makers rather than passive conduits for retrieving information. Hence, researchers relied on interviewees as the key informants "who can enlighten researchers on what and whom he or she would know" and "who can suggest people to talk with, make introductions, propose tactics for collecting information, collecting information, and react to collected data and tentative interpretation" (Murphy, 1980, p.78 cited in Frey et al. 2000, p.274)

In this study, three key stakeholder categories who were directly involved in the creation of the analysed contents were interviewed, including:

- Bloggers and Facebook page admins: who posted entries or status about the green issues;
- Journalists: whose content on mainstream media has been selected for content analysis; and

- Others, including media managers, public relations practitioners, environmental engineer, business people, NGO staffs, who have primary information of the analysed green issues.

Selection of participants

From November 2014 to April 2016, invitations were sent via messages to all admins of all the selected social media and to the journalists who were assigned to cover the environmental topics of Tuoi Tre and VnExpress Newspaper. The journalists, then, introduced me to those who were directly involved in generating the coverage relating to selected case studies. The journalists also introduced me to NGO staffs or businesspeople with relevant information to my research. As of June 2019, I have conducted interviews with 35 people, two of them were interviewed twice. Please see Appendix J for the list of interviewees, with the details of where and when the interviews were conducted and the main topics of the interviews.

Invitations were sent to other potential participants together with the consent forms and explanatory statements (See the Appendix A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H for the full list of consent forms and explanatory statements for this study). Some of the research participants signed in the consent forms and sent them back to me. Other participants just provided their oral agreement to participate in the interview and refused to sign in the consent form. None of the anonymous participants returned the signed consent forms, which is understandable since they wanted to keep anonymity.

During the in-depth interviews

Thirty-five interviews were carried out as of April 2019: 27 face-to-face interviews, six interviews via phone calls and emails, and two interviews via Facebook text messages. To explore the complexity and nature of meaning, the in-depth interviews were based on a semi-structured questionnaire, which were sent to the participants before the face-to-face interview to allow time for preparation of the details for answers. Follow-up questions were

raised during and after the interviews for clarifications, examples and details. During the interview, sometimes the researcher and participant visited the websites, online-newspapers and Facebook pages to read the content that the participants were talking about. In general, the in-depth interviews were natural sequences of conversation where the participants described the contexts, backgrounds and reasons for the content generation while the researcher asked semi-structured and follow-up questions.

Not all interviewees allowed audio recording, and I didn't record all the interviews. I made about 11 hours of audio recording, which has been transcribed for analysis. When the interviews were not audio-recorded, I took notes while listening or right after the interviews. Interviews via phone had notes taken and sent to the participants for amendment after the interviews. The data taken from the in-depth interviews were in the form of text, which was analysed and then verified. The significant views and opinions of participants were quoted in the text to illustrate research points. The data from in-depth interviews was inductively presented to enable the theoretical conclusions. In the book manuscript, the names of the participants are anonymous; however, a small identification (for example the initial letters of the interviewees' names) was used for each participant so that the audience could understand information sources.

3.3. Some lessons learnt for future research

Technical consideration for content analysis

Since the beginning of the content analysis process in November 2014, I have been using a spreadsheet (Excel) template to fill in the details of the items for content analysis. I analysed the content about the measles outbreak first, using colour codes to differentiate types of sources. In 2016, two changes were made in the template. First, the colour code was replaced by the number code. Second, each news and social media post, previously presented in multi-rows,

was described in one row only. This change made the row for one item longer, but it allowed the spreadsheet to be imported to content analysis programs, such as SPSS and Nvivo. In the data set on Figshare, the analysis of the news and Facebook posts about the measles outbreak look different from the other cases.

If I were to conduct the same study in 2019, I would consider using apps for content analysis. When I started the study in 2014, I selected Facebook posts manually, whichever posts reached over 1000 interactions (like, comment and share) on the selected Facebook posts were added to the sample for content analysis. In 2017, I was introduced to TrISMA - Tracking Infrastructure for Social Media Analysis, a tool developed by Queensland University of Technology (QUT). TrISMA requires users to pay fees and apply for QUT's ethics clearance. This tool analyses the content in the English language, and thus, it cannot be applied to my study, which has been working with Facebook posts in the Vietnamese language. I consulted with technical experts in Vietnam and was introduced to Social Media Command Centre (SMCC). This tool helps to detect all the social media contents around a selected set of keywords, it also helps to analyse the nuances of each unit of contents. If I can do so again, I would work with an app developer to design my app for this study. In doing so, I would do the content analysis manually for several sets of text, and then the machine could have to continue the analysis by itself.

Building trust with research participants

It is essential to assure confidentiality and anonymity for those who are dissident bloggers and Facebook admins. Because of many intimidations against them, such as being arrested, attacked, and defamed, I considered them as vulnerable participants in this study and sought to protect them from any possible physical or emotional harm. Article 38.4 in the Vietnamese Press Code (Government 2016) requires journalists to disclose the identification of sources

when the chief procurators of cities and provinces issue the warrants. Therefore, in the scenario of being requested to disclose, I would have to reveal the identification details of whom I interviewed. To avoid this scenario, I did not request to meet the anonymous social media users in person, and did not ask any question that may lead to the disclosure of their identities. Instead, I contacted them by sending texts to their social media private message boxes. The admin of the Facebook page Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health also advised me to communicate via plain texting, and refused to open the attached files that I sent. He explained that he was afraid that the attached files would contain virus, hoaxes and trojans enabling the traceability.

Although most of the journalists agreed to be audio-reordered, some of them answered thoroughly only when the audio recorder was off. Particularly during the interviews with journalists reporting about the hydropower plant on Tranh River number 2 (Song Tranh 2), of which I hardly recorded the answers because some of them refused to be recorded or would have kept quiet. Since it would cause troubles for these journalists when their opinions are published, I use such opinions for off the record, background information about Song Tranh 2 journalistic coverage without direct or indirect quotes. Some people rejected the proposals for interviews, especially the high-ranking staffs of ministerial offices. I contacted many times with hundreds of emails exchange and phone calls to the communication department of the MOH. However, many attempts did not result in an interview with the Minister of Health, who is the first among the government leaders to launch a Facebook page. Another unsuccessful attempt was the visit to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in Ho Chi Minh City in September 2015. Although the department staff treated me well with a very friendly lunch, they did not answer questions about how they engage in the INDC of Vietnam to the COP21.

It was time-consuming building mutual trust between the author and interviewees. Particularly in the interviews about Formosa, the first meetings

with scientists, local authorities in Ha Tinh province, and Formosa staff in the whole last week of April 2019 were just for making a rapport and asking questions. The actual answers came later during May to October 2019 via phone calls and messages. I was conscious that the invited research participants needed to verify who I am, like the way I verified if they were the appropriate sources for the study. For the purpose of verification, I pro-actively constructed a self-introduction on Facebook, with my photos in Monash university campus, the articles that I author being published on *Tuoi Tre* newspapers and Vietnam Journalists Association's magazines throughout the years, the family photos, and particularly my writings and photos on the Academies I affiliate to. According to one of the local authorities in Ha Tinh province, who was in charge of inspecting Formosa Ha Tinh Corporation, the authorities and their cooperation only accepted a meeting with researchers from Communist Party's schools. I started my job at the top politics training school of the Party in early April 2019, and it is the condition for the interview and the visit to Formosa Ha Tinh in the last week of April 2019. Once the mutual trust was built, it was easier for the frequent follow-up interviews with Formosa people.

Before that, during 2016-2017, I also did construct the trust with prominent activists against Formosa. Being open to both sides of social movements takes time and effort, and it was worthwhile for doing research. I can contact the activists to ask for their comments and opinions on the new developments of the movements; for example, I contacted the activists, admin of Save Son Doong cave many times to get the updated details on the cable car construction plan. Sometimes, the research participants contacted me to notify me of the movements; for example, I got a notification on Facebook about the protests of fishermen who occupied the Formosa premises on October 2, 2016.

In conclusion, this chapter summarises the process and procedures of conducting this study. I explain why and how I have been applying content analysis and in-depth interview to collect data for the research. I also discuss

the ethical perspectives in conducting the research and suggest the changes in methodological tactics and techniques for future research. ■

Chapter 4 Evaluation

This chapter presents the findings for five research questions. It discusses the attributes of social media in creating the green public sphere, identifying the roles of different groups of stakeholders in the green public sphere. The chapter also emphasises the multi-faceted development of politics, society and journalism under the impacts of the green public sphere. By comparing the literature reviews about the public sphere and the reality of the green public sphere in Vietnam, this chapter highlights the similarities and differences between the theories of the public sphere and the findings of the green public sphere in the Vietnamese context. It reaffirms the contribution of this research in generating further knowledge about social media and green public sphere in Vietnam in particular and in transitional countries in general. Finally, from the study outputs and impacts, potential avenues for further research are pointed out.

4.1. Why social media enables the formulation of the green public sphere in the Vietnamese context?

In the administration system of Vietnamese organisations, the flow of information runs vertically from the top managing units down to the lower level units. Social media, in contrast, is constructed horizontally, in which peer-to-peer communication removes the gaps in the actual social status of social media users. Social media inserts the horizontal network of equal users into the traditional vertical network governed by the CPV. This creates the complexity and diversity in society and enables the radical changes in how people receive information and knowledge, leading to the crack in the democratic centralism. Blogging against bauxite was the earliest example of such changes. Before the anti-bauxite movement, the CPV played the absolute role in decision-making, and the CPV's decisions were communicated down to be implemented by the

organisations at the lower levels in the system. Blogs provided platforms for the elites to disseminate counter opinions and arguments against the bauxite projects. For the first time the disagreement between the top CPV leaders was publicly presented. In the later movement to protect 6700 trees in Hanoi, a group of about 40 people from all walks of life gathered to form the admins' board of the Facebook page Man-for-Tree. They equally performed the role of facilitators for the movement, in which the initiatives emerged from the public and implemented by the public, rather than being decided from top-down.

The user-generated content (UGC) of social media refrained from censorship by the authorities. The content about protests, demonstrations and negativities, as a result, could be published freely on social media. It is also acceptable for the UGC to be produced outside the parameters of professionalism. Besides, many technical aids facilitated the media production and distribution on social media, namely the techniques of Livestream (live broadcast), share, content promotion, page analysis (on Facebook). This enables nonprofessionally trained end-users can become media producers on social media platforms. The use of social media is mostly free of charge unless the users opt to upgrade to customer-tailored service (in some platforms for blogging). Moreover, before the legislation of Cyber Security Law in 2018, the use of social media had been regulated by relatively easy legal terms, according to which it was not compulsory to trace the identities of social media users. Such attributes enable the independence of social media since its usage goes beyond the control of censorship, the professional criteria, budget and legal constraints. This encourages the massive use of social media for social life communication, as well as for the freedom of expression about green issues. 55 million Vietnamese people use Facebook as of January 2018, hundreds of thousands of Facebook users joined the protesting Facebook pages, including Bauxite Vietnam (8700 members), Call for Resignation of the Minister of Health

(124 thousand members), Save Son Doong (215 thousand members), Man-for-Tree (56 thousand members), and Green Trees (16 thousand members) as of June 2019.

With such attributes, social media in Vietnam in 2009-2018 played the roles of a free and open domain for public opinion. Social media, particularly Facebook, has been performing similar roles to that of the bourgeois salons, banquets, libraries, coffee-houses, and so on, as Habermas describes in the formulation of the bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth century. The green public sphere in Vietnam started from the third decade after *Doi Moi* had been formulated on the social media platform, especially on Facebook from 2014 (with the measles outbreak as a milestone marking the use of Facebook for movements on social media) to 2018. However, the number of participants in social media around green issues may be vast in number, but the attention for green issues is short-term and potentially deficient. It sometimes causes so-called slacktivism among social media users. For instance, the attention of Facebook users to the pages Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health lasted merely 16 days, from April 17 to May 3, 2014. The metric for social media usage in this period was largely based on quantitative measurement. The impacts of social media contents were recognised by the number of interactions on the surface, such as shares, likes, comments, views, and followers, rather than by the deep layers of meanings. As a consequence, there observed the phenomenon of government-based and business-based paid online commentators and cyber troops, posing the threats of information manipulation, such as in the case of Formosa and the sea disaster.

4.2. How social media and Vietnamese journalism has covered the green issues?

Vietnamese journalism is state-owned and state-controlled, so as a consequence, journalism conveys the messages top-down from the government

to the audience. Vietnamese journalism is dependent on governmental leaders, experts and reports as its primary defining sources. 15% of the sources on *Tuo Tre* newspaper and 19.4% of the sources on *VnExpress* newspaper for the green issues were from the government. To create a sense of harmony and social stability for economic development, the theme of conflict was vastly neglected and avoided on Vietnamese journalism. 41.4% of the sources on *Tuo Tre* and *VnExpress* did not propose conflicts in their opinions and arguments. In most of the cases, particularly in the case of reporting of the Hydropower dam number 2 on Tranh River, journalism performs as the propaganda mouthpiece for the authorities, rather than seeking and reflecting the truth as such. Journalism should have provided evidence for decision-making in green issues. However, since journalism heavily relied on confirmation from the authorities, it has been slow and passive in providing news about the green issues.

Social media, in contraposition, is a domain for the general public. The coverage of green issues on Facebook by Vietnamese users reflects more emotions than evidence. It sometimes creates pressure to redirect the authorities' decision on the green issues, for example, to stop the construction of a cable car system to Son Doong cave, or stop the tree-cutting in Hanoi in March 2015. However, social media can be manipulated for political purposes. Together with the heavily top-down control over journalism, the manipulation on social media can cause chaos in the political and social arena. One example is the coverage of the sea disaster caused by Formosa in 2016. Photos of the massive fish death were published on journalism for the purposes of illustration for the fish death. However, such photos were taken from the internet without verification, and they were not the photos taken in Vietnam.

Protesters use fake photos to create posters for their anti-Formosa protests. For example, a Vietnamese doctor published his opinion the essay title "Vietnam mass fish kill isn't simply an environmental disaster", on *AsiaTimes*,

on May 13, 2016, using a photo of the dead fish but not in Vietnam. *AsiaTimes* then removed the unverified photos but the photos were re-published in another news site, (for example the site Agora dialogue). The fake photo on *AsiaTimes* was used for the image on the posters in the protests in Ho Chi Minh City in May 15, 2016, (see the photos of protesters holding the fake photo on an AFP's picture in this link (https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fish-deaths-vietnam-press-freedom_b_10744496.) An academic paper presented at a conference at Cornell University used fake photos of massive fish death (the photos were removed from the paper in June 2019), and its authors had to make an apology for that. Another example of using fake photos of dead fish in academic research is the paper presentation of Prof. Edmund Malesky. The presentation for the paper titled *Fish or Steel? New Evidence for the Environment-Economy Tradeoff in Developing Vietnam*. Prof. Malesky then apologised for using unverified photos. Malesky's apology was posted on Facebook of the Vietnamese environmental engineer Nhat Dinh (Hanoi) on June 22, 2019. Journalism coverage about the fish death provided wrong evidence for protesters and wrong in-puts for researchers.

It is the matter of who launched the discussions about green issues that influences how those green issues are covered. In the movement against bauxite mining, the social media users were the elite intellectuals, whose opinions were politics- and science-centric. In the movement against the construction of the cable car to Son Doong, the targeted public were the young international adventure trekkers, resulting in the use of English as the prominent language in the movement materials, and the use of photos and art on T-shirts for protesting messages. The anti-Formosa movement was reflected from the political activists' viewpoint, causing the politicalisation of the green issues. Among green issues, only the matter of Hydropower dam Song Tranh 2 was confronted from the viewpoint of journalists. For this reason, together with the

fact that Facebook was not so popular in Vietnam in 2010 when the Song Tranh 2 was built, the journalists-led confrontation against Song Tranh 2 construction did not reach the general public.

4.3. What are the roles of different groups of stakeholders in the green public sphere in Vietnam?

The intellectuals formed the most proactive group in leading the green public sphere in Vietnam. Intellectuals were the exception among the stakeholders of the green public sphere. To re-affirm their claims and arguments, they often made themselves visible and identifiable in the green debates and often affiliate with their institutions. In blogging against bauxite mining projects, starting in 2009 until the time of writing this research, as well as in other green movements, the intellectuals were consistently in the forefront of the social media-based green public sphere. Because of their academic abilities, the intellectuals had evidence-based arguments for the confrontation against the authority in the green issues. Intellectuals also had the ability and skills to facilitate the collaboration between civil society organisations to address different green issues; for example, the Facebook page protesting against tree-cutting in Hanoi also protested against Dong Nai river filling in another city. The intellectuals were flexible in terms of choosing platforms for green movements. In the movement against Formosa, the intellectuals shifted from using Facebook to publishing books and documentary films, which requires certain sets of qualities including high level of knowledge, skills and professionalism. The non-intellectual groups did not have the qualities required to lead the green public sphere.

The international agent is a very important factor in the green public sphere in Vietnam – in some cases, international agency is a must. Without the internationally based media platforms, the green public sphere would not have formed. Such platforms include social network Facebook, website for online

petition Change.org, the website for Save Son Doong campaign with the host server located in America, the blogging platform that a UK zoologist used to disseminate news about the Safari in Phu Quoc, and the blogging services for the anti-bauxite movement. The engagement of international organizations in the green public sphere ensures success in addressing green issues. For example, Son Doong cave is UNESCO-recognized, and it has international heritage status, which was one of the reasons why the activists chose Son Doong to protect. Meanwhile, cable car systems were built in non-international tourism sites, such as in Ba Na and Fansipan. Especially, the financial support from international institutions becomes the specific condition for Vietnamese commitment in addressing climate change issues, namely if the international community support financially, Vietnam will reduce the glasshouse gas emission to 25%, compared to just 8% as proposed in the INDC (MONRE 2015, p.2).

The young dynamic demographic of Vietnamese population was the big group to respond to green issues. They are the target group of environmental campaigns of companies (such as Boo Fashion Company) and actively design edutainment campaigns on green issues (such as the virtual reality film-making project to replace the actual trekking into Son Doong cave). Among the admins of the social media pages for the green public sphere, teacher Pham Toan, the founder of bauxite blogs died in June 2019, at the age of 88; while the others were in their 20s when they launched the pages. One of them was in the Forbes' 30under30 list (30 eminent people under 30 years old). The Millenia of Vietnam, those were born after *Doi Moi* and grew up during the international integration, possess a set of savvy internet skills, was and will continue to be the proactive group to address the green issues. They are also the pioneers in promoting the consumption of green commodities, and have the mindset for being environmentally friendly.

In the later phases of the green public sphere, from 2014 to 2018, many and various occupation groups entered the green public sphere. They are scientists, architects, engineers, artists, and teachers and so on. To minimise the risk of harm to their careers and personal safety that could arise from being publicly associated with cyber protests, they abandoned their occupational identities and kept themselves anonymous. For example, 40 people joined the groups of admins of the Facebook page Man-for-Tree as citizens, although they are well-trained intellectuals holding high positions in their organisations. Some of them adopted the common identity as “the people”, like in the case of the protest against tree felling, the former Vice President of Vietnamese Television, Mr Tran Dang Tuan sent several open letters to the Hanoi mayor, and he said he sent the letter in the role of one of the people.

Business and NGO sectors indirectly participate in the green public sphere by raising public awareness of the public on green issues. Since the business and NGO sectors need the authorities' approvals for their performance, these two groups take a non-confrontational approach to the authorities. Each business and NGO targets a specific group of consumers or the public. As a consequence, their campaigns around the green issues do not involve the general public and may marginalize some of the groups. For example, Boo Fashion Company targets young consumers, and Boo organizes campaigns targeting the youth only. The local NGO that affiliated to the international NGO GIZ promoting tourism in the Phong Nha – Ke Bang mountainous area was reluctant to participate in the discussion about the cable car construction (GIZ-staff 2015). This is exactly what Habermas describes about the relationship between the public sphere and the market, as Nancy Fraser claims: “the public sphere in Habermas’s sense is also conceptually distinct from the official economy; it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive

relations, a theatre for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling (Fraser, 2007, p.57).

The group that had little or no participation in the green public sphere is governmental staff. Even when they have had quality arguments to contribute to the debates, they have had to withdraw because of the regulations of their organizations. Withdrawal from the green public sphere was also incentivised in some cases. A local journalist living near the water dam on Song Tranh 2 had to stop his collaboration with a national journalist in producing journalistic works about the dam, because some significant incentives for his family were promised to him. (NTB, 2017).

4.4. What are the political changes in Vietnam under the impacts of the green public sphere?

On the threshold of the third decade after *Doi Moi*, complacency was observed in the political arena. Steady economic growth was often cited as the most obvious achievement of the CPV in *Doi Moi*. However, the fruits of economic development go with a spectrum of environmental problems, resulting in pollution, health risks, environmental injustice, conflicts between people and the authorities. Industrial zones used to be considered as proof that the strategy the CPV has been implementing since 1986 was working, while now they are seen as a source of pollution. When political groups from outside Vietnam attack the Formosa issue, it was a challenge for the strategy, policy and legitimacy of the CPV. The vision of “Wealthy people, healthy nation, social justice, democracy and civilization”, introduced in the tenth National Congress of the CPV in 1994, was confronted since people know they have been paying for the wealth by the health of themselves and their next generations. Under pressure from the green public sphere, the consideration of green perspectives has been integrated into the development strategies.

In a decade of the green public sphere in Vietnam, people have rehearsed and constructed a model of dialogue for communication with the government around the green issues. It often starts with launching a protest page on social media, which attracts a critical mass of membership. Then, social media users participate in a serial of collective connective activities, namely signing online petitions, showing protesting message on T-shirts and photos, fundraising, online and offline protests, etc. The dialogue between the public and the authorities ruptures the administrative top-down order. It facilitates public participation in decision making, enhances public awareness, and keeps the authorities accountable. In most of the cases, their opinions have been successfully converted to the changes in authorities' plans, decisions, performances and practices.

Overall and more importantly, the dialogue model constructs a larger room for democracy in a single-party country. Freedom of expression becomes an existing practice. The public gets to know how to exercise the right of opinion expression, at least on social media platforms. While it is too early to draw conclusions about the emergence of political parties in Vietnam as of 2018, it is obvious that the single-party status has been vastly challenged by many social media-based pressure groups. Many Facebook pages have been performing the roles of the opposition parties in various ministries. For example, the Page Call for the resignation of the MOH played a role as the counter organisation for the MOH, the Page Embassy and Me for the Ministry of External Affairs, the Page Friendship on Far Road for the Ministry of Transportation. Political parties of Vietnamese diasporas, such as Viet Tan, Viet Labour, have been using social media to enter the Vietnamese political realm, and confronting the CPV on green issues.

4.5. What are the changes in Vietnamese journalism under the impacts of the green public sphere?

Facebook enabled a radical change in the Vietnamese journalism system. Before the prominence of Facebook, journalists must affiliate to journalism organisations, and the journalism organisations must affiliate to state organisations. With the popular use of Facebook, one journalist can be independent and perform the function of a media outlet, such as Facebook of Osin Huy Duc, Bach Hoan, Co Gai Do Long etc. The concept of freelance journalists, or Facebook journalists becomes common knowledge. On the one hand, it makes pluralism in the media landscape, brings more options for the audience. On the other hand, the system of Facebook journalism run by Facebook journalists (or social media influencers) co-exists with the system of governmental and party journalism. The impacts of the former on the later, and the interaction between the two systems is one of the important topics for ongoing research.

The green public sphere challenged the rightfulness of the principle of Vietnamese journalism, which stated: "the first and foremost truth for journalists is the Party's truth" (Tho, 1997, p.25). The scandal of Formosa and sea pollution was an example of the negative impacts of the Party's truth on society. The false reports on the red tide, the fake photos of the massive fish death, then the silence of the Vietnamese journalism while waiting for the authorities' confirmation caused social chaos. The protesters carried posters with fake photos taken from international newspapers. This was a communication disaster causing by the out-dated principle of the Party's journalism, going together with the sea disaster causing by the Party's poor monitoring of the waste processing in industrial zones. The Party's truth was not the absolute truth, and in the case of Formosa and sea pollution, the Party was incompetent in finding the truth. The public recognised the existence of the truth that emerged from citizens' opinions, experience, observation and

argument exchange, which was disseminated and accumulated on social media. The competition of the Party's truth with the Public's truth could signal of the emergence of democracy and the pressure from the public to CPV, which may lead to change from within CPV.

There has been a new concept of environmental writers using Facebook. They are former journalists, but have changed to publish on Facebook only, focusing on green issues. Mai Quoc An and Do Cao Cuong are two prominent writers in this group. They have been choosing to write about environmental issues for around five years, since 2014. Although they work independently, there have been some early signs of the formulation of a linkage of individual environmental writers on Facebook. With the professional journalistic skills, being independent of the governmental and business powers, their reports and commentaries on the green issues are often read by hundreds of thousands of people, generating relatively significant influence. It is expected that a network of environmental writers, with greater collaboration, will be established in the future (from late 2019) between Facebook writers and state journalists across platforms, across countries, for the better service in truth-seeking on green issues. However, as the author observed, there was little evidence of a sustainable business model for the co-operation of independent journalists. Most of them ran private and family business. The apparent benefit they could earn from the fame they got from social media was that social media users knew about the goods and services they were selling, which could increase the number of sales and generate profits.

In conclusion, during 2009-2018, the green public sphere has emerged in Vietnam in conditions of an open national policy toward global social networks, impacts from international agents and the young generation's adoption of advanced media technologies. The green public sphere has witnessed the rise of freedom of expression, based on which the political pluralism and the

opposition challenge the legitimacy of the ruling Party in the one-party country. The journalists have been playing the role of non-political politics stakeholder by bringing green issues to public debates using both journalism and social media. The intellectuals are the leading stakeholder in the formulation of the green public sphere. The green public sphere was largely based on connective collective actions, and it had been impeded by governmental intimidation and legislative barriers since the Cyber Security Law in 2018. ■

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Chapter Five reviews the process of reflexivity of this research. The conclusion summarises what the author has done so far and the implications for journalism studies and practice. It also discusses the limitations of the research and possible topics for further research into the social media-based green public sphere in Vietnam.

5.1. What I have done so far?

If this research succeeds in creating a better awareness of the green public sphere in Vietnam emerging on social media, its developments and its impacts, and generates good quality discussion on the subject, its purpose will have been served. The project is a process of reflexivity, which does not only show a big picture of the green public sphere in Vietnam, generated by social media, especially Facebook, from 2009 to 2018, but also helps those who are working in the green public sphere to justify their practice and construct a theoretical framework for their profession as media generators. The research project uses Jurgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere as the theoretical checklist for analysis. For the conclusion of this research, I would like to emphasise two claims.

The first claim is that this research is a PhD (Journalism) for the benefit of journalism in terms of the audience, the method, the writing style and the spacio-temporality. The book "What is Journalism" published in 2016 by Professor Chris Nash cited Stuart Adam saying that "Journalism is marked by its public voice" (Nash, 2016, p.12). Journalists must have a public in mind when producing journalistic work. My research project firstly aims at journalists who are directly working in the issues of environment, climate change, sustainability, ecology, urban and rural development, pollution,

resilience, etc. or the green issues in Vietnam. The second target group is the engaged public, or those who are working with journalists in the green public sphere, such as policymakers, the activists who are using social media, NGOs and scientists working and interested in green issues, media and freedom of expression in Vietnam.

Nash asserted journalism empirical methods are typically qualitative research methods (2016, p.19). I am using the methods that my target audience often use in their work, which is typically qualitative. I conducted content analysis with 402 news articles and social media posts. As of June 2019, when I intended to submit this work, five of them had been removed from the Internet and 397 news articles and social media posts were still available on line. A majority of the journalism contents were taken from *Tuois Tre* and *VnExpress*, which are the most liberal media houses and are leaders in creating the public sphere. The contents from social media were from Facebook and blog posts of relevant social media pages. The second method was in-depth interviews. I interviewed 35 people who are the most well-known, influential journalists, activist, bloggers, staffs from government, NGOs and business sector. The validity of the truth claimed in this research was taken from the findings from content analysis, while the justification for the claim was taken from what the interviewees say during the in-depth interviews.

The creative component of the research project (component 1, book manuscript) uses the appropriate language for journalists, who are “non-theoretic knowers, which is based on direct sense of experience, not abstract systematic reflection” (Nash, 2016, p.25). This is why I used more direct quotations from interviewees, more examples and photos. Besides in-text referencing for the academic sources, I used endnotes to provide the links to the journalistic articles, providing more context for journalists, and they can decide if they want to continue reading the main part of the book or pause to read the endnotes. Since “journalism is the real world as a whole comprehended under

the category of the present" (Nash, 2016, p.12), I keep in mind that space and time is the feature differentiating my research with other traditional thesis. I travelled to the locations where the green public sphere emerged and conducted interviews with local journalists and those who are using social media to address the green issues in real locations, and real-time.

When I enrolled in 2014, I planned the research with the previous green public sphere, which occurred during the prevalence of Yahoo! 360° social network, the blogging against bauxite mining in 2009 and the journalism about the Hydropower Plant number 2 on Tranh River. In 2014, I didn't know that I was planning for the most powerful green public sphere, which continuously emerged during my candidature from 2014 to 2019. In April 2014, during the measles outbreak, the public used Facebook to call for the resignation of the Minister of Health. In October the same year, the public joined Save Son Doong campaign, an online protest against the construction plan of a cable car system to Son Doong, the biggest cave in the world. In March 2015, just three weeks before my confirmation, the tree movement starting on Facebook of a housewife in Hanoi, calling people to join the tree-hugging protest against the cutting down of 6700 trees. The United Nations conference on climate change COP21 in November 2015 in which Vietnamese government aimed at the scenario of 2 Celsius degree increase, while the NGO wanted to construct plan for 1.5 Celsius degree increase, making a social media-based attempt of the NGO to struggle for a zero point five degrees less in the INDC or the intended national determined contribution in COP21. In January 2016, a UK zoologist revealed on his blog that the wild animals were being kept as farm and domestic animal on Phu Quoc Island, and the topic was then investigated by Vietnamese journalists. The stories then were removed from mainstream media because of the interference of Vin group, the owner of the Safari. In a counter move they were then republished on Facebook.

In April 2016, the historic sea disaster occurred, causing the death of 100 tons of fish. Formosa steel company, in June 2016, was accused of discharging polluted wastewater to the sea which caused the disaster. Until June 2019, when I intended to submit the work, I found that most of the news about the massive death of fish was fake news, some academic research about Formosa and the death of fish was based on the fake journalistic data, and there was a journalism fake news disaster going together with the sea pollution incident, making the biggest fake news story in Vietnam so far. In February 2017, journalists and tourism managers in Da Nang city used Facebook to start the Save Son Tra campaign. From mid-2017, many bloggers and Facebook activists have been arrested and sentenced to be in jail. In October 2017, the Cyber Security Law was introduced and discussed at the National Assembly, and it was legislated in June 2018. I am fortunate that the green public sphere on social media, the topic I chose for doing research, has been rising during my candidature, and I can analyse its evolvement in real-time. This analysis of 'the green' is part of the green public sphere in term of journalistic language, journalistic methods, empirical and ethnographic research into the place of the green public sphere at the very time it is happening. This is the great strength of journalism as a research methodology.

The second claim is the main findings of the research, which is also analysed and presented in Chapter Four of the exegesis. During 2009-2018, the green public sphere has emerged in Vietnam in the conditions of open national policy toward global social networks, the impacts from international agents and the young generation's adoption of the advanced media technologies. The green public sphere has witnessed the rise of freedom of expression, based on which political pluralism and opposition challenges to the legitimacy of the ruling Party have emerged in the one-party state. Journalists have been playing the role of non-political politics stakeholder by bringing the green issues to the public debates using both journalism and social media. The intellectuals are the

leading stakeholder in the formulation of the green public sphere. The green public sphere is largely based on connective collective actions and it has been impeded by governmental intimidation and legislative barriers since the Cyber Security Law in 2018.

There are three conditions for the green public sphere during 2009-2018. First, the free access to the international based social networks such as Facebook, YouTube and blog services enabled a large quantity of social media users. Second, the international agents involvement in media training (various international sponsored media training programs in Vietnam, namely Fojo, Danida, MediaNet, etc.), foreign investment creating the sense of financial independence in media (Chinese Tencent invested on VNG, making Zing and Zalo; IDG invested on VCCorp, making Channel14, Soha news), and the international public involvement in the green issues in Vietnam (the petition for Save Son Doong, the Taiwanese parliament delegation to Formosa in Vietnam, etc.) The third condition is the adoption of young Vietnamese generations to the advanced in media technology. 40% of the Vietnamese population is younger than 24 years old. Both media producers (including journalists and bloggers) and media consumers (most of them are young people) are becoming proactive in using social media for personal and professional purposes, leading to the fundamental changes in Vietnamese media landscape and society. Most of the Facebook activists are very young, who were born after Doi Moi or the economic reform. They experience a good living standard, freedom of expression, and western-style democracy.

The green public sphere has witnessed the unprecedented freedom of expression, basing on which the political pluralism challenges the legitimacy of the ruling Party in the one-party country. In the early years of *Doi Moi*, the sphere of consensus was easy to be achieved among Vietnamese politicians as they were from the same Party and adhered to the democratic centralism - the key principle of the Party. However, with the growing compatibility of the

opposition to the realm of politics, the sense of consensus is harder to be obtained while the sense of controversy is on the rise. Many governmental plans, that would have been easily achievable from the viewpoint of the CPV members before the social media era, become open for discussion by everyone on social media. Some governmental plans were withdrawn under the pressure of social media users. "Facebook is the last remaining space for freedom of expression", said Mr NAT, an activist for victims of the Formosa sea disaster (2017). Many Facebook groups have been established without the approval of the Ministry of Home Affairs. These Facebook groups quickly become non-party based, non-government based associations. Some activist groups have functioned as the opposition or counter-ministries. Some groups were established on Facebook but then gained equivalent status with legal entities. The green public sphere enables the practice of public policy reviewing, fact-checking, public debates, rising the sphere of controversy on media and political agenda, and demanding the accountability and procedure modification.

In blogging against bauxite mining projects, starting in 2009 until the finishing time of writing this research, intellectuals are consistently in the forefront of the social media-based green public sphere. Journalists, especially social media influencers, those who are quitting their jobs at media organisations and institutionalise their work on social media, have been actively introducing the green issues to public debates, conversations and political agenda. Therefore, the intellectuals and the social media influencers-journalists are the two most important groups making the green public sphere. Besides, the green public sphere in Vietnam requires the engagement of various walks of life since it bases itself on the size of the public who are interested in the green issues.

5.2. What's next?

An arguable question is “Is there the green public sphere in Vietnam or is it just the slacktivism?”. Slactivism or clicktivism is the term introduced by Fuchs (2014) is the low-cost efforts of social media users, and it generates no change in real life. If we use Eckersley (2004, p.245) definition of the green public sphere as the checklist, we can see that the green public sphere in Vietnam has checked three items out of four. The green public sphere in Vietnam has created the changed in democratic procedures (it deconstructs the Party’s democratic centralism principle), the construction of the economy (toward green consumption and green consideration in industrialisation process), and reshapes society (new groups addressing green issues). However, it is still arguably concerning the fourth item in Eckersley’s checklist, which is the appearance of constitutional renovations. The green public sphere initially adopted a non-violent agenda and non-political politics. It does not aim at overthrowing the government to start a new regime, something like the public sphere that the Arab Spring created. It challenges the CPV in the way it makes the CPV change from within. Democracy is now not just an adjective for centralism in the former principle of democratic centralism. The public sphere makes democracy gain equal status with centralism, which makes the fourth box in Eckersley’s list checked.

Another question is “Will the green public sphere decline after the Cyber Security Law?”. On the one hand, I believe that the green public sphere has a firm foundation for further development. The intimidation and the legal restriction will reduce the phenomenon of slacktivism while the intellectuals can find better ways to retain the momentum of the green public sphere. The green public sphere after 2018 maybe no longer depends on social media, but the intellectuals will change to the new platforms, such as books, films (for example, the book and film of the Green-trees groups), public lectures and

educational program (for example, the education project run by Save Son Doong group) . This will be the topic of future research.

The changing role of journalists is another possible topic for the follow-up research. The green public sphere could change from being based on quantitative connective collective actions to basing itself on quality experts' opinions, less emotions, more facts and truths. This requires journalists a new skills set of truth-seeking, which definitely must be independent of the manipulations of political or business powers. The institutionalisation and constitutionalisation of social media journalism, the inter-media collaboration of journalists (between CPV's press-carded journalists and social media journalists) also begs further investigation in future research.

The green issues discussed in this study resonate with similar cases in other countries. For instance, the Formosa toxic spill that caused the disaster in the central sea of Vietnam in 2016 was similar to what happened with Formosa in Louisiana, USA, in 1991.¹⁶⁹ The protest against the felling of 6700 trees closely mirrors the Chipko movement or the massive rally to preserve forests during the 1970s in India.¹⁷⁰ The constructions of the hydropower plant on the Tranh River and the cable car to Son Doong cave recalled the massive response to the construction of a dam on the Nu River in China in 2004.¹⁷¹ The audience can use this research as the in-puts for some comparative analysis of the green public sphere in Vietnam and other countries.

Finally, and sadly, despite the rise of green public sphere, the green issues in Vietnam still get worse. The future of the environment and climate change is not too far from the terrifying scenario, when the green problems will force the people and the powers into a desperate struggle for economic growth or survival. For this scenario, continuous research on the green public sphere should be conducted. I am happy at this moment to come to the conclusion of this research project, but I am acutely conscious that this research does not stop here: it should be continuing in the next phase.

As the last word in this research, I would admit that I have a lot of limitations. The use of the English language, the combination of both creative component and academic component is the first one. The readers of both components may notice the similarity of language in the two components (which I admit is my limitation in mastering the language). Some parts in two components can be interchangeable, for example, the literature review. Journalists will be the first target audience of the book. So the literature review of Vietnamese journalism is much presented in the book manuscript. The academic community may be more interested in the development of the Habermas's public sphere in the Vietnamese context. This is the reason why I placed the literature review about the public sphere in the exegesis component.

The second biggest limitation is my hesitation in taking sides. I was a lecturer of a CPV's journalism school during my PhD candidature. It took me 18 months in the final stage of my candidature (October 2017 to April 2019) to choose should I stop teaching at a CPV's school, become an independent researcher or not. CPV did not encourage the research about social movement, Formosa, protests, dissidents, and so on. Finally, in April 2019, I decided to work for a CPV's leading political school. I believe the CPV will change from within for the better serve of the Vietnamese people, and my research will facilitate that change. I am so fortunate to choose this topic in this period, so glad to write about the historical changes, and so earnest to share this research.■

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent form for blogger and Facebook participants and journalists (English)

CONSENT FORM

(Bloggers and Facebook participants group) and (Mainstream journalists group)

Project: Emerging social media and the “green” public sphere in Vietnam

Chief Investigator: Prof. Chris Nash

Student: Le Thu Mach

I.....
..... have been asked
to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have
read and understood the Explanatory Statement and the contents thereof. I
understand that:

- The information I provide may be used in the doctoral dissertation of the researchers and other papers arising from this research, which may be published;
- This research project is being conducted under Australian Journalists' Code of Ethics; therefore, all the information I supply will be on the public record unless specifically requested.
- The information I supply during the interview will be securely held until five years after the research has been completed, after that it will be destroyed;

- I can withdraw from the research at any time before the researchers publish the findings; and

- I can request for a copy of the research findings.

	Yes	No
My identity being disclosed in the published research findings;	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being audio recorded during the interview for the purpose of facilitating the creation of transcript of the interview for subsequent analysis; and	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Answering the follow-up questions after the interview without signing a new consent form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I hereby consent to the following:

Name of Participant

Participant Signature
Date

Appendix B: Consent form for blogger and Facebook participants and journalists (Vietnamese)

CHẤP THUẬN THAM GIA NGHIÊN CỨU

(Nhóm người viết blog và Facebook) và (Nhóm nhà báo các tờ báo chính thống)

Đề tài nghiên cứu: Sự phát triển nhanh của truyền thông mạng xã hội và mối quan tâm của người dân tới vấn đề “xanh” ở Việt Nam

Giảng viên hướng dẫn: Giáo sư Chris Nash

Nghiên cứu sinh: Mạch Lê Thu

Tôi tên là: tôi được mời tham gia trả lời phỏng vấn cho đề tài nghiên cứu nêu trên của Đại học Monash. Tôi đã đọc bản giải thích về vấn đề nghiên cứu và hiểu nội dung của bản giải thích đó. Cụ thể, tôi hiểu rằng:

- Thông tin tôi cung cấp sẽ được sử dụng trong luận án tiến sĩ của nghiên cứu sinh, và các bài báo khoa học được rút trích từ luận án, các sản phẩm này có thể được xuất bản rộng rãi;
- Nghiên cứu này tuân thủ Bộ quy tắc Đạo đức Báo chí Úc; vì vậy, thông tin tôi cung cấp sẽ được lưu trữ như một tài liệu dành cho công chúng, trừ trường hợp có yêu cầu đặc biệt khác;
- Mọi thông tin tôi cung cấp sẽ được lưu trữ an toàn cho tới năm năm sau khi nghiên cứu hoàn thành, nghiên cứu sinh sẽ xóa thông tin tôi cung cấp sau khi hoàn thành nghiên cứu này;
- Tôi có thể rút lui không tham gia nghiên cứu này tại mọi thời điểm trước khi nghiên cứu sinh công bố công trình nghiên cứu; và
- Tôi có thể yêu cầu có một bản sao kết quả nghiên cứu.

Tôi đồng ý với những điểm cụ thể sau đây

Người trả lời phỏng vấn Chữ ký
Ngày tháng

	Có	Không
Tên thật của tôi sẽ được nêu rõ trong các báo cáo kết quả nghiên cứu	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tôi đồng ý cho nghiên cứu sinh ghi âm cuộc phỏng vấn với mục đích viết lại các câu trả lời, tạo điều kiện thuận lợi cho quá trình phân tích kết quả; và	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tôi sẽ trả lời các câu hỏi phát sinh sau cuộc phỏng vấn này mà không cần ký một bản chấp thuận mới.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix C: Explanatory Statement for blogger and Facebook participants (English)

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

(Bloggers and Facebook participants group)

Project: Emerging social media and the "green" public sphere in Vietnam

Chief Investigator's name: Prof. Chris Nash	Student's name : Le Thu
Faculty of Arts	Mach
Phone: +61 3 99034948	Phone:+ 61 449824383
Email: Chris.Nash@monash.edu	Email: Thu.Mach@monash.edu

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

What does the research involve?

This study is for a PhD research project about social media, environment journalism and climate change in Vietnam, conducted by PhD candidate Le Thu Mach and supervised by Prof. Chris Nash, Monash University. With your consent, the researcher will meet you in person for an in-depth interview of about one hour at a place chosen at your preference.

Why were you chosen for this research?

You have been selected for this study because you have well-known blogs and/or Facebook content about climate change and environment or related issues. Your blog entries and/or Facebook posts about climate change, environment and related issues reached over 1000 comments and sharings. I got

your contact details from the information provided on the “About” section on your social media pages and I am sending this explanatory statement to your message inbox on your social media account.

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research

Please read this explanatory statement and the consent form which is sent to you together with this statement. Please notify Le Thu Mach via the phone or email address listed above if you wish or do not wish to participate in the research. You have the right to withdraw from further participation at any stage before the submission of the research.

Possible benefits and risks to participants

Your participation in this study will contribute to new knowledge about social media in Vietnam and its influence in addressing climate change and environmental issues. We do not anticipate that participation to this study will cause any risk to you. Your answers will not be judged as right or wrong.

Payment

No payments will be made to participants who are involved in this research project.

Confidentiality

Only the chief investigator and the student can access the original data that is collected during the interview. If you so request, no reports relating to this research, including an exegesis and other research publications, will disclose your name or any other details that will identify you. If your opinions are quoted your name will be substituted by a small identifier, for example “Mr A., a blogger”, unless you give permission on the consent form for your real name to be used. A draft version of the sections in the research findings which quote directly or indirectly your opinions will be sent to you for your comments and/or correction before it is submitted.

Storage of data

The data will be confidentially and safely stored in the hard drives of a secure computer at the offices at Monash University. It will be transferred to CD or USB and hard copies to backup and these will be stored in locked cabinets in the researchers' offices. The data will be stored for five years after the completion of the research. After that, the hard copies of data will be physically disposed of and the data files will be deleted from the computer and other digital storages of the researchers.

Results

The results of this research include an exegesis, a thesis (in form of a book manuscript), journal articles and oral presentations. If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research findings and request a copy of the results, please contact Le Thu Mach at +61 0449824383 or Thu.Mach@monash.edu.

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)

Room 111, Building 3e

Research Office

Monash University VIC 3800

Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Email: muhrec@monash.edu Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

Thank you,

(insert Chief Investigator's signature)

Chief Investigator's name

Appendix D: Explanatory Statement for blogger and Facebook participants (Vietnamese)

GIẢI THÍCH VỀ NGHIÊN CỨU

(Nhóm người viết blog và sử dụng Facebook)

Đề tài nghiên cứu: Sự phát triển nhanh của truyền thông mạng xã hội và mối quan tâm của người dân tới vấn đề “xanh” ở Việt Nam

Giảng viên hướng dẫn: Giáo sư Chris Nash Nghiên cứu sinh: Mạch Lê

Thu

Khoa Nghệ Thuật

Điện thoại: +61 3 99034948

Email: Chris.Nash@monash.edu

Điện thoại:+ 61 449824383

Email:

Thu.Mach@monash.edu

Quý vị được mời tham gia nghiên cứu này. Xin vui lòng đọc bản Giải thích về Nghiên cứu trước khi quyết định có tham gia vào nghiên cứu này hay không. Nếu quý vị muốn biết thêm thông tin về bất kỳ khía cạnh nào của nghiên cứu này, vui lòng liên lạc với các nhà nghiên cứu thông qua các số điện thoại và địa chỉ email được liệt kê ở trên.

Nghiên cứu bao gồm những gì?

Nghiên cứu này là một đề tài luận án tiến sĩ về truyền thông xã hội và báo chí về vấn đề biến đổi khí hậu và môi trường tại Việt Nam, được thực hiện bởi nghiên cứu sinh Mạch Lê Thu, do Giáo sư Chris Nash, Đại học Monash, hướng dẫn. Với sự đồng ý của quý vị, các nhà nghiên cứu sẽ tới gặp quý vị để phỏng vấn sâu trong vòng một giờ tại địa điểm phù hợp do quý vị lựa chọn.

Lý do quý vị được mời trả lời phỏng vấn?

Quý vị được mời tham gia trả lời phỏng vấn cho nghiên cứu này vì quý vị đã xuất bản nội dung được nhiều người biết đến trên blog và/hoặc Facebook về vấn đề môi trường và biến đổi khí hậu và các vấn đề có liên quan. Nội dung đó đã nhận được hơn 1000 ý kiến bình luận và lượt chia sẻ. Chúng tôi có địa chỉ để liên hệ với quý vị từ những thông tin cung cấp trong mục "Giới thiệu" của trang truyền thông xã hội của quý vị và chúng tôi đang gửi bản giải thích này đến hộp thư tin nhắn trên tài khoản truyền thông xã hội của quý vị.

Đồng ý tham gia, hoặc rút lui không tham gia nghiên cứu

Vui lòng đọc phần giải thích này và giấy chấp thuận tham gia nghiên cứu đang được gửi kèm theo. Vui lòng thông báo cho nghiên cứu sinh Mạch Lê Thu qua điện thoại hoặc địa chỉ email được liệt kê ở trên nếu quý vị muốn hay không muốn tham gia vào nghiên cứu. Quý vị có quyền rút lui, không tham gia thêm vào nghiên cứu tại bất kỳ thời điểm nào trước khi luận án được nộp và các công trình nghiên cứu được công bố.

Lợi ích và nguy cơ cho người tham gia

Sự tham gia của quý vị vào nghiên cứu này sẽ góp phần bổ sung kiến thức mới về truyền thông xã hội tại Việt Nam và ảnh hưởng của nó trong việc giải quyết các vấn đề môi trường và biến đổi khí hậu. Chúng tôi không dự đoán rằng sự tham gia nghiên cứu này sẽ gây ra bất kỳ mối nguy hiểm nào cho quý vị. Câu trả lời của quý vị sẽ không bị đánh giá là đúng hay sai.

Thù lao

Không có khoản thù lao nào sẽ được chi trả cho người tham gia trả lời phỏng vấn

Bảo mật

Chỉ có giáo sư hướng dẫn và nghiên cứu sinh có thể truy cập dữ liệu ban đầu về cuộc phỏng vấn. Nếu quý vị yêu cầu, các báo cáo liên quan đến nghiên cứu

này, bao gồm luận án và các ấn phẩm nghiên cứu khác, sẽ không tiết lộ tên của quý vị hoặc bất kỳ chi tiết nào khác có thể nhận diện quý vị. Hầu hết các ý kiến của quý vị sẽ được sử dụng như thông tin cơ bản mà không trích dẫn trực tiếp hoặc gián tiếp. Nếu ý kiến của quý vị được trích dẫn, tên của quý vị sẽ được thay thế bởi một định danh nhỏ, ví dụ "ông A, một người viết blog", trừ khi trong bản chấp thuận quý vị cho phép người nghiên cứu sử dụng tên thật của quý vị. Một bản thảo của những chương/phần trong báo cáo nghiên cứu có sử dụng ý kiến của quý vị sẽ được gửi đến quý vị để xin ý kiến và/hoặc chỉnh sửa trước khi báo cáo được nộp và/hoặc xuất bản.

Lưu trữ dữ liệu

Các dữ liệu sẽ được bảo mật và lưu trữ an toàn trong các ổ đĩa cứng của máy tính tại văn phòng tại Đại học Monash. Dữ liệu sẽ được sao lưu vào đĩa CD hoặc USB và sẽ được lưu trữ trong tủ có khóa, trong văn phòng của các nhà nghiên cứu. Dữ liệu sẽ được lưu trữ trong vòng năm năm sau khi hoàn thành nghiên cứu. Sau đó, các bản sao cứng của dữ liệu sẽ được hủy và các tập tin dữ liệu sẽ bị xóa khỏi máy tính và các thiết bị lưu trữ kỹ thuật số khác của các nhà nghiên cứu.

Kết quả

Kết quả của nghiên cứu này bao gồm một bản chú giải, một luận án (dưới hình thức một cuốn sách), các bài báo và bài thuyết trình. Nếu quý vị muốn được thông báo về kết quả nghiên cứu tổng hợp và yêu cầu một bản sao của kết quả, xin vui lòng liên hệ với nghiên cứu sinh Mạch Lê Thu theo số điện thoại +61 0449824383 hoặc thư điện tử Thu.Mach@monash.edu

Khiếu nại

Nếu quý vị có bất kỳ mối quan tâm hoặc khiếu nại nào về việc thực hiện nghiên cứu này, xin liên hệ với Giám đốc Trung tâm Đạo đức Nghiên cứu Con người, thuộc Đại học Monash (MUHREC):

Executive Officer

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)

Room 111, Building 3e

Research Office

Monash University VIC 3800

Điện thoại: +61 3 9905 2052 Email: muhrec@monash.edu Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

Trân trọng cảm ơn,

(insert Chief Investigator's signature)

Giảng viên hướng dẫn: Giáo sư Chris Nash

Appendix E: Explanatory Statement for journalists (English)

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

(Mainstream journalists group)

Project: Emerging social media and the "green" public sphere in Vietnam

Chief Investigator's name: Chris Nash **Student's name** : Le Thu

Faculty of Arts

Phone: +61 3 99034948 Phone: +61 449824383

Email: Chris.Nash@monash.edu Email: Thu.Mach@monash.edu

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

What does the research involve?

This study is for a PhD research project about social media and climate change and environmental journalism in Vietnam, conducted by PhD candidate Le Thu Mach and supervised by Prof. Chris Nash, Monash University. With your consent, the researcher will meet you in person for an in-depth interview within an hour at a venue chosen as your preference.

Why were you chosen for this research?

You have been selected for this study because you have experience in writing news articles about climate change and the environment or related issues and your articles have been published in mainstream media in Vietnam. I got your contact from the Human Resources Department from your media organisation.

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research

Please read this explanatory statement and the consent form which is sent to you together with this statement. Please notify Le Thu Mach via the phone or email address listed above if you wish or do not wish to participate in the research. You have the right to withdraw from further participation at any stage before the submission and publication of the research.

Possible benefits and risks to participants

Your participation in this study will contribute to new knowledge of social media in Vietnam and its influence in addressing climate change and environmental issues. We do not anticipate that participation to this study will cause any risk to you. Your answers will not be judged as right or wrong.

Payment

No payments will be made to participants who are involved in this research project.

Confidentiality

Only the chief investigator and the student can access the original data which is collected during the interview. No reports relating to this research, including an exegesis and other research publications, will disclose your name or any other details that will identify you. Most of the time, your opinions will be used as background information without direct or indirect quotations. If your opinions are quoted, your name will be substituted by a small identifier, for example “Mr A., a journalist from Tuoi Tre newspaper”, unless you give permission on the consent form for your real name to be used. A draft version of the sections in the research findings which are composed using your opinions will be sent to you for your comments and/or correction before it is submitted and/or published.

Storage of data

The data will be confidentially and safely stored in the hard drives of a secure computer at the offices at Monash University. It will be transferred to CD or USB and hard copies to backup and these will be stored in locked cabinets in the researchers' offices. The data will be stored for five years after the completion of the research. After that, the hard copies of data will be physically disposed and the data files will be deleted from the computer and other digital storages of the researchers.

Results

The results of this research include an exegesis, a thesis (in form of a book), journal articles and oral presentation. If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research findings and request a copy of the results, please contact Le Thu Mach at +61 0449824383 or Thu.Mach@monash.edu.

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)

Room 111, Building 3e

Research Office

Monash University VIC 3800

Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Email: muhrec@monash.edu Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

Thank you,

(insert Chief Investigator's signature)

Chief Investigator's name

Appendix F: Explanatory Statement for journalists (Vietnamese)

GIẢI THÍCH VỀ NGHIÊN CỨU

(Nhóm nhà báo thuộc các cơ quan báo chí chính thống)

Đề tài nghiên cứu: Sự phát triển nhanh của truyền thông mạng xã hội và mối quan tâm của người dân tới vấn đề “xanh” ở Việt Nam

Giảng viên hướng dẫn: Giáo sư Mạch Lê Thu
Chris Nash

Khoa Nghệ Thuật Điện thoại:+ 61 449824383
Điện thoại: +61 3 99034948 Email: Thu.Mach@monash.edu
Email: Chris.Nash@monash.edu

Quý vị được mời tham gia nghiên cứu này. Xin vui lòng đọc bản Giải thích về Nghiên cứu trước khi quyết định có tham gia vào nghiên cứu này hay không. Nếu quý vị muốn biết thêm thông tin về bất kỳ khía cạnh nào của nghiên cứu này, vui lòng liên lạc với các nhà nghiên cứu thông qua các số điện thoại và địa chỉ email được liệt kê ở trên.

Nghiên cứu bao gồm những gì?

Nghiên cứu này là một đề tài luận án tiến sĩ về truyền thông xã hội và báo chí về vấn đề biến đổi khí hậu và môi trường tại Việt Nam, được thực hiện bởi nghiên cứu sinh Mạch Lê Thu, do Giáo sư Chris Nash, Đại học Monash, hướng dẫn. Với sự đồng ý của quý vị, các nhà nghiên cứu sẽ tới gặp quý vị để phỏng vấn sâu trong vòng một giờ tại địa điểm phù hợp do quý vị lựa chọn..

Lý do quý vị được mời trả lời phỏng vấn?

Quý vị đã được chọn để trả lời phỏng vấn cho nghiên cứu này vì quý vị có kinh nghiệm và chuyên môn viết tin/bài về biến đổi khí hậu và môi trường và các vấn đề liên quan và các bài báo của quý vị đã được công bố trên phương tiện truyền thông tại Việt Nam. Cơ quan báo chí của quý vị đã cung cấp cho chúng tôi địa chỉ liên hệ của quý vị.

Đồng ý tham gia, hoặc rút lui không tham gia nghiên cứu

Vui lòng đọc phần giải thích này và giấy chấp thuận tham gia nghiên cứu đang được gửi kèm theo. Vui lòng thông báo cho nghiên cứu sinh Mạch Lê Thu qua điện thoại hoặc địa chỉ email được liệt kê ở trên nếu quý vị muốn hay không muốn tham gia vào nghiên cứu. Quý vị có quyền rút lui, không tham gia thêm vào nghiên cứu tại bất kỳ thời điểm nào trước khi luận án được nộp và các công trình nghiên cứu được công bố.

Lợi ích và nguy cơ cho người tham gia

Sự tham gia của quý vị vào nghiên cứu này sẽ góp phần bổ sung kiến thức mới về truyền thông xã hội tại Việt Nam và ảnh hưởng của nó trong việc giải quyết các vấn đề môi trường và biến đổi khí hậu. Chúng tôi không dự đoán rằng sự tham gia nghiên cứu này sẽ gây ra bất kỳ mối nguy hiểm nào cho quý vị. Câu trả lời của quý vị sẽ không bị đánh giá là đúng hay sai.

Thù lao

Không có khoản thù lao nào sẽ được chi trả cho người tham gia trả lời phỏng vấn

Bảo mật

Chỉ có giáo sư hướng dẫn và nghiên cứu sinh có thể truy cập dữ liệu về cuộc phỏng vấn. Nếu quý vị yêu cầu, các báo cáo liên quan đến nghiên cứu này, bao gồm luận án và các ấn phẩm nghiên cứu khác, sẽ không tiết lộ tên của quý vị hoặc bất kỳ chi tiết nào khác có thể nhận diện quý vị. Hầu hết các ý kiến của quý vị sẽ được sử dụng như thông tin cơ bản mà không trích dẫn trực tiếp hoặc

gián tiếp. Nếu ý kiến của quý vị được trích dẫn, tên của quý vị sẽ được thay thế bởi một định danh nhỏ, ví dụ "ông A, phóng viên báo Tuổi Trẻ", trừ khi trong bản chấp thuận quý vị cho phép người nghiên cứu sử dụng tên thật của quý vị. Một bản thảo của những chương/phần trong báo cáo nghiên cứu có sử dụng ý kiến của quý vị sẽ được gửi đến quý vị để xin ý kiến và/hoặc chỉnh sửa trước khi báo cáo được nộp và/hoặc xuất bản.

Lưu trữ dữ liệu

Các dữ liệu sẽ được bảo mật và lưu trữ an toàn trong các ổ đĩa cứng của máy tính tại văn phòng tại Đại học Monash. Dữ liệu sẽ được sao lưu vào đĩa CD hoặc USB và sẽ được lưu trữ trong tủ có khóa, trong văn phòng của các nhà nghiên cứu. Dữ liệu sẽ được lưu trữ trong vòng năm năm sau khi hoàn thành nghiên cứu. Sau đó, các bản sao cứng của dữ liệu sẽ được hủy và các tập tin dữ liệu sẽ bị xóa khỏi máy tính và các thiết bị lưu trữ kỹ thuật số khác của các nhà nghiên cứu.

Kết quả

Kết quả của nghiên cứu này bao gồm một bản chú giải, một luận án (dưới hình thức một cuốn sách), các bài báo và bài thuyết trình. Nếu quý vị muốn được thông báo về kết quả nghiên cứu tổng hợp và yêu cầu một bản sao của kết quả, xin vui lòng liên hệ với nghiên cứu sinh Mạch Lê Thu theo số điện thoại +61 0449824383 hoặc thư điện tử Thu.Mach@monash.edu

Khiếu nại

Nếu quý vị có bất kỳ mối quan tâm hoặc khiếu nại nào về việc thực hiện nghiên cứu này, xin liên hệ với Giám đốc Trung tâm Đạo đức Nghiên cứu Con người, thuộc Đại học Monash (MUHREC):

Executive Officer

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)

Room 111, Building 3e

Research Office
Monash University VIC 3800

Điện thoại: +61 3 9905 2052 Email: muhrec@monash.edu Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

Trân trọng cảm ơn,

(insert Chief Investigator's signature)

Giảng viên hướng dẫn: Giáo sư Chris Nash

Appendix G: Explanatory Statement for organisations (English)

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

(For the organisations listed in section 1.10 of the
Ethics Proposal Application)

Project: Emerging social media and the "green" public sphere in Vietnam

Chief Investigator's name: Chris Nash	Student's name : Le Thu
Faculty of Arts	Mach
Phone: +61 3 99034948	Phone:+ 61 449824383
Email: Chris.Nash@monash.edu	Email: Thu.Mach@monash.edu

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

What does the research involve?

This study is for a PhD research project about social media and climate change and environmental journalism in Vietnam, conducted by PhD candidate Le Thu Mach and supervised by Prof. Chris Nash, Monash University. With your consent, the researcher will meet you in person for an in-depth interview within one hour at a place chosen as your preference.

Why were you chosen for this research?

You have been selected for this study because you and your organisation have data relating to climate change communication and social media in Vietnam, which can be shared and used for the proposed research.

Possible benefits and risks to participants

Your participation in this study will contribute to new knowledge of social media in Vietnam and its influence in addressing the climate change and environmental issues. We do not anticipate that participation to this study will cause any risk to you. Your answers will not be judged as right or wrong.

Payment

No payments will be made to participants who are involved in this research project.

Confidentiality

Only the chief investigator and the student can access the original data which is collected during the interview. If you so request, no reports relating to this research, including an exegesis and other research publications, will disclose your name or any other details that will identify you. Most of the time, your opinions will be used as background information without direct or indirect quotations. A draft version of the sections in the research findings which are composed using your opinions will be sent to you for your comments and/ or correction before it is submitted and/or published.

Storage of data

The data will be confidentially and safely stored in the hard drives of a secure computer at the offices at Monash University. It will be transferred to CD or USB and hard copies to backup and these will be stored in locked cabinets in the researchers' offices. The data will be stored for five years after the completion of the research. After that, the hard copies of data will be physically disposed and the data files will be deleted from the computer and other digital storages of the researchers.

Results

The results of this research include an exegesis, a thesis (in form of a book), journal articles and oral presentations. If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research findings and request a copy of the results, please contact Le Thu Mach at +61 0449824383 or Thu.Mach@monash.edu.

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)

Room 111, Building 3e

Research Office

Monash University VIC 3800

Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Email: muhrec@monash.edu Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

Thank you,

Professor Chris Nash

Appendix H: Explanatory Statement for organisations (Vietnamese)

GIẢI THÍCH VỀ NGHIÊN CỨU (BẢN DỊCH)

(Nhóm Các cơ quan được liệt kê trong phần 1.10 của bản Đề xuất Đạo đức Nghiên cứu)

Đề tài nghiên cứu: Sự phát triển nhanh của truyền thông mạng xã hội và mối quan tâm của người dân tới vấn đề “xanh” ở Việt Nam

Giảng viên hướng dẫn: Giáo sư Nghiên cứu sinh: Mạch Lê Thu

Chris Nash

Điện thoại:+ 61 449824383

Điện thoại: +61 3 99034948

Email: Thu.Mach@monash.edu

Email: Chris.Nash@monash.edu

Quý vị được mời tham gia nghiên cứu này. Xin vui lòng đọc bản Giải thích về Nghiên cứu trước khi quyết định có tham gia vào nghiên cứu này hay không. Nếu quý vị muốn biết thêm thông tin về bất kỳ khía cạnh nào của nghiên cứu này, vui lòng liên lạc với các nhà nghiên cứu thông qua các số điện thoại và địa chỉ email được liệt kê ở trên.

Nghiên cứu bao gồm những gì?

Nghiên cứu này là một đề tài luận án tiến sĩ về truyền thông xã hội và báo chí về vấn đề biến đổi khí hậu và môi trường tại Việt Nam, được thực hiện bởi nghiên cứu sinh Mạch Lê Thu, do Giáo sư Chris Nash, Đại học Monash, hướng dẫn. Với sự đồng ý của quý vị, các nhà nghiên cứu sẽ tới gặp quý vị để xin được sử dụng các dữ liệu, tư liệu do quý cơ quan cung cấp cho luận án nghiên cứu nêu trên.

Lý do quý vị được mời trả lời phỏng vấn?

Quý vị đã được chọn để trả lời phỏng vấn cho nghiên cứu này vì quý vị và cơ quan/công ty quý vị đang lãnh đạo và quản lý hiện đang có các tài liệu liên quan đến truyền thông về môi trường, biến đổi khí hậu và truyền thông mạng xã hội, có thể được sử dụng cho nghiên cứu nêu trên.

Đồng ý tham gia, hoặc rút lui không tham gia nghiên cứu

Vui lòng đọc phần giải thích này và thư cho phép tham gia nghiên cứu đang được gửi kèm theo. Nếu quý vị đồng ý, xin vui lòng viết thư cho phép theo mẫu, trên giấy có tiêu đề và logo của quý cơ quan, kèm theo chữ ký của quý vị và gửi cho nghiên cứu sinh Mạch Lê Thu qua điện thoại hoặc địa chỉ email được liệt kê ở trên. Quý vị có quyền rút lui, không tham gia thêm vào nghiên cứu tại bất kỳ thời điểm nào trước khi luận án được nộp.

Lợi ích và nguy cơ cho người tham gia

Sự tham gia của quý vị vào nghiên cứu này sẽ góp phần bổ sung kiến thức mới về truyền thông xã hội tại Việt Nam và ảnh hưởng của nó trong việc giải quyết các vấn đề môi trường và biến đổi khí hậu. Chúng tôi không dự đoán rằng sự tham gia nghiên cứu này sẽ gây ra bất kỳ mối nguy hiểm nào cho quý vị. Câu trả lời của quý vị sẽ không bị đánh giá là đúng hay sai.

Thù lao

Không có khoản thù lao nào sẽ được chi trả cho người tham gia nghiên cứu.

Bảo mật

Chỉ có giáo sư hướng dẫn và nghiên cứu sinh có thể truy cập dữ liệu về cuộc phỏng vấn. Nếu quý vị yêu cầu, các báo cáo liên quan đến nghiên cứu này, bao gồm luận án và các ấn phẩm nghiên cứu khác, sẽ không tiết lộ tên của quý vị hoặc bất kỳ chi tiết nào khác có thể nhận diện quý vị. Một bản thảo của những chương/phần trong báo cáo nghiên cứu có sử dụng ý kiến của quý vị sẽ được gửi đến quý vị để xin ý kiến và/hoặc chỉnh sửa trước khi báo cáo được nộp.

Lưu trữ dữ liệu

Các dữ liệu sẽ được bảo mật và lưu trữ an toàn trong các ổ đĩa cứng của máy tính tại văn phòng tại Đại học Monash. Dữ liệu sẽ được sao lưu vào đĩa CD hoặc USB và sẽ được lưu trữ trong tủ có khóa, trong văn phòng của các nhà nghiên cứu. Dữ liệu sẽ được lưu trữ trong vòng năm năm sau khi hoàn thành nghiên cứu. Sau đó, các bản sao cứng của dữ liệu sẽ được hủy và các tập tin dữ liệu sẽ bị xóa khỏi máy tính và các thiết bị lưu trữ kỹ thuật số khác của các nhà nghiên cứu.

Kết quả

Kết quả của nghiên cứu này bao gồm một bản chú giải, một luận án (dưới hình thức một bản thảo cuốn sách), các bài báo và bài thuyết trình. Nếu quý vị muốn được thông báo về kết quả nghiên cứu tổng hợp và yêu cầu một bản sao của kết quả, xin vui lòng liên hệ với nghiên cứu sinh Mạch Lê Thu theo số điện thoại +61 0449824383 hoặc thư điện tử Thu.Mach@monash.edu

Khiếu nại

Nếu quý vị có bất kỳ mối quan tâm hoặc khiếu nại nào về việc thực hiện nghiên cứu này, xin liên hệ với Giám đốc Trung tâm Đạo đức Nghiên cứu Con người, thuộc Đại học Monash (MUHREC):

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Trân trọng cảm ơn,

Giảng viên hướng dẫn: Giáo sư Chris Nash (đã ký)

Appendix I: Questions for semi-structured in-depth interviews (Vietnamese)

LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

A: For bloggers/Facebook admins/journalists

Đề tài: Truyền thông xã hội với sự quan tâm của công chúng tới vấn đề xanh/chị ở Việt Nam

1. Về các bài đăng trên blog của nhà báo/bài báo [URL] Xin anh/chị vì sao anh/chị viết blog/bài báo này? Anh/chị lựa chọn những câu chuyện, nguồn tin như thế nào để đăng trên blog? Anh/chị trả lời và quản lý các bình luận (comments) như thế nào?
2. Tại sao anh/chị viết về đề tài môi trường? Anh/chị đánh giá bản thân có “điểm mạnh”, “điểm yếu”, “cơ hội” và “khó khăn” gì khi viết về đề tài này trên blog?
3. Làm thế nào để anh/chị tin tưởng vào những người cung cấp thông tin cho anh/chị?

Khi viết và đăng trên blog anh/chị có cần hỏi ý kiến của các chuyên gia y tế (nhà khoa học) rồi mới post hay không?

4. Mục đích ban đầu của anh/chị khi viết blog/Facebook/bài báo [URL] là gì? Anh/chị đã đạt mục đích, mục tiêu đề ra lúc ban đầu hay chưa? Điều gì đã hỗ trợ (hoặc ngăn cản) anh/chị đạt được mục tiêu này. (Xét các tác nhân như khoa học công nghệ hiện nay, chính sách quản lý báo chí truyền thông, ảnh hưởng của xã hội, ngân sách để duy trì trang mạng xã hội, nguồn nhân lực và thời gian để duy trì trang mạng xã hội)

5. Ai thường đọc trang blog của anh/chị? Ai là nhóm công chúng mục tiêu anh/chị hướng đến khi viết blog này. Anh/chị đã làm gì để đưa thông điệp đến với nhóm công chúng mục tiêu? Công chúng đã có những hoạt động gì (Công chúng đã làm gì trên mạng, làm gì ở ngoài cuộc sống thực), có thái độ thế nào khi đọc xong các bài viết trên blog của anh/chị?

6. Anh/chị có chiến lược gì để phát triển nội dung trang blog của anh/chị không? (Ví dụ nội dung gì anh/chị thường đăng lên, tần suất đăng lên như thế nào). Anh/chị có chiến lược marketing hay tạo dựng thương hiệu cá nhân từ trang blog này không? Có trang mạng xã hội và tờ báo nào anh/chị coi là hình mẫu để hướng tới không?

7. Tại sao (hoặc tại sao không) anh/chị kết hợp với cơ quan báo chí hoặc những người dùng mạng xã hội khác để kết hợp đưa tin về môi trường? Và anh/chị đã kết hợp như thế nào?

8. Anh/chị có đề xuất, gợi ý, lời khuyên nào cho những người dùng mạng xã hội khi muốn đưa tin về vấn đề tương tự (để thu hút sự chú ý của công chúng và có tầm ảnh hưởng, tác động nhiều hơn, nhằm thay đổi và giải quyết những vấn đề xã hội)

B: For organisations

CEO

1. Tại sao lựa chọn phát triển công ty theo hướng vì môi trường? Công ty đang có những hoạt động như thế nào liên quan đến vấn đề môi trường?
2. Có công ty nào trên thế giới/hoặc Việt Nam được sử dụng làm hình mẫu để phát triển Bao giống như vậy hay không?
3. Hiện có đối thủ cạnh tranh nào? Hoặc có công ty đối tác nào cũng hoạt động theo hướng đưa ra các sản phẩm xanh hay không? Có cần thiết phải liên minh với nhau không?
4. Tỷ lệ đầu tư cho vấn đề môi trường như thế nào? Ví dụ có cán bộ chuyên trách không? Tỷ lệ thời gian làm việc kinh doanh/làm việc vì môi trường? Tỷ lệ đầu tư ngân sách cho vấn đề môi trường/vấn đề khác? Phân tích cost-benefit trong chương trình/sản phẩm vì môi trường.

5. Tự đánh giá: hiện nay hướng phát triển vì môi trường của công ty Boo thành công đến mức độ nào? Xu hướng tiêu dùng sản phẩm/dịch vụ vì môi trường của thị trường VN ntn?
6. Quan điểm cá nhân của lãnh đạo công ty về truyền thông qua mạng xã hội? Chiến lược sử dụng mạng xã hội vào hoạt động kinh doanh? Sử dụng mạng xã hội để phát triển công ty theo hướng vì môi trường ntn?

Sales-marketing:

1. Làm thế nào để nói với khách hàng đây là sản phẩm vì môi trường?
2. So sánh giá của sản phẩm thân thiện với môi trường với sản phẩm cùng chức năng sử dụng nhưng không “vì môi trường”? Nếu khách hàng thắc mắc về giá (nếu cao hơn), công ty có cách trả lời ntn?
3. Tự đánh giá: hiện nay hướng phát triển vì môi trường của công ty Boo thành công đến mức độ nào? Xu hướng tiêu dùng sản phẩm/dịch vụ vì môi trường của thị trường VN ntn?
4. Quan điểm cá nhân của người phụ trách sales/marketing về truyền thông qua mạng xã hội? Sử dụng mạng xã hội vào hoạt động kinh doanh đang được thực hiện ntn? Sử dụng mạng xã hội để phát triển công ty theo hướng vì môi trường ntn?
5. Nếu có thể được: xin các số liệu, biểu bảng báo cáo kinh doanh các sản phẩm/dịch vụ liên quan đến vấn đề môi trường

Environment Director:

1. Mô tả những công việc/hoạt động cụ thể vì môi trường tại Boo
2. Để làm được việc này cần có nhóm kỹ năng/khiến thức cụ thể gì liên quan đến môi trường hay không? Học ở đâu, ntn?
3. Bản thân có tin tưởng vào hiệu quả các hoạt động vì môi trường hay không?
4. Green: a trend or a motive, personal view.
5. Quan điểm cá nhân về mạng xã hội và ứng dụng truyền thông xã hội vào kinh doanh các sản phẩm/dịch vụ vì môi trường.
6. Nếu có thể được: xin được tham gia quan sát 1 event cụ thể sẽ tổ chức trong tháng 8 hoặc tháng 9 liên quan đến kinh doanh các sản phẩm/dịch vụ hướng đến vấn đề môi trường

Media relations:

A: Quan hệ với báo chí (báo chí chính thống)

1. Việc quan hệ với báo chí đang được thực hiện như thế nào tại Boo?
2. Có quota về số lượng tin/bài/chương trình lên báo, lên sóng mỗi tháng hay không? Xin số liệu thống kê, media clips
3. Boo xuất hiện trên báo chí chính thống ntn? (Khen, chê, trung lập), thường nhắm đến báo nào, vì sao?

B: Người quản lý các trang mạng xã hội

1. Xin số liệu thống kê về việc sử dụng mạng xã hội: số người theo dõi, số friends, fan, lượt tiếp cận, nhân khẩu học (độ tuổi, giới tính, địa điểm, thời gian, tần suất) của nhóm người truy cập và sử dụng mạng xã hội của công ty.
2. Nếu có thể được: xin được quan sát theo dõi 1 buổi làm việc (up bài lên mạng xã hội, xử lý comment...) của người quản lý mạng xã hội
3. Quản lý mạng xã hội cần có kỹ năng/kiến thức gì? rèn luyện kỹ năng/kiến thức này ở đâu?

C: Người quản lý (các) trang web của công ty Boo

1. Xin số liệu thống kê về trang web, lượng view, bound, hit, click....

Câu hỏi chung cho ABC:

So sánh hiệu quả truyền thông giữa báo chí chính thống, mạng xã hội và trang web công ty:

- Platform nào dùng vào việc gì?
- Platform nào hiệu quả nhất trong bán hàng?
- Đã từng bao giờ xử lý khủng hoảng truyền thông? Platform nào A hay B hay C dễ gây ra khủng hoảng truyền thông nhất, ví dụ
- Chi phí duy trì A/B/C, hiệu quả thu được từ các phương tiện truyền thông A/B/C

Appendix J: List of research participants for in-depth interview

No.	Name	Job	Date	Place	Topic
1	HHY	Journalist - Mot the gioi Newspaper	November 13, 2014	Phone, email interview	The measles outbreak
2	DDH	Journalist - Lao Dong Newspaper	June 9, 2015	VJTC office, Hanoi	Environment Journalism
3	NQD	Environment Program Director - Boo Fashion Company	August 5, 2015	Boo's headquarter in Hanoi	Environment Campaigns at Boo
4	PQN	Marketing Official - Boo Fashion Company	August 6, 2015	Boo's headquarter in Hanoi	Media at Boo
5	DVA	CEO - Boo Fashion Company	August 8, 2015	Boo's headquarter in Hanoi	Commercialisation of the green goods and services
6	VNQ	Staff - Boo cafe	August 8, 2015	Boo's headquarter in Hanoi	Healthy F&B at Boo
7	NCA	CEO - Oxalis	August 26, 2015	Cafe Haiku, Hanoi	Media to promote cave tourism
8	VP	Media Officer	August 27, 2015	Oxalis head quarter - Quang Binh	Media to promote cave tourism
9	NPH	Project Officer - GIZ	August 31, 2015	Phone and email interview	Media for projects in Quang Binh
10	(N)BT	Activist - Save Son Doong	September 1, 2015 February 13, 2017	Hanoi	Save Son Doong
11	NTQD	Journalist - AutoCar Magazine	September 15, 2015	Hanoi	Environmental Facebooking

No.	Name	Job	Date	Place	Topic
12	MQA	Journalist - Vietnam News Agency	September 16, 2015 April-May 2016 (Email exchange) February 27, 2017	Hanoi	Dong Nai River movement Writing about Safari Phu Quoc
13	VB	Project Officer - Change, 350 Vietnam	September 17, 2015	Ho Chi Minh City	Preparation for COP21
14	PAV	Journalist - Sai Gon Gia Phong	September 18, 2015	Ho Chi Minh City	Environmental Journalism in HCMC
15	LA	Journalist - Tuoi Tre newspaper	September 20, 2015	Hanoi	The measles outbreak
16	HDM	CEO - A4F	September 20, 2015	Hanoi	COP21
17	NNM	Communication officer - Care International	September 21, 2015	Hanoi	COP21, V-INDC
18	Anonymous Admin	Facebook page “Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health”	April 4-17, 2016	Facebook messages	The measles outbreak
19	HQD	Journalist - Chairman of VFEJ	May 23, 2016	Phone and email interview	Vietnamese Forum for Environment Journalists
20	Anonymous Admin	Bauxite Vietnam blogs and Facebook page	May 23, 2016	Facebook messages	Bauxite
21	TT	Journalist - BRT	February 22, 2017	Quang Nam	Song Tranh 2
22	NQD	Engineer - Song Tranh 2	February 22, 2017	Quang Nam	Song Tranh 2
23	TV	Journalist - QRT	February 23, 2017	Quang Nam	Song Tranh 2

No.	Name	Job	Date	Place	Topic
24	HT	Journalist - VTV	February 24, 2017	Da Nang	Song Tranh 2
25	NAT	Activist - Formosa	February 24, 2017	Da Nang	Formosa
26	NTB	Media staff - Bac Tra My District	February 24, 2017	Quang Nam	Song Tranh 2
27	HTV	Journalist - Tuoi Tre newspaper	February 25, 2017	Ha Noi	Song Tranh 2
28	NTB	Former journalist	March 30, 2017	Phone and email interview	Save Son Tra
29	NHS	Journalist - Ngay Nay newspaper	December 1-7, 2017	Phone interview	One thousand like group
30	VDT	Party's Media Manager - PCTC	December 7, 2017	Phone interview	Paid Online commentators
31	LCT	CEO - InforRe	March 30, 2018	Phone and Facebook messages interview	Apps for social media content analysis
32	LTC	CEO - REpuDigital	July 23, 2018	Hanoi	Paid Online commentators
33	DND	Environmental Engineer	April 21, 2019	Hanoi	Formosa
34	HTT	Deputy manager - Ha Tinh industrial zones management committee	April 25, 2019	Ha Tinh	Formosa
35	NBD (& other PR staffs)	PR manager - FHS	April 25, 2019	Ha Tinh	Formosa

Appendix K: Codebook for content analysis

Note: For the first phase of content analysis (2014), the code book was designed in English language. From the second phase (2015-2016), the code book was designed in Vietnamese language for the convenience of the co-coders. In this appendix, different parts designed in different phases were merged.

CODE BOOK

This coding guidance is designed to analyse the text in the news articles about measles outbreak 2014 on Tuoi Tre Newspaper, VnExpress e-newspaper and The Facebook page “Call for resignation of the Minister of Health”. It provides labels with definitions and/or description, basing on which coders can group texts with commonalities in meaning under the appropriate labels.

The sources are coded in five groups according to their sectoral provenance. When a source works in several sectors, the information provided by the source is considered to code the source in the proper sector. For example, the Minister of Health, who is obviously a governmental official, could be coded as “a health expert” if this source says about vaccination or treatment rather than the policy or guidance from the government. Even though the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister are the most key positions in government, they can be coded as the political leaders because they are key members of the Vietnam Communist Party and the party assign them into the government positions.

Labels	Definitions/descriptions
1. Sources	
Experts	Doctors, health – vaccination experts, medical staffs, pharmacist
Government	(Deputy) Ministers, (Deputy) Chairmen and Chairwomen of People’s Committee, saying about the policies, regulations, demands and guidance from the government, cities and provinces authorities toward the outbreak
Lay people	Parents, non-medical staff working in hospital (security, cleaners)
Political leaders	Members of the Communist Party Central Committee
Primary definer	Primary definers are credible individuals and institutions granted media access to enable their initial framing of events which are assumed to be within their area of competence: for instance, experts, official sources, courts, leading politicians, and senior religious figures. Stuart Hall 1974: A term used to refer to the way in which the media look first to authorities (politicians, professors, senior

	management) for news items.
Counter definer	Those providing the contrast information and opposite opinion to the primary definer
Different opinion	Those providing information which is not relating to the information of primary definers and counter definers
No conflict	Those providing information which is relating but not different to the information of primary definers
Social media	Citations taken from lamchame, webtretho forum and Facebook
7. Topic/Subject matter	
Another epidemic	Other infectious diseases emerged together with the measles outbreak
Archive of measles outbreaks	Measles outbreaks in history and in other countries
Call for resignation	Title of a Facebook page, the petition of resignation of the Minister of Health
Caring of patients	How to take care of measles children and adults, for example: traditional medicine, separate patients according to the measles seriousness, how to identify measles, the process from infection to recovering, don't take children to hospital in big cities, don't take children to National Pediatrics Hospital, separate patients' beds, don't go to over crowded public space, new invention/medicine to cure the disease...
Celebrity	Music composers, singers, movie stars, fashion models' saying about measles outbreak
Condolences	Sympathy, condolences to the death children's families
Clarification	The leaders of the MOH clarified the differences in the number of death and number of patients; the reasons why measles vaccine is lacking
Criticism	Public criticised because of: Lack of resource for curing and prevention; Slow reaction of MOH and DoH; In-hospital infection in National Hospital of Paediatrics; Doctor have nothing but social media to talk about the epidemic; Opaqueness and inconsistence in the number of patients and death; Improper/unscientific procedure to count the number of patient; Poor education and training for people working in health care sector; Lack of leadership vision from the MOH.
Death toll	Number of children and adults died of measles during the measles break 2014

Demonstration	The call for demonstration is delivered on the Facebook page, it suggested people to take photo in public place with a sign calling for the resignation of the Minister of Health; discussion about the plan of an offline meeting to call for resignation
Deputy PM Appraisal	People appraised the quick response of the Deputy Minister Vu Duc Dam
Donation	The public donate money and buy respiratory aided equipment for Pediatrics hospitals
Double check	Facebook users discussed about the trustworthy of the information provided on the Facebook page
Doubtfulness	Facebook users questioned the trustworthy of the information provided on the Facebook page
Epidemic announcement	Call for the announcement that the outbreak is an epidemic
Gender issues	Discussion of the Facebook users about the appearance, outlook of the Minister; being a female Minister in society where most of the leaders are men.
Good development	Decrease in the number of patients; Good co-operation between hospitals
Investment	The demand of more money and equipment allocated for hospitals
Market information	The price of parsley seeds – a traditional medicine to prevent measles; advertising on the measles news thread
Measles facts and figures	The danger of measles (lung and brain diseases); New attributions of the measles in 2014 (Earlier in the age of patients; children under 9 months old and 10 years old also acquired measles; children with full vaccination also acquired measles); How measles transfer
Measles prevention	How to prevent measles and measles outbreak
Neglect of press	The criticism of Facebook users to the newspaper because of neglect and being slow in covering measles news
No resignation	The Minister of Health refused to resign
Number of patients	Statistic of the number of measles patients in different hospitals
Private measles stories	Stories shared by parents who children died of measles or by people who knew measles patients
Private information of the Minister	Family members of the Minister of Health

Professional ethics	Discussion on the ethics of doctors, medical staffs and other occupations
Reasons of the outbreak	Life circle of the virus; Global warming; 4 reasons provided by Minister of Health: (1) low rate of vaccination among children; (2) flee to National hospital of Paediatrics results to over anxiety and lead to (3) in-hospital infection and (4) the warm weather of the North after Tet holiday.
Response to criticism	The reaction and answers of MOH and Hanoi People's committee after being criticised
Response to social media	Answers and feedback for the information provided on social media
Schedule of the Minister	Visits to hospitals; Press conference; Chair meetings of MOH
Tension	Heavy Workload of doctors; Many children shared one hospital bed, Poor security in hospital: kidnap, pocket-picking
The death kid	The photo of the couple carrying their infant baby died of measles
Traits of a Minister	Discussions of Facebook users of the desired traits and quality that a Minister of health should have; stories of minister of health in other countries
Vaccination	The number/percentage of vaccinated children and adults; the lack of vaccine
3. Comment	
Positive	Support the authority (Authority include the government, MOH, Department of Health, Minister and her Deputy, The managers of hospitals, Peoples' Committee...)
Negative	Attack the authority
Neutral	Neither support nor attack the authority

Hướng dẫn code

Case 6700 cây xanh

File VnExpress:

- Điền vào các cột AE (số comment ủng hộ dự án chặt cây), AF (số comment phản đối dự án chặt cây), AG (số comment không ủng hộ, không phản đối, ý kiến khác). Vì số

comment rất nhiều (cột AC), nên chỉ cần lấy 1/5 số comment để phân tích (cột AD), và lấy từ trên xuống dưới đến khi đủ 1/5 số comment trong mỗi bài thì dừng lại.

2. Chọn 8 bài bất kỳ trong tổng số 39 bài để phân tích, điền từ cột I cho đến cột cuối cùng của bảng, không thay đổi nội dung trong các cột từ cột A đến cột H.

File TuoiTre

3. Điền vào các cột AE (số comment ủng hộ dự án chặt cây), AF (số comment phản đối dự án chặt cây), AG (số comment không ủng hộ, không phản đối, ý kiến khác). Vì số comment rất nhiều (cột AC), nên chỉ cần lấy 1/5 số comment để phân tích (cột AD), và lấy từ trên xuống dưới đến khi đủ 1/5 số comment trong mỗi bài thì dừng lại.

4. Chọn 2 bài bất kỳ trong tổng số 9 bài để phân tích, điền từ cột I cho đến cột cuối cùng của bảng, không thay đổi nội dung trong các cột từ cột A đến cột H.

Facebook Page ManforTree

5. Cột D: tóm tắt nội dung post, ngắn gọn 1 câu, viết bằng tiếng Việt.

6. Điền vào các cột G (số comment ủng hộ dự án chặt cây), H (số comment phản đối dự án chặt cây), I (số comment không ủng hộ, không phản đối, ý kiến khác). Do tổng số comment rất nhiều nên chỉ phân tích 1 phần 5 tổng số comment. Lấy từ trên xuống dưới đến khi đủ 1/5 số comment trong mỗi post thì dừng lại. Ví dụ, post số 1 có 216 comment thì phân tích 43 comment xuất hiện đầu tiên.

7. Cột L: Người dùng Facebook kêu gọi, đề xuất, yêu cầu làm việc gì, viết bằng tiếng Việt

8. Cột M: Người dùng Facebook đã thực hiện hành động gì để phản đối dự án chặt cây

9. Cột N: Nêu tên và chức danh của những người nổi tiếng, những vị lãnh đạo, quan chức, chuyên gia, nhà báo v.v...được nhắc tới trong post và trong số những comment đã phân tích trong cột G, H, I.

Hướng dẫn case Bauxite:

1. Sheet blog boxit: Điền cột G, H, I
2. Sheet TuoiTre: Điền cột AM, AN, AO; và chọn 4 bài bất kỳ trong số 18 bài để điền lại từ các cột G đến AL
3. Sheet VnExpress: chọn 4 bài bất kỳ trong số 19 bài để điền lại từ cột G đến cột cuối sheet.

Hướng dẫn case Son Doong

Trong file excel Facebook Save Son Doong:

Cột E: đếm tổng số like

Cột F: đếm tổng số comment (chỉ tính số comment hiện lên ở dưới mỗi post, không tính số comment phụ hiện lên dưới mỗi comment chính)

Cột G: Đếm tổng số những comment do người Quảng Bình viết. Định nghĩa người Quảng Bình: họ nói trong comment là họ là người QB hoặc vào trang Facebook cá nhân của người comment để xem thông tin phần About có thông tin về nơi sinh sống hoặc quê quán Quảng Bình. Gọi cột G là người Local.

Cột H: Người Local kêu gọi cộng đồng mạng làm những việc gì?

Cột I: Tổng số những comment do người trên lãnh thổ Việt Nam (trừ tỉnh Quảng Bình) viết. Định nghĩa người Việt Nam: trong phần About trên trang cá nhân ghi nơi sinh sống ở Việt Nam (trừ Quảng Bình). Gọi cột I là người National.

Cột J: Người National kêu gọi cộng đồng mạng làm những việc gì?

Cột K: Tổng số những comment do người sống ở ngoài lãnh thổ Việt Nam viết. Định nghĩa người sống ngoài lãnh thổ Việt Nam: vào phần About trên trang cá nhân ghi nơi sinh sống ở nước ngoài. Gọi cột K là người International.

Cột L: Người International kêu gọi cộng đồng mạng làm những việc gì?

Cột M: Số lượt share

Cột Q: nếu không tìm thấy thông tin về nơi sinh sống của người comment thì tính là No Information. Ghi số lượng No Information trong cột cuối cùng, cột Q.

Vì số lượng comment rất nhiều nên phải chọn lấy 1 số ít comment để phân tích.

Cách chọn. Phần Sampling này cô để nguyên tiếng Anh để cô test xem cô viết có dễ hiểu hay không? Nếu em không rõ chỗ nào thì báo lại cho cô nhé.

- Any news article or post with less than 20 comments: analyse 100% of the comments;

- Any news article or post with 20 to 50 comments: analyse 50% of the comments, select the first comment from every two comments;
- Any news article or post with 50 to 100 comments: analyse a 25% of the comments, select the first comment from every four comments;
- Any news article or post with 100 to 200 comments: analyse 10% of the comments, select the first comment from every ten comments; and
- Any news article or post with over 200 comments: analyse 5% of the comments, select the first comment from every 20 comments.

Như vậy, nếu post có 200 comment thì chọn 10 comment để phân tích. Bắt đầu chọn từ comment đầu tiên, số 1, sau đó đến comment số 21, 41, 61, 81, 101, 121, 141, 161, 181.

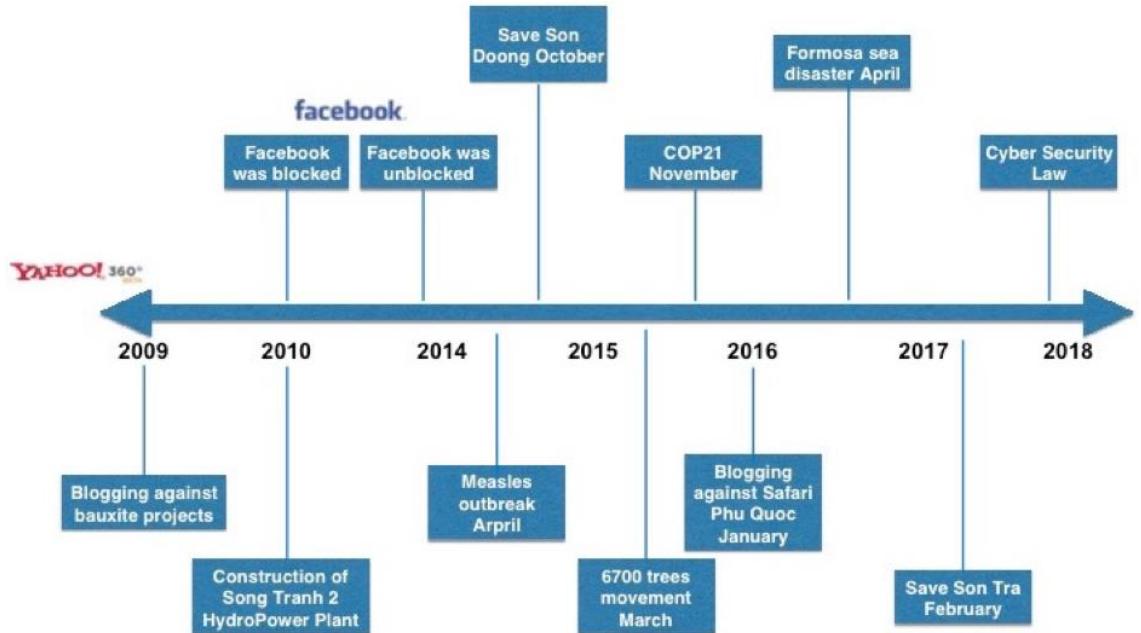
Appendix L: Number of news articles and social media posts for content analysis

The entire spreadsheets (Excel file) for content analysis is now available on Figshare for public access. Please follow this link to the file:

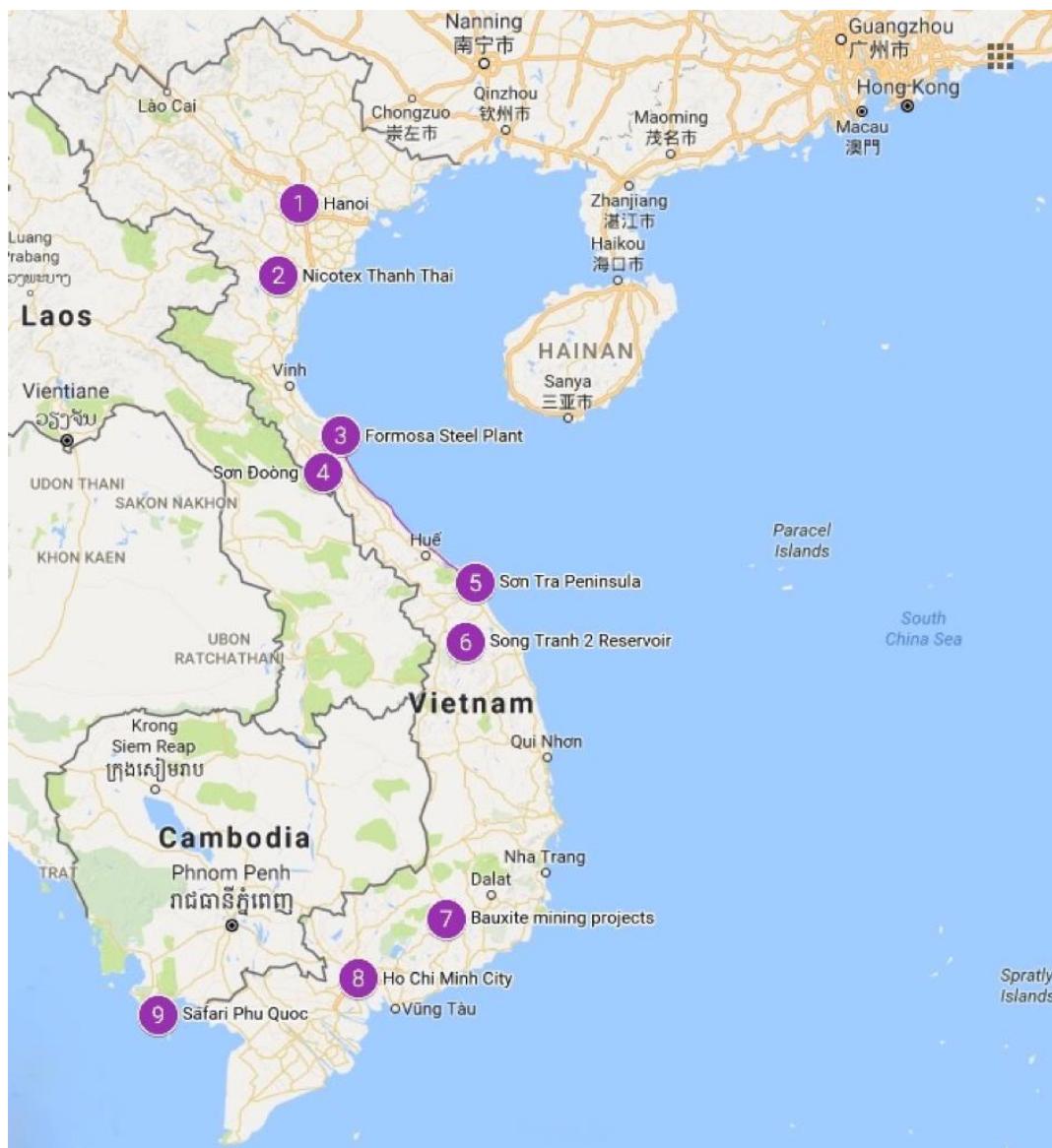
https://figshare.com/articles/Data_for_Content_analysis_for_Le_Thu_Mach_st_hesis/8217236

Events/Media	Tuoi Tre	VnExpress	Nhan Dan	Suc Khoe & Doi Song	Facebook	Blogs
Bauxite	18	19				57
Measles outbreak	46	45	63	22	15	
Save Son Doong					14	
6700 trees	9	39			50	
TOTAL	397					

Appendix M: Timeline of the green issues and events, and their location in Vietnam 2009-2018



Appendix M, Figure 1: Green issues that arose during the prevalence of Facebook in Vietnam 2009 – 2018



Appendix M, Figure 2: The locations of green issues in Vietnam from 2009 to 2018

The locations on the map¹⁷² are numbered in geographical order from the North to the South of Vietnam, regardless of the time or significance of their occurrence.

In July 2009, when the Yahoo! 360° blogging service closed down, social media users scattered to many platforms such as multiply, Wordpress, Blogspot, lamchame, webtretho, and ttvnonnline. August 2009 marks the beginning of blogging against bauxite projects. This is the starting point for the use of social

media for the green public sphere. The bauxite mining projects are numbered seven in the map. They were in Tan Rai and Nhan Co villages in Bao Loc District, Lam Dong province in the central highlands of Vietnam. The projects had been managed by the Vietnam National Coal and Mineral Industries Group (VINACOMIN) since 2008. In early 2012 VINACOMIN began extracting and processing aluminum from raw bauxite. The Vietnamese intellectual elites, led by high-profile former national leaders, engineers and army officials, started several blogs in 2009 to protest against the projects. The green public sphere in Vietnam was initiated by these intellectuals.

From 2010 to 2012, Facebook was unofficially technically blocked in Vietnam. The construction of HydroPower Plant number two on the Tranh River (Song Tranh 2) occurred during these two years. Song Tranh 2 is number six on the map. It is in Bac Tra My district, Quang Nam province, Vietnam. After the construction of Song Tranh 2, in 2010, trigger earthquakes began to occur with high frequency, causing tension and insecurity for the people living in the basin of local rivers. The construction and operation of Song Tranh 2 received criticism from the mainstream media, but no confrontation from social media because Facebook was blocked at the time. During this period, then, the green public sphere was characterised by the involvement of journalists.

In October 2013, the Facebook page 'Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health' was established. The page reached its peak of user participation from 16 April to 3 May 2014 during a measles outbreak. The location for the measles outbreak is the number one on the map in figure E1.5. This occurred in Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam, with a population of 7.5 million people in 2018. The Paediatrics Hospital in 18/879 De La Thanh Street in Hanoi was the treatment centre for most of the children with measles during the outbreak in 2014. The Minister of Health often visited this hospital during the measles outbreak. As a

consequence, the protesters used the hospital as the site for demonstrations, along with their protest on Facebook calling for the resignation of the Minister of Health. This event is a pivot point in the public sphere in Vietnam. This was the first time the public participated in a direct confrontation against a Minister. The public sphere shifted from political issues to non-political issues. Before the measles outbreak, the protests were against the nine-dash line (an area in the South China Sea, or the East Sea of Vietnam, that China claims as its Exclusive Economic Zone), which was known in Vietnam as the 'No-U' movement. With the measles outbreak, the protesters turned their concerns to public health and vaccination and then to green issues. In response to the Facebook public sphere around the measles outbreak, the Minister of Health started to use Facebook, recruited professional journalists, and embedded social media in the Ministry's public communication strategy. As of July 2019, she was the only Vietnamese government leader to use Facebook publicly. The media landscape observed a radical change when a group of journalists started to use Facebook to protect the Minister of Health. This was the early formation of the 'One thousand likes', a group of journalists using Facebook for propaganda purposes, serving both the government and the business sectors. The measles outbreak was a remarkable milestone in Vietnamese media history and in the Vietnamese green public sphere.

October 2014 witnessed a Facebook-based campaign 'Save Son Doong'. Number four in the map indicates the Son Doong cave, in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, Bo Trach District, Quang Binh Province, Vietnam, near the Laos-Vietnam border. In 2009, it was the largest known cave in the world. In 2014, the People's Committee of Quang Binh Province and SunGroup (a Vietnamese private company) made a plan to build a cable car system to Son Doong cave to establish massive tourism in the region, which would erase the rare ecological

system of the cave system. Save Son Doong was an online protest, starting in October 2014, which forced the Quang Binh People's Committee to halt the planned construction. People from around the world started to use the hashtag SaveSonDoong on their posts against the cable car system to Son Doong. At this point, then, the green public sphere in Vietnam gained the engagement of the international communities.

In March 2015, there was a mass movement against the cutting down of 6700 trees in Hanoi. A Hanoi housewife opened a Facebook page '6700 people for 6700 trees', then up to 22 people joined the administration of the page. This case marked the first triumph of the green public sphere. After the public protests, the Hanoi authority stopped its plan to chop down the trees. The green public sphere, in this case, obtained the thorough engagement of a diversity of the public, including the intellectuals, businessmen, governmental staffs, NGOs, national and international communities, celebrities and journalists.

In November 2015, the COP21 was a significant event for the green movement in the global context. In addition to the INDC that the Vietnamese government submitted to COP21, the NGO sector in Vietnam prepared an NGO proposal for the conference. Change, a Vietnamese NGO was among the NGOs advocating a ban on coal-fired power plants in Vietnam. Before and during COP21, Change selected social media as the key channel to deliver its message. Change's office is in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, numbered eight in the map. This is the largest city in Vietnam with a population of about 10 million people as of 2017. Before 1975, the city was called Sai Gon and was the centre of the South Vietnamese regime during the Vietnam War (which is referred to as the 'American war' in the communist government discourses). The city is the most populous metropolitan area in Vietnam and was the connecting hub for provinces in the Mekong Delta.

To further investigate the NGOs' engagement in the green public sphere, the researcher also collected data from Care International. Care International has its office in 92 To Ngoc Van Street, Hanoi, number one on the map in figure E1.5. Care International was the primary coordinator for the Climate Change Working Group, a collective of NGOs in Vietnam preparing for Vietnam's participation in COP21 in 2015.

To investigate the extent of engagement of the business sector in the green public sphere, the research also analysed a case study at Boo Fashion Company. In 2015 Boo was located at 198 Nghi Tam, Hanoi, before moving in 2016 to Hanoi Creative City. Hanoi is number one on the map. The data consists of Boo's performance in 2015 to 2017.

In January 2016, a blog post about Phu Quoc Safari appeared on Facebook, which the author used in this study as a case study for examining how business powers were controlling social media content in Vietnam. Phu Quoc Island is number nine in the map. Phu Quoc Safari is a 500-hectare themed zoo for wild animals from various parts of the world, owned by Pham Nhat Vuong, the CEO of Vin group, the first billionaire in Vietnam. In 2016, a UK-based blogger leaked details about the miserable living conditions of the wild animals at the Safari. Facebook users tracked the path of wild animal trafficking and discovered a farm in South Africa where the wild animals were being raised. The farm was owned by the family of a Vietnamese diamond trader who was having a romantic affair with Ho Ngoc Ha, a Vietnamese pop singer. This story immediately gained the public's attention because it had many sensational elements: billionaire, celebrity and wild animal trafficking. However, most of the investigation around Safari Phu Quoc was not published. This was a typical practice around media about the Vin Group, in which negative news was often blacked out or removed from both mainstream and social media.

In April 2016, water pollution caused a severe marine disaster in four provinces of Vietnam: Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Thua Thien-Hue. The location for this disaster is number four on the map. The Formosa Steel Plant then admitted that they were responsible for illegally discharging toxic industrial waste into the sea and promised to pay 500 million USD in compensation. The disaster provoked many demonstrations calling for the closure of the Formosa plant. It was the most serious environmental disaster in Vietnam since *Doi Moi* and had significant impacts on the entire population of Vietnam in the long term.

In March 2017, protests against the construction on Son Tra Peninsula occurred in Da Nang city, number five on the map, Son Tra Peninsula city is the home of a diversity of fauna and flora species, especially the red-shanked douc (one of the rare species of the Old World Monkey), which was selected as the mascot for Da Nang when the city hosted the APEC Summit in 2017. In March 2017, it was revealed that Sun Group (the same company that wanted to build the cable car system to Son Doong cave) constructed a series of villas on Son Tra Peninsula. The demonstrators started the Save Son Cha campaign and used WakeItUp.com to sign a petition against the construction. This campaign was the first time people had used local petition websites for green issues in Vietnam.

In October 2017, the National Assembly of Vietnam introduced the Bill for the *Cyber Security Law*, which enacted in 2018, marking tightened legislative barriers in using Facebook for activism in Vietnam.

The map displays the long coast that makes the country extremely vulnerable to rising sea levels and storms from the Pacific Ocean. The two largest cities in the country, Hanoi in the north (number 1 in the map) and Ho Chi Minh City in the south (number 8) are the centres of the large low-lying

areas of the Red River Delta and the Mekong Delta respectively. Vietnam is also dependent on the water management activities of the neighbouring countries in the upper reaches of the rivers: China, Laos and Cambodia.

Location number two in the map is Nicotex Thanh Thai, a military company located in Cam Van commune, Cam Thuy District, Thanh Hoa province. The story of Nicotext Thanh Thai was discussed to clarify the seriousness of pollution toward public health. From 1999 to 2009, Nicotext Thanh Thai dumped toxic pesticide DDT on the company's premises. A strong link was identified between the DDT dumping and widespread cases of cancer in the commune. The local people discovered the illegal DDT dumping in 2014. However, more than five years had passed from the last dumping, making it too late for the local people to lodge a lawsuit against the company Nicotex Thanh Thai.

Notes

¹ The text of the talk to voters can be accessed in this news article:

<http://vietnamnews.vn/politics-laws/450069/party-chief-askes-for-trust-from-voters.html#ihBBLK3kPsICpTko.97>

² The declaration of Amnesty International about the Cybersecurity Law:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/06/viet-nam-cybersecurity-law-devastating-blow-freedom-of-expression/>

³ The narrow city roads do not pave the way for the use of more frequent bus system. In Hanoi, the old French-built tram system was destroyed in the 1980s. The construction of the metro systems started in Ho Chi Minh city in 2010, and in Hanoi in 2011, but have not yet been finished as of 2018, after repeated delays. Since the infrastructure for public transport has not yet developed, the number of motorbikes in Vietnam is among the highest in Southeast Asia. In 2016, the number of motorbikes in Vietnam was 45 million. On average, every two Vietnamese people own a motorbike. Meanwhile, the number of private car ownership increased 200 per cent annually during 2005-2015 (VOV, 2016).

⁴ This is a link to the report on deforestation, published on Dan Tri, online newspaper
<http://dantri.com.vn/xa-hoi/ky-2-ve-co-ban-da-pha-xong-rung-1280209038.htm>

⁵ An investigation by Zing News about the industrial waste found in the property of Ha Tinh DONRE leader: <http://news.zing.vn/phat-hien-100-tan-chat-thai-cua-formosa-chon-o-ha-tinh-post665171.html>

⁶ For more about the economic crisis in Vietnam on VNEconomy newspaper, see:
<http://vneconomy.vn/thoi-su/3-lan-khung-hoang-va-3-lan-chuyen-vi-the-cua-viet-nam-20105194034740.htm>

⁷ Link to the online archive of the data

<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MKTGDPVNA646NWDB#0>

⁸ For more about the World Bank's prediction of Vietnamese economic growth in 2018, see this news story, published on the Voice of Vietnam: <https://vov.vn/kinh-te/wb-du-bao-tang-truong-gdp-viet-nam-nam-2018-dat-65-750345.vov>

⁹ The total amount of investment is discussed in this news story, published on Vietnam News
<http://vietnamnews.vn/Economy/223894/formosa-steel-lifts-investment-to-22b-in-cast-iron-refinery.html>

¹⁰ Website of Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation: <http://www.fhs.com.vn>

¹¹ The VTC's video news, in which Mr. Chou Chun Fan of Formosa Ha Tinh raised the question of 'Fish or Steel?' to the reporter Bui Lan Anh: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KnYr-c9Eco>

¹² A summary of the speech of PM Nguyen Xuan Phuc is published on Tuoi Tre newspaper:
<http://tuoitre.vn/tin/chinh-tri-xa-hoi/20160824/khong-danh-doi-kinh-te-lay-moi-truong-gay-anh-huong-cuoc-song/1160059.html>

¹³ A summary of the speech of Mr. Hoang Trung Hai is published on Tuoi Tre newspaper:
<http://tuoitre.vn/tin/chinh-tri-xa-hoi/20160224/tha-ngheo-nhung-yen-binh-con-hon-giau-ma-khong-an-toan/1056190.html>

¹⁴ A commune is an unit of administration in Vietnam, a commune is bigger than a village and is smaller than a district.

¹⁵ Mr. Truong Minh Tuan was appointed as the Minister of MIC on April 9, 2016, on the week that the sea disaster broke out. He was demoted on July 23, 2018.

¹⁶ The link to the interview of Thanh Nien reporters with the Deputy Minister of MONRE
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3kSR8s4RK4>

¹⁷ Full report *Vietnamese journalists use social media* is published on Vietnamese Journalists Association's professional magazine: <http://nguoilambao.vn/hien-tuong-nha-bao-dung-mang-xa-hoi-n5489.html>. The data set for this report has been uploaded on Monash University's Figshare archive: <https://figshare.com/s/0b39c05bc804012d4120>

¹⁸ Data collected from the discussions on Young Journalists Facebook Forum, April-June 2016.

¹⁹ MONRE experts announced 'the red tide' was the cause for the sea disaster, Transportation Newspaper reported: <http://www.baogiaothong.vn/bo-tvmt-ca-chet-do-thuy-trieu-do-khong-phai-formosa-d147796.html>

²⁰ Tuoi Tre newspaper reported that 'water blooming' was considered as one of the causes for the sea disaster: <http://tuoitre.vn/hoi-nghe-ca-vn-ca-chet-khong-lien-quan-tao-no-hoa-1092349.htm>

²¹ For more about the media expert's opinion of fake news about Hillary Clinton in this report, published on US News: <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/thomas-jefferson-street/articles/2017-07-12/russias-fake-news-is-a-big-part-of-the-trump-story>

²² Frankfurt School consists of the researchers of the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt on the Main river in Germany, which was founded in 1923 as an adjunct of University of Frankfurt. They constructed the critical theory, analysing the roles of large corporations and monopolies, technology, the industrialisation of culture, and the decline of the individual within capitalist society. Since the Nazi Party rose to power in Germany from the early 1930s, many scholars of the Institute sought refuge scheme in the USA, and the Institute became affiliate with Columbia University until 1949. Jürgen Habermas was a prominent scholar in the Institute from the 1950s. He has been the postwar Germany's leading philosopher and social thinker. Jürgen Habermas's influential theories include: the public sphere, communicative action, and modernity. These theories have been shaped through the historical West Germany political events, and helped to re-orienting German political thought and culture toward the liberal-democratic model (Specter, 2011).

²³ Guidance for journalists to produce news about meetings: <https://www.baomoi.com/doi-moi-tu-duy-de-tao-nen-nhung-tin-hoi-nghi-le-tan-hay-va-hap-dan/c/22355364.epi>

²⁴ For more about the ranking of VnExpress in these links: <http://vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/thoi-su/vnexpress-vao-danh-sach-500-trang-web-hang-dau-the-gioi-2028703.html>,
<http://vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/thoi-su/vnexpress-lot-vao-top-300-website-the-gioi-2816405.html>,
and <http://sohoa.vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/doi-song-so/vnexpress-vao-top-100-website-toan-cau-1517758.html>

²⁵ The data about Zing's revenue is published in this news articles on The Straits Times:
<http://www.straitstimes.com/business/vietnam-digital-content-startup-vng-plans-first-tech-ipo-in-us>

²⁶ For more about the HSBC's envision of Vietnam economic growth on this news articles published on VTV's website: <http://vtv.vn/kinh-te/tang-truong-kinh-te-viet-nam-vuot-ky-vong-20171006090208717.htm>

²⁷ Chinese Great FireWall/regulation is a term referring to the legislation and projects initiated by the Chinese government to regulate the internet in Mainland China. Following the scheme, China censors the internet by permanently blocking the access to thousands of websites outside China, particularly to the objectionable foreign websites such as Human Rights Watch, the BBC, the Huffington Post or Amnesty. In addition, specific subjects, including Falun Gong, Tibetan independence, Tiananmen Square massacre and democracy are also blocked. All the online content and service providers in China are required to sign a 'Public Pledge of Self Discipline' which requires them to refrain 'from producing, posting, or disseminating pernicious information that may jeopardise state security and disrupt social stability'. Google launched Google China - the subject censored service with the host computers locate in China. Youtube, Twitter, Facebook and many other social media networks are banned and replaced by vernacular social network such as Sina's Weibo, Live Chat SANTORO, M. A. 2009. China 2020 - How Western Business Can - and Should - Influence Social and Political Change in the Coming Decade, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press., QQ, Weixin, and many other chat apps.

²⁸ http://www.pr-quangcao.edu.vn/index.php/detail/579/?fbclid=IwAR2X1Vcnq568I9Ooseqt20VlFi27Q-edB3fp37FH0ttPZUUMoMyAnnvEy_k

²⁹ Link to Facebook account Osin Huy Duc: <https://www.facebook.com/Osinhuyduc>. This Facebook has a blue tick as an indicator that Truong Huy San has his identification verified for ownership of this Facebook account.

³⁰ Link to Facebook account Co gai do long <https://www.facebook.com/cogaidolongvn>. Like Osin Huy Duc's, this account also has the verified blue tick from Facebook.

³¹ Bach Hoan has two Facebook accounts at: <https://www.facebook.com/nhabaobachhoan> and <https://www.facebook.com/bachhoanvtv24>. Her sister, Bach Hue, always post the supporting contents at the account <https://www.facebook.com/tocroi2010>

³² Facebook account of Truong Duy Nhat: <https://www.facebook.com/nhabaotruongduynhat>

³³ Facebook account of Tran Dang Tuan <https://www.facebook.com/trandangtuanavg>

³⁴ Link to Facebook Nguyen Duc Hien (Bo cu Hung): <https://www.facebook.com/bocuhung>

³⁵ Link to Facebook page of Nicolas Kristof: <https://www.facebook.com/kristof/>

³⁶ Link to Facebook account of Phung Ai Van: <https://www.facebook.com/phung.van.73>

³⁷ Link to the main Facebook account of Nguyen Hong Son: <https://www.facebook.com/muot.ma.3>. Besides, he has two other spare Facebook accounts.

³⁸ Dinh Duc Hoang is a collaborator journalist of VnExpress. His Facebook account Hoang Hoi Han was deactivated in early 2017.

³⁹ Facebook account of Pham Gia Hien <https://www.facebook.com/giahien.journalist>

⁴⁰ Facebook account of Tran Anh Tu (Duong Tieu) <https://www.facebook.com/duong.tieu.14cm>

⁴¹ Facebook account of Hoang Minh Tri (Cu Tri): <https://www.facebook.com/tritroc>

⁴² Facebook account of Pham Huu Quang <https://www.facebook.com/phamhuuquang>

⁴³ Facebook account of Nguyen Quang

<https://www.facebook.com/nguyen.quang.3344?ref=mentions>

⁴⁴ Facebook account Chung Nguyen <https://www.facebook.com/congdan.phoco>

⁴⁵ Facebook account Mai Duong <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100004927486495>

⁴⁶ In this interview, published on Soha website, Do Doan Hoang justified why he does not use social media: <http://soha.vn/xa-hoi/nha-bao-do-doan-hoang-muon-thanh-nha-bao-tu-te-thi-bo-facebook-di-20130621034502285.htm>

⁴⁷ CMEA (also known as the Russia acronym Comecon) consisted of the communist countries: Bulgaria, Czech, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russian, Albania, East Germany, Mongolia, Cuba, Vietnam and some other observer countries. CMEA members supported each other in long-term economic plans. It was founded in 1949 and dissolved after the collapse of the communist bloc in 1991.

⁴⁸ Link to the full text of the Decision No.167: <https://luatminhkhue.vn/en/decision/decision-no-167-2007-qd-ttg-approving-the-zoning-plan-for-exploration--mining--processing-and-use-of-bauxite-ore-in-the-2007-2015-period-with-a-vision-to-2025-taken-into-consideration.aspx>

⁴⁹ Alumina (Al_2O_3) can be extracted to get Aluminium (Al)

⁵⁰ Bayer process is named after the Austrian chemist Carl Josef Bayer (1847-1904).It is a method of extracting alumina from bauxite following five steps. First, the ore is crushed to separate bauxite from oxides of iron, silica, and titanium. Second, mix bauxite with caustic soda and heat the mixture under high pressure, forming a solution of sodium aluminate. Fourth, crystals of aluminium hydroxide are precipitated from the solution. Last, aluminium crystals are then dried by heating to 1200 Celsius degree to collect the white powder (Schaschke, 2014). Red mud is the residue from step three to step four in this process.

⁵¹ The term 'bomb of sludge' was first published on the state-run newspaper of the state inspectors (Báo Thanh Tra) and was re-mentioned in many posts on Bauxite Vietnam blogs. This is the link to the archived news article about 20 million tons of 'bom of sludge': <https://bxvietnam.wordpress.com/2009/05/31/khai-thac-bauxit-o-tay-nguyen-'bom-bun'-20-trieu-tan-bi-dat-ngoai-vong-kiem-soat/>

⁵² This is the link to a news article on Zing News about the broken red-mud store pool in Tan Rai in October 2014 <https://news.zing.vn/bo-tai-nguyen-moi-truong-len-tieng-ve-vo-ho-chua-thai-quang-post466798.html>

⁵³ In this newsletter, published on VINACOMIN's website, on March 21, 2014, Alcoa had been conducted feasibility study in the Central Highlands but a number of obstacles thwart them from launching the co-operation: <http://www.vinacomin.vn/alcoa-muon-hop-tac-khai-thac-boxit-voi-viet-nam/alcoa-muon-hop-tac-khai-thac-bo-xit-voi-viet-nam-7544.htm>

⁵⁴ According to some media sources (RFA, kenh13), the number of Chinese workers in bauxite projects ranges from 2000 people in 2009 to 10.000 people in 2017. This is the link to the RFA news article: <https://www.rfa.org/vietnamesee/vietnam/chinh-tri/thousands-of-chinese-workers-heading-to-vietnam-GMinh-04032009115839.html>. This is the link to the news article on the Kenh13 website <http://kenh13.net/phat-hien-hon-3-000-tre-lai-tai-tay-nguyen-sinh-ra-tu-nhung-du-an-thue-muon-cong-nhan-trung-quoc.html>. The state-run newspapers and organisations in Vietnam have not released the number of Chinese workers in the bauxite projects.

⁵⁵ The ‘tribute to China’, FT: <https://www.ft.com/content/57d45a62-3a84-11de-8a2d-00144feabdc0>

⁵⁶ The figures about Vietnam debt problem are taken from this news article on Asia Times <http://www.atimes.com/article/vietnam-debt-problem/>

⁵⁷ For more about the production cost and the price of alumina in this article on thanh Nien newspaper <http://www.thanhniennews.com/business/after-many-years-vietnam-authority-investor-still-struggle-to-justify-bauxite-plants-40660.html>

⁵⁸ For more about the loss of the bauxite projects in this article on VnExpress, business column: <https://kinhdoanh.vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/doanh-nghiep/du-an-bo-xit-nhom-lam-dong-lo-gan-3-700-ty-3554483.html>

⁵⁹ This article reports opinions of the leading experts in mineral resources management and it is concluded that it is difficult to gain profit from the Nhan Co bauxite project <https://baomoi.com/alumin-nhan-co-lai-hon-13-ty-the-nao-la-lai/c/26740026.epi>

⁶⁰ The news articles about General Giap’s letters were then removed from VietnamNet. They were no longer accessible on VietnamNet and other mainstream media outlets in February 2019.

⁶¹ This is the link to the three anti-bauxite letters of General Giap <http://vietsciences.free.fr/vietnam/donggopxaydung/balathu.htm>

⁶² See the full list of 2746 intellectuals signed the petition on anti-bauxite website and blogs, here is the link to the last section (out of nine sections) of the list <https://boxitvn.wordpress.com/kien-nghi/danh-sach-9/>

⁶³ This is the link to the news article about the letter of Thich Quang Do, published on newspaper People’s Police <http://cand.com.vn/Su-kien-Binh-luan-thoi-su/Nhung-viec-lam-sai-trai-cua-ong-Thich-Quang-Do-Khau-phat-tam-xa-141999/>

⁶⁴ In Vietnamese language: ‘Chúng tôi sẽ đệ đơn nhò cõ quan chủ quản là VNPT can thiệp để loại bỏ cách hành xử tội tệ ấy’. See the section ‘How to access bauxite blogs’ on the front page of the bauxite blog <https://boxitvn.wordpress.com>

⁶⁵ Three Code Sections number 79, 88 and 258 of the Vietnamese Penal Code 1999, which respectively bans taking advantage of freedom to violate state interests, anti-state propaganda, and actions aimed at overthrowing the government. In June 2009, an amendment was made in the Section 88, according to which blogging against the government and CPV was banned. In the Penal Code version in 2015, the three sections were re-numbered as 109, 117 and 343 accordingly.

⁶⁶ Read about Tran Huynh Duy Thuc in this blog <https://tranfami.wordpress.com>

⁶⁷ Read the news about Cu Huy Ha Vu on VnExpress at <https://vnexpress.net/topic/vu-an-cu-huy-ha-vu-15306>

⁶⁸ Some of the content generated during 2009-2010, before the website collapsed, was re-posted on the blog boxitvn.wordpress.com. However, the blog on wordpress service has not been updated since June 18, 2011.

⁶⁹ For more about the ban on Du Bich newspaper in this news article on RFI http://www1.rfi.fr/actuvi/articles/112/article_3209.asp

⁷⁰ API stands for Application Program Interface, is a set of routines, communication protocols, and tools for building applications. It allows applications to interact with each other. For

example, with API on Facebook, applications of online games can be added in Facebook, and users can play games on Facebook platform. Without API, Facebook and a game are two separate applications, users and players have to log in both. For more about API on Mulesoft, a site for application developers: <https://www.mulesoft.com/resources/api/what-is-an-api>. In 2009, Facebook just released the Like button. Seven years later, in 2016, Facebook introduced five more buttons of reaction, including Love, Haha, Wow, Sad, and Angry.

⁷¹ The figures in this paragraph were published on the e-portal of Quang Nam province at <http://quangnam.gov.vn/> in May 2017.

⁷² <http://laodong.com.vn/xa-hoi/sang-79-dong-dat-manh-42-do-richter-tai-thuy-dien-song-tranh-2-82572.bld>

⁷³ <http://laodong.com.vn/xa-hoi/song-tranh-2-dong-dat-47-do-richter-91839.bld>

⁷⁴ <http://laodong.com.vn/xa-hoi/dong-dat-manh-36-do-richter-tai-khu-vuc-thuy-dien-song-tranh-2-quang-nam-222907.bld>

⁷⁵ <http://laodong.com.vn/thoi-su-xa-hoi/quang-nam-dong-dat-gan-thuy-dien-song-tranh-2-641584.bld>

⁷⁶ This is the link to the article about the number of earthquakes in Song Tranh 2 from 2017 to 2018, and the conclusion of Doctor Nguyen Xuan Anh <https://nld.com.vn/thoi-su/vua-xay-ra-tran-dong-dat-thu-74-gan-thuy-dien-song-tranh-2-20180926153455793.htm>

⁷⁷ For more about the damage of the Song Tranh 2 water dam in this news articles on VietnamNet e-newspaper <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/special-reports/56075/hydropower-2012--gray-picture.html>

⁷⁸ It is 900km from Tam Ky to Hanoi in the North, and about 900km to Ho Chi Minh City in the South.

⁷⁹ This is the link to the footage about the fatal storm
<https://www.facebook.com/justthu/videos/10214635561543114/>

⁸⁰ This is the link to the Facebook group of protesters against the Song Tranh 2:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/311059868992882/> It was created on September 11, 2012.

⁸¹ Ha Tinh is the location of Formosa. The people of Nghe An - Ha Tinh started the Soviet-Nghe Tinh revolutionary in 1930 in Vietnam, leading to the struggle against the French and Japanese for the independence of Vietnam in 1945.

⁸² This is the link to the MONRE environment journalism announcement
<http://vea.gov.vn/vn/tintuc/tintuchangngay/Pages/B%e1%bb%99-TNMT-t%e1%bb%99-ch%e1%bb%99c-Giai-thuong-B%e1%ba%a1o-ch%e1%bb%99-%C3%AD-tai-nguyen-v%e1%ba%a1-m%e1%bb%99i-truong-l%e1%bb%99n-th%e1%bb%99-IV.aspx>

⁸³ Link to the environmental journalism award by Siemes: <https://baomoi.com/giai-thuong-ve-cong-nghe-xanh-danh-cho-bao-chi/c/4716379.epi>

⁸⁴ Link to the announcement of environmental journalism award, by MIC:
<https://dantri.com.vn/ban-doc/be-mac-hoi-bao-toan-quoc-2017-an-tuong-dac-sac-nhung-giai-thuong-20170320090850627.htm>

⁸⁵ In the course outlines for journalism programs of AJC, retrieved on December 4, 2018, there is no course for environmental journalism: <https://ajc.hcmu.edu.vn/daotao/pages/chuong-trinh-dao-tao-he-chinh-quy-tap-trung.aspx?CateID=830&ItemID=9448>.

In the course list 2017 of VJA, there was no training on environmental journalism
<https://ajc.hcma.vn/daotao/pages/chuong-trinh-dao-tao-he-chinh-quy-tap-trung.aspx?CateID=830&ItemID=9448>.

Other journalism schools and journalism associations follow the training structures proposed by AJC and VJA.

⁸⁶ This is the link to the guidance on birth registration:

<http://www.sotuphap.hochiminhhcity.gov.vn/tthc/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx>List=20ef509c-6e8a-4396-886b-dcbecc1d0f12&ID=23>

⁸⁷ This is the link to the news article on Tuoi Tre <http://tuoitrenews.vn/society/38695/the-mystery-of-vietnams-ten-cancer-villages>

⁸⁸ This is the link to the summary of the report on HEMA's website <http://vihema.gov.vn/thong-tin-ve-ketqua-khao-sat-so-bo-tinh-hinh-mac-ung-thu-va-chat-luong-nuoc-an-uong-sinh-hoat.html>

⁸⁹ This is the link to the article on Tuoi Tre newspaper, in which MOH reported 25 children died of measles <http://tuoitre.vn/tin/song-khoe/20140415/da-co-25-tre-tu-vong-vi-soi/602841.html>

⁹⁰ This is the link to the article on Tuoi Tre newspaper, in which MOH reported 108 children died of measles <http://tuoitre.vn/tin/song-khoe/20140416/108-tre-chet-do-soi-va-bien-chung-bo-y-te-giau-dich/602991.html>

⁹¹ Lao Dong newspaper used the quotation as the title for this article <https://baomoi.com/bo-truong-bo-y-te-con-chau-toi-co-mac-soi-khong-bao-gio-dai-cho-vao-vien-nhi-t-u/c/13586623.epi>

⁹² This is the link to the Facebook Page 'Call for the resignation of the Minister of Health':
<https://www.facebook.com/botruongytetuchuc/>

⁹³ This is the link to a news articles, originated by VnExpress, discuss the curfew regulation in Defence Law <https://baomoi.com/luat-quoc-phong-2018-lenh-gioi-nghiem-va-thiet-quan-luat-lagi/c/26842835.epi>

⁹⁴ This is the link to the personal Facebook account of the Minister of Health, Nguyen Thi Kim Tien <https://www.facebook.com/kimtien1102>

⁹⁵ This account has been managed by the communication officer of the MOH
<https://www.facebook.com/botruongboyte.vn/>

⁹⁶ This is the link to the interview in which the Minister of Health answer the reporter of Tuoi Tre about the use of Facebook <https://news.zing.vn/bo-truong-kim-tien-facebook-cua-toi-la-toi-tra-loi-day-post633479.html>

⁹⁷ This is the link to the news article about a doctor was fined because of calling for the resignation of the Minister of Health <https://news.zing.vn/khuyen-bo-truong-y-te-nghi-bac-si-bi-khien-trach-phat-tien-post788782.html>

⁹⁸ On August 8. 2019, Do Viet Anh's secretary wrote in a feedback email that "Viet Anh's green life style has become more practical and applicable to the modern daily life".

⁹⁹ <http://tapchibaothiennghiepxahoi.gov.vn/tin-tuc/viet-nam-dang-co-dan-so-tre-cao-nhat-trong-lich-su-9135>

¹⁰⁰ (T. L. Giang & Bui, 2014) & GSO&UNFPA 2014. Survey on Population and Housing mid-2014: Demographics of Age, Gender, and some socio-economic issues in Vietnam. Hanoi: UNFPA.

¹⁰¹ <https://climateheroes.org/heroes/hong-hoang-inspiring-vietnams-youth/>

¹⁰² <http://thehexanh.net/trang-mau/chung-toi-la-ai/> See the About-us statement of the Green Generation Network, Retrieved on July 9, 2018

¹⁰³ https://www.facebook.com/pg/clbnhabaoxanh/about/?ref=page_internal See the mission statement of the Green Journalists Club

¹⁰⁴ Checking in October 2019, Boo Fashion Compnay launched their YouTube channel in September 2018 and had post 12 commercial clips as of 11 October 2019. Here is the link to the channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOWxk3gWGE4RL3wcAeBCFNA>

¹⁰⁵ Reach: The times that the contents on Facebook pages be sent to the news feed of the followers.

¹⁰⁶ Like: A button under each post on Facebook, with a thumb up icon. Facebook users hit like button to express their appreciation to the posts.

¹⁰⁷ Share: A button under each public post on Facebook. Facebook users hit the share button to re-post content from a Facebook page to another Facebook page.

¹⁰⁸ Comment: Users leave their opinions and feedback under the posts on Facebook.

¹⁰⁹ Ly-Le, T.-M. 2014. Danlait's 2013 Social Media Crisis in Vietnam: a case study to explore online crisis scanning criteria. ANZCA Conference. Swinburne University: ANZCA.

¹¹⁰ Retrieved in July 2018, on the website of Petrolimex, the Vietnamese governmental gasoline corporation <http://www.petrolimex.com.vn>

¹¹¹ Read this article for the analysis of the increase in petrol price cause the rise in inflation and many other goods and service: <https://tapchimoi.info/gia-dien-tang-xang-len-manh-dat-do-mo-rau-con-ca-lo-mam-com-nha-dan.html>

¹¹² <http://cafef.vn/tang-thue-xang-khong-vi-moi-truong-20180706084708685.chn> See the article 'Environmental tax is not for the sake of environment'

¹¹³ In 2012, the Green Cross and Blacksmith Institute resealed the report of the top industries that cause risks to public health in 49 middle income countries. The below is the top ten list by DALY (Disability-adjusted life year).

1. Lead-acid battery recycling - 4,800,000 DALYS
2. Lead smelting - 2,600,000
3. Mining and Ore Processing - 2,521,600
4. Tannery operations - 1,930,000
5. Industrial/municipal dump site - 1,234,000
6. Industrial estates - 1,060,000
7. Artisanal gold mining - 1,021,000
8. Product manufacturing - 786,000
9. Chemical Manufacturing - 765,000
10. Dye industry - 430,000

In this list, dye industry ranks the tenth. In addition, the bauxite mining and alumina refinery rank the third (in the category of mining and ore processing), and the red mud storing ranks the

fifth (industrial dump site) in the top of most disastrous industries. Bauxite mining projects are discussed in the chapter three of this book.

¹¹⁴ ANGUELOV, N. 2016a. The Dirty Side of the Garment Industry

¹¹⁵ The lists of international and local fast fashion brands are made up of the brand names mentioned in the news article 'The pressure of international fast fashion',
<https://baomoi.com/suc-ep-cua-hang-thoi-trang-nhanh-nuoc-ngoai/c/24621513.epi> Retrieved on 11 July 2018.

¹¹⁶ The numbers of visitor to Son Doong are taken from in this news article published on VnExpress <https://dulich.vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/viet-nam/quang-binh/tour-son-doong-2017-ban-het-hon-nua-so-luong-sau-2-ngay-3453918.html>

¹¹⁷ See the news about cable car construction announcement in this link
<https://dulich.vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/tu-van/hanh-trinh/quang-binh-len-ke-hoach-xay-cap-treo-vao-hang-son-doong-3097538.html>

¹¹⁸ The most interactive posts are those with over 1000 times of like, share and comment. From October 2014 to October 2015, there were 14 most interactive posts on SaveSonDoong Facebook page.

¹¹⁹ Searching on Quang Binh online newspaper with the stem 'cáp treo' (cable car), from October 2014 to August 2015, there were just two articles written by journalists of this newspaper directly discussed the construction of cable car to Son Doong cave. The other articles were copied from other newspapers, and/or discussed the general development plan of Quang Binh, in which the plan of cable car was a part of. This is the link to the article 'Quang Binh People Committee organised a press conference about the cable car to Son Doong', published on Quang Binh online newspaper on November 4, 2014: <https://baoquangbinh.vn/tin-tuc-su-kien/201411/ubnd-tinh-quang-binh-to-chuc-hop-bao-ve-du-an-cap-treo-phong-nha-ke-bang-2120003/>

¹²⁰ This is the link to the article 'Quang Binh strictly follows the national law and international regulations of managing heritages', published on Quang Binh online newspaper on November 21, 2014: <https://baoquangbinh.vn/dat-va-nguoi-quang-binh/201411/ve-du-an-cap-treo-phong-nha-ke-bang-quang-binh-dang-thuc-hien-dung-trinh-tu-thu-tuc-do-luat-phap-trong-nuoc-va-cong-uoc-quoc-te-ve-di-san-quy-dinh-2120471/>

¹²¹ Vu Duc Dam is a media and technology savvy Deputy Prime Minister, who read a Facebook page of a doctor to detect false number of measles children died in the report of the MOH (Read more in chapter 5). He was selected to stay as one of the four Deputy Prime Minister of Vietnam from 2016-2020, even though he was not selected as a standing member of the Party's Political Bureau in this period.

¹²² This is the link to the news article on Nhan Dan online newspaper, published on November 4, 2014, that cover the opinion of the local Communist Party's view point on the construction of the cable car <http://www.nhandan.com.vn/vanhoa/di-san/item/24746002-cap-treo-phong-nha-ke-bang-se-khong-di-vao-hang-son-doong.html>

¹²³ This is the link to the article on Lao Cai provincial newspaper, which lists the compliment constructions for the success of the National Congress of the Communist Party
<http://www.baolaocai.vn/goc-anh/an-tuong-nhung-cong-trinh-chao-mung-dai-hoi-dang-bo-tinh-lan-thu-xv-z53n2015092111119571.htm>

¹²⁴ See the Save Son Doong Facebook post on June 9, 2018:

<https://www.facebook.com/NoCableCarInSonDoong/posts/2035490886705439>

¹²⁵ The blog Zoo New Digest, zonewsdigest.blogspot.com started in 2009 and it has been still updated as of 2018.

¹²⁶ This is the link to the feature story about Pham Nhat Vuong, published on the first issue of Forbes magazine <https://forbesvietnam.com.vn/nhan-vat/ong-pham-nhat-vuong-ti-phu-dau-tien-38.html>

¹²⁷ This is the link to a news articles on VietnamNet e-newspaper, with the fact and figures provided by Vinpearl PHA Quoc Safari about the animals in the Safari:

<https://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/environment/151544/over-100-animals-die-at-phu-quoc-vinpearl-safari.html>

¹²⁸ This is the link to the Request of The International Animal Rescue Africa to trace the animals in the photo of Chu Dang Khoa's ex-wife

<https://www.facebook.com/InternationalAnimalRescueFoundationAfrica/photos/a.204117543001491/995564317190139/?type=3&theater>

¹²⁹ Read about the extreme heat in Hanoi in early July 2018 in this news article on Zing

<https://news.zing.vn/ha-noi-dang-nong-ky-luc-post857009.html>

¹³⁰ See Zing's list of extraordinary French styles buildings in Hanoi in this articles

<https://news.zing.vn/nhung-cong-trinh-phap-co-tuyet-dep-tai-ha-noi-post343668.html>

¹³¹ Read about the changes of Hanoi population in this article published on VN Economy

<http://vneconomy.vn/den-2020-dan-so-ha-noi-gan-bang-du-bao-cho-30-nam-sau-20181026105652887.htm>

¹³² The data of the number of vehicles in Hanoi was taken from this articles, published on Tien Phong newspaper <https://www.tienphong.vn/xa-hoi/ha-noi-tang-27000-phuong-tienthang-khong-tac-them-moi-la-1324092.tpo>

¹³³ This is the link to the open letter posted on Tran Dang Tuan's Facebook on March 16, 2015

<https://www.facebook.com/trandangtuanavg/posts/742454139204505>

¹³⁴ Read the interview of VietnamNet reporter with Mr. Phan Dang Long in this link

<https://vietnamnet.vn/vn/thoi-su/chat-cay-xanh-ha-noi-khong-phai-hoi-dan-226164.html>

¹³⁵ Here is the link to the Facebook page Man for Tree <https://www.facebook.com/manfortree/>

¹³⁶ This is the link to the Facebook page of Green-Trees:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/vimothanoixanh>

¹³⁷ In this article on Ha Noi Moi newspaper on January 19, 2019, Hanoi People's Committee reported over 1 million trees had been removed and re-planted <https://hanoimoi.com.vn/tin-tuc/Xa-hoi/924773/chuong-trinh-trong-1-trieu-cay-xanh-ve-dich-som-truoc-2-nam>

¹³⁸ See the article that was removed from the *Tuois Tre* newspaper but re-published in blogs: (1)

<https://nguyenxuanphuc.org/%E2%80%8Bkiem-tra-formosa-dung-dau-sai-do.html>; (2)

<http://alobacsi.com/kiem-tra-formosa-dung-dau-sai-do-n20160522071427340.html>; (3)

<http://vinasme.vn/Ca-chet-hang-loat-o-mien-Trung-Kiem-tra-Formosa-Dung-dau-sai-do-1501-4395.html>

¹³⁹ See the full video of the June 30, 2016 press conference on the YouTube channel of VnExpress <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edJuvRkiT90>

¹⁴⁰ See the full video of the VTC1's report on April 24, 2016 about two fish died after two minutes in Vung Ang sea water in this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFrZOAdc4zc>

¹⁴¹ See the extraction of the 60 minutes VTV talk show 'Why did you share?' with Mc Phan Anh in this link <https://vimeo.com/168892064>

¹⁴² Read the full poem in this link <https://www.thivien.net/Trần-Thị-Lam/Đất-nước-mình-ngô-quá-phải-không-anh/poem-OoHCOCBrsvLEM-uXZP9DSQ>

¹⁴³ Read more about Cao Vinh Thinh and the film production in this news article on BBC <https://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/vietnam-47770205>

¹⁴⁴ The information about Ho Chi Minh City Policemen's report about Viet Tan's activities in May 2016 was extracted from this news article on Nhan Dan newspaper http://www.nhandan.com.vn/nation_news/item/29601802-to-chuc-khung-bo-viet-tan-to-chuccac-vu-gay-roi-trat-tu.html

¹⁴⁵ Viet Labour is listed as one of the partners among protester against Formosa in this article and video on Nghe An TV: <https://truyenhinhanghean.vn/xa-hoi/201702/nguyen-dinh-thuc-that-su-la-ai-697239/>

¹⁴⁶ Read more about Viet Tan party's role in protests in this article on Tuoi Tre newspaper, re-published on baomoi website http://baomoi.me/xa-hoi/to-chuc-viet-tan-to-chuc-gay-roi-nhan-vu-ca-chet-o-mien-trung_tin552119.html

¹⁴⁷ The information about the Catholics' protests are described in this article on People's Police Newspaper <http://cand.com.vn/Chong-dien-bien-hoa-binh/Buc-xuc-truoc-hanh-dong-cua-cha-Nguyen-Dinh-Thuc-giao-dan-Nghe-An-viet-thu-ngo-441041/> and this article on RFA https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/the-rallies-against-priest-in-nghean-tt-05092017080021.html

¹⁴⁸ This is the link to a news about the meeting between Green-Trees and Green Peace <https://www.greentreesvn.org/2016/11/loi-khuyen-tu-greenpeace.html>

¹⁴⁹ Video Obama met CSOs representatives https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKyBJZpy_HQ

¹⁵⁰ Read the commentary 'Don't let him hold a press card' on the news site petrotimes <https://petrotimes.vn/khong-the-de-ke-nay-cam-the-nha-bao-438391.html>

¹⁵¹ The number of Chinese workers in Formosa is extracted from this interview with Formosa Manager <https://vnexpress.net/kinh-doanh/sep-formosa-ha-tinh-chua-the-du-ng-thue-lao-dong-trung-quoc-3073106.html>

¹⁵² 18000 workers migrate to find jobs <https://vnexpress.net/thoi-su/gan-18-000-lao-dong-xuat-khau-sau-su-co-moi-truong-mien-trung-3598634.html>

¹⁵³ Read about the refugee Bach Hong Quyen in this announcement of the VOICE <https://vietnamvoice.org/en/2019/05/thong-cao-ve-viec-ong-bach-hong-quyen-di-dinh-cu-tai-canada/>

¹⁵⁴ Read about doctor Ho Hai, the dissident against Formosa, in this news article on RFA: <https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/news/vietnamnews/Dissident-doctor-jailed-for-propaganda-against-the-state-02012018071747.html>

¹⁵⁵ Read about the intimidation toward reporter Nguyen Van Hoa in this post: <https://www.facebook.com/RFAVietnam/photos/a.489111469570/10157359400819571/?type=1&t=heater>

¹⁵⁶ Read about the violent attacks to the Catholics paraders in this news article <https://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/vietnam-40642011>

¹⁵⁷ Read about the online attacks to Mr. Vo Kim Cu in this news article

<http://hatinh24h.com.vn/ong-vo-kim-cu-noi-ve-viec-dinh-cu-the-xanh-o-canada-a124892.html>

¹⁵⁸ Mr. Vo Kim Cu was demoted from previous position <https://vnexpress.net/thoi-su/ong-vo-kim-cu-bi-xoa-tu-cach-nguyen-chu-tich-ha-tinh-3628182.html>

¹⁵⁹ Read the report about the economic growth of Ha Tinh in this article on Investment site:

<https://nhadautu.vn/ha-tinh-toc-do-tang-truong-dat-muc-khung-3294-d10843.html>

¹⁶⁰ Report about Tata's investment in Ha Tinh https://ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=3512

¹⁶¹ This article compare Formosa and Da Phuoc waste dumping site <https://motthegioi.vn/thoi-su-c-66/xa-hoi-c-94/dan-keu-troi-bai-rac-da-phuoc-nhu-mot-formosa-cua-tphcm-41205.html>

¹⁶² Read the English version of Vietnamese Constitution 2013 in this link:

https://www.globaldisabilityrightsnow.org/sites/default/files/related-files/272/Constitution_Vietnamese.pdf

¹⁶³ Here is the link to the website for drafting law:

http://duthaoonline.quochoi.vn/DuThao/Lists/TT_TINLAPPAP/View_Detail.aspx?ItemID=153

The website is run by the National Assembly of Vietnam.

¹⁶⁴ Link to the Decree 38/2005: <https://luatvietnam.vn/an-ninh-trat-tu/nghi-dinh-38-2005-nd-cp-chinh-phu-17055-d1.html#noidung>

¹⁶⁵ Link to the Circular 09/2006: <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Van-hoa-Xa-hoi/Thong-tu-09-2005-TT-BCA-bien-phap-bao-dam-trat-tu-cong-cong-huong-dan-thi-hanh-Nghi-dinh-38-2005-ND-CP-17573.aspx>

¹⁶⁶ Read about the Thai Binh riots in this article on the website of Vietnam National Assembly:

http://duthaoonline.quochoi.vn/DuThao/Lists/TT_TINLAPPAP/View_Detail.aspx?ItemID=153

¹⁶⁷ Here is the link to the news about the birth of VCNet social media of CPV:

<https://congnghe.tuoitre.vn/mang-xa-hoi-vcnet-co-nhieu-tinh-nang-nhu-mang-xa-hoi-khac-20190705103016682.htm>

¹⁶⁸ Read the news about the launching of Lotus social media platform in this link:

<https://infonet.vn/mang-xa-hoi-lotus-viet-nam-hut/nguo-dung-vi-noi-dung-la-vua-post312415.info>

¹⁶⁹ Under the powerful activism of the communities in Wallace and Claiborne parish, Louisiana, in 1991, the Formosa Plastics Corporation admitted that they discharged dioxin into the Mississippi River, possibly a direct correlation to the widespread of cancer in the region. The ultimate success of the Louisiana movement against Formosa was the termination of Formosa's large pulp and rayon production facilities in Louisiana (Hill, 2009).

¹⁷⁰ Chipko in Hindi language means 'stick to' or 'hug'. It is a women-led movement started in India in 1973 when the Himalayan communities embrace the trees to protect them against the felling designation. Chipko activists triggered a series of civil disobedience, such as sitting protests, trees hugging and silence strike for forests preservation, which led to many changes in policies toward forestation and ecology (James, 2013).

¹⁷¹ Nu River is a part of the UNESCO recognised World Heritage Site in Yunnan, a south western province of China, near the border with Myanmar. The plan for constructing water dams on Nu River in 2004 was halted upon the protesting campaigns initiating by scholars and researchers. In this case, Chinese national media acted as powerful public forum since it dramatically covered the debates between the economism supporters and ecology supporters (Yang and Calhoun. 2007). The plan to build dams on this river was thwarted by the protests and has been shelved as of early 2018.

¹⁷² According to the Article number 16.2 of the Decree number 173/2013/NĐ-CP dated 13 November 2013 on penalties for administrative offences in the areas of meteorology-hydrology, measurement and mapping, which was prepared by the MONRE and issued by the Government of Vietnam, a fine from 40 million to 50 million Vietnam Dongs (an equivalence to about 2,500 AUD) will be implemented on the maps of Vietnam that lack of Parcel Islands and Spratly Islands, spontaneously the maps would not be officially recognised in the country. This justifies the appearance of the two groups of Islands in the map, despite the fact that the green issues hardly occur in such remote areas.