

Arisen Issues in Innovating Political Communication Work on Social Networks in Vietnam Today

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Abstract: *Nowadays, there are lots of urgent problems that need to be solved related to the requirement of innovating political communication on social networks in Vietnam. The key issues involve leadership, direction and management activities; human resources; contents and methods of communication; guidelines, policies and solutions to develop the domestic social network ecosystem; scale and nature of the participation of cadres, Party members and people of all classes who are both subjects and objects of this process.*

Keywords: *arisen issues, political communication, innovating political communication, social networks.*

Political communication on social networks in Vietnam in the digital era is posing new requirements for the innovation process. Innovation must be based on inheritance and creative, scientific and effective development. Innovation must be comprehensive, synchronous, radical and groundbreaking; making the most of functions and utilities of social networks. It needs to ensure good information security and ideological security, firmly protecting the Party's ideological foundation. Looking at that requirement and from the current situation of political communication work on social networks in our country, there are still a number of issues raised in the process of innovating this work as follows:

1. Innovating political communication on social networks requires innovating and further improving leadership capacity while leadership awareness and practice, content and leadership methods still have some shortcomings.

Innovating political communication on social networks in the current situation requires subjects, especially leaders and managers, to have correct and complete awareness of using the advantages which social networks

have brought to political communication work. However, in reality, there is still a part of cadres, Party members, and political communication workers, as well as some Party and government agencies and organizations, who are hesitant to use social networks in propagating political content. They believe that political communication on social networks does not ensure information security, especially internal information. Therefore, most of the communication content about the Party's viewpoints and guidelines, the State's policies and laws, and many other political communication contents are only disseminated through the mainstream traditional media system. The outstanding advantages of social networks in terms of multi-dimensional interaction, agility, and wide public reach have not yet been exploited and promoted effectively in political communication.

The benefits and advantages of social networks, if properly and fully recognized by Party committees at all levels, will become an opportunity for us to apply to improve leadership, direction, management, and governance capacity in political communication work on social networks. At the same time, they will also help agencies and organizations in charge of political communication work to consolidate the apparatus, downsize personnel, improve leadership, management, and administration efficiency, and improve the quality of advisory activities, monitoring, inspection and evaluation activities.

In the context of rapid development of social media platforms, rising number of netizens in our country, growing demand to provide, share, search and receive political information on social networks, the content and leadership methods of the Party on political communication on social networks needs to be further innovated.

Regarding leadership content, innovating political communication on social networks in the new period requires Party committees at all levels to focus on leading the comprehensive and synchronous innovation of communication content. However, in the current practice of political communication on social networks in our country, innovation in the communication content of Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought is quite low, and is the lowest indicator among the 5 contents of political communication. Among those who gave the above assessment, 58% said

that the communication content contained no new knowledge or had but little (accounting for 26.7%). Only 0.26% and 0.23% believed it provided completely new or quite a lot of new knowledge respectively. Clearly, the innovation of communication content should be paid much attention to.

During the process of leadership and guidance, monitoring and orienting the provision of positive and official information on social networks have received little, untimely and irregular attention. In some places, there are times when we are still passive in providing positive and directional information, leading to an empty battlefield. It creates opportunities for bad, toxic, misleading, distorted, and fake information to approach the public, occupying the ideological battlefield early, while the political communication work comes later to deal with the consequences. As a result, confusion and skepticism appear in society, mixed public opinions arise and cause negative impacts on social mood and ideology. There would be no room for fake news, misleading information, and distortions to have negative impacts on individual and social ideology if the work of Party committees at all levels improved and provided accurate information that was sufficient enough on social platforms.

Regarding leadership methods, the need to innovate political communication on social networks in the new era requires further strengthening and innovation of leadership methods. Priority should be given to innovating the Party's leadership methods in building and developing communication forces.

In essence, the political communication force on social networks is the entire political system, the entire people tightly organized under the leadership of the Party. As a part of ideological work, political communication on social networks is only highly effective when the entire political system is involved, and when it attracts all forces among the people to participate. However, in reality, many Party committees at different levels have not been able to issue correct guidelines, and have not been able to identify tasks and solutions to promote the strength of the political system, the system of agencies, and the means of political communication and communication forces among the people. In building the force, in addition to building a specialized and professional contingent as the core force, it is necessary to

regularly pay attention to leadership in building a semi-specialized force - a broader force. However in our country currently there is no mechanism or policy to attract, motivate and encourage experts, scientists, researchers, people from all walks of life, social forces, especially people who have influence in the community and leaders of social groups to participate in this work.

Both theory and practice in Vietnam and around the world prove that celebrities and KOLs play a large and important role in political communication and shaping public opinion both in the real world and the virtual world of cyberspace. However, in Vietnam, there are no or very few reputable people in the community, politicians, leaders, and KOLs using social networks and new media in political communication. Even few leaders and managers, including senior leaders and managers, use social networks and personal accounts to inform and promote guidelines, policies and laws. Meanwhile around the world, leaders, heads of state, and politicians all use social networks very successfully in political communication, even in handling the country's most sensitive political situations. In fact, there are a number of KOLs using the utility of social networks to post positive information and information about national policies. But there are also those who have taken advantage of social networks to spread fake, misleading, and distorted news, affecting positive public opinion. Therefore, to effectively use KOLs, reputable people in political communication on social networks, on the one hand, it is necessary to create conditions for them to promote their sense of responsibility, contribute to spreading political information for the benefit of the nation and people. On the other hand, there should be strict sanctions to handle violations. At the same time, Party committees at all levels also need to proactively and soon build mechanisms and policies to attract and gather bloggers, facebookers, tiktokers, key individuals, and media figures outside the political system who have reputation in the world of writers, artists, businessmen, and scientific knowledge that use social networks and have the same official opinion. It is necessary to proactively provide them information so that they can spread positive, official information and participate in the fight against wrong, hostile views, fake news, and toxic news.

2. Innovating political communication on social networks requires strengthening and innovating State management with scientific and effective management content and methods while current State management still has limitations.

With the strong development of social networks and the widespread and increasing use of social networks in all areas of social life and in political communication, the Government of Vietnam has issued many legal regulations to manage social networks, such as the Press Law, Law on Cyber Security, Law on Cyber Information Security and many other documents. State management through law for society as well as political communication on social networks requires both the management subject and the management object to strictly comply with and enforce the law. However, the practice of State management, especially the issue of law enforcement in political communication on social networks in our country, has not been strict from both sides. On the subject's side, there is also a phenomenon of lax management, incomplete implementation of sanctions which are not sufficiently deterrent. On the object side, there is a phenomenon of non-serious compliance, taking advantage of loopholes in the law to avoid management impacts. Some current regulations and policies do not keep up with the continuous development of social networks. Many new practical problems have arisen and are posing new requirements for timely management and adjustment, improvement of the legal system, mechanisms, policies and correct, complete, adequate and scientific approach on social networks with specific documents and sanctions.

The Press Law, the Law on Information Security, the Law on Cyber Security, and Ethics of journalists have been widely propagated and guided for implementation but service providers and network users are still not fully aware of and do not observe them. There are still violations, therefore, we have not yet had a healthy, safe, and desirable network environment to ensure favorable conditions for propagating guidelines, policies, laws, and other political content. In addition, it should also be noted that social networks are increasingly developing, social platforms are exploding on a large scale, increasingly widely used and have a great impact on all areas of social life. However, the governance of communication information,

including political information on social networks in our country does not keep up with the reality changes and still uses many traditional information governance methods.

State governance of political communication on social networks must include the prevention, detection, and handling of unverified information, fake news, misleading information, and distortion. However, currently the toolkit for management, collection, prevention, warning, and quantitative assessment of website access has not been built. Tools to filter and detect fake news, misleading, distorted, bad, toxic news, to measure in real time the level of dissemination of the above information are incomplete and ineffective. The coordination mechanism between management agencies and businesses in preventing, filtering, and removing has not been strictly regulated and seriously implemented. Therefore, in political communication on social networks, especially in the fight against wrong and hostile views, it is necessary to increase the application of modern technology to identify, classify this information and process it thoroughly according to current laws, not allowing false and distorted information to spread and cause harm to society.

Managing political communication on social networks involves management activities of many ministries, departments and branches such as the Ministry of Information and Communications, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of National Defense, and the Ministry of Finance, State Bank, Central Department for Communication and Education, etc. For effective management, it is necessary to overcome the mismatch and lack of synchronization in management, further strengthen responsibility and synchronous and smooth coordination between relevant ministries, departments and branches. Managing political communication on social networks in the new period requires not only strengthening management coordination between ministries, departments and branches in our country but also between the Government of Vietnam and other organizations, countries in the world and in the region, as well as for major service providers in the world to prevent, handle and eliminate the risks that social networks can cause to information security and ideological security, national security.

3. Innovating political communication on social networks requires communication content to be comprehensive in scope, scale, quality, and diverse in nature while political communication content on social networks has not been innovated and comprehensive

For a part of the population, political communication contents are often considered abstract, difficult to understand, rigid, and even sublime, meaning they have little connection to people's daily lives. To quickly reach netizens, to convince, inspire them, and create trust in them, political information content on social networks needs to meet the requirements of novelty, accuracy, practicality, topicality and directionality. Novelty means that information is not yet known to the recipients; information about social events and phenomena that may be old but are approached and presented with new methods; information that reflects ongoing events, phenomena, and social processes; new analyses, comments, and assessments of objective reality. Because of the requirement for novelty of political communication information content on social networks in order to attract and quickly create public trust, many agencies, units, and forces participating in political communication have done in-depth research or coordinated with theoretical research agencies to organize conferences, scientific seminars, and discussions to discover and summarize new theoretical and practical issues to provide content for political communication.

Political information on social networks must not only be new but also practical. In other words, it must be related to and meet the cognitive or practical needs of the recipients. Political information on social networks also needs to ensure topicality, urgency, interest from a large number of netizens, and timely and updated information, ensuring high accuracy. At the same time, starting from the requirements of political communication in cyberspace in the new era, information must be oriented and selected based on social and national interests, contributing to encouraging and supporting the new, progressive, positive fighting and criticizing, eliminating the bad, backward, wrong, hostile, reactionary views. For political communication on social networks, the requirement for directionality of communication content is becoming the most important requirement today, because in the context of a global information explosion on social networks, real - fake,

right - wrong, progressive - backward, positive - negative are easily confused and swapped, making it very difficult for the social media public to identify, detect, analyze, evaluate, and process. Therefore, information orientation is both a basic and urgent requirement for political communication content on social networks.

Currently, it is a fact that political information on social networks sometimes have little or no new content. Many articles repeat or blatantly copy other people's articles. Sometimes many people copy from the same source, causing crude repetition, boredom, and disgust. Many events and phenomena in national and international political life have taken place but have not been promptly informed, analyzed, explained, commented on, or thoroughly oriented. In such conditions, the public and the online public often look to other sources of information, unofficial sources to satisfy their needs or curiosity. Therefore, in some cases, false information, distortions, and fake news are absorbed by some people without being tested and handled, leading to psychological insecurity and even violence, instability, ideological inclination, faith loss in mainstream and official information.

4. Innovating political communication on social networks requires diverse and frequently innovative communication methods, but political communication methods on social networks are still formulaic and outdated

Not only netizens, but all communication recipients, including political communication audiences, have a need for diversity, richness, and regular innovation in forms that suit their information tastes. However, political communication on social networks in our country has not had many innovations in form, including language, images, sounds, graphics, plans, campaigns, and communication strategies. It is suggested by some scientists, practical researchers, and media officers that we should innovate the form of political communication on social networks by using information that is concise, easy to understand, conveyed through images, rich in emotions and call on communication staff to use many ongoing events, phenomena, and social processes that are of interest to many people. In order for political information to reach netizens, it is perhaps necessary to combine the above - mentioned form factors so that they are diverse, rich, harmonious, and

suitable to the needs and tastes of netizens. In addition, in order for political information to dominate the audience in cyberspace, a political content should be chosen to be designed in diversified forms of transmission and combine the use of many rules and psychological factors such as: combination of reason and emotion, one-sided and two-sided, unilateral and bilateral, humorous and serious styles⁽¹⁾... Observations on social networks show that a message can be conveyed by various forums, such as written text, video, audio or by adapting to cultural and artistic forms, especially folk cultural and artistic culture such as folk songs, rhymes, comedies on multimedia tools. Frequency and duration of information are also current issues. Because many political contents are propagated in a brief, simple manner, with low duration and frequency. To improve the effectiveness of political communication on social networks, more attention needs to be paid to the duration and frequency of information. Repetition of information, in many cases, helps increase the effectiveness of impact. Regarding this issue, it should be noted that information on social networks has the characteristic of being stored for a long time but may “drift away” and therefore easily be ignored and not accessed by the target audience. Therefore, for political communication on social networks to be effective, the content of political information must be repeated an appropriate number of times and with a frequency of appearance high enough for audiences of many sectors to be able to access and deeply aware to make impressions and beliefs on them. Clearly, the frequency of political information on social networks is an issue, an aspect worthy of attention in innovating political communication in cyberspace. Therefore, increasing the frequency of political information is very necessary, but it needs to be associated with innovating the content and form of content delivery. Many people also believe that netizens should use short, low-duration information. But looking closely at media products on social networks, we see that on YouTube, children still watch animated films that are over 10 minutes long. A news report about the Russia-Ukraine conflict that has been going on for more than a year, also on the social network YouTube, has a duration of up to 10 minutes or 15, 20 minutes, especially political commentary programs, but they have up to hundreds of thousands, even millions of followers, accesses, and comments. Professor

Hoang Chi Bao's stories about Uncle Ho, or his introduction to President Ho Chi Minh's Testament, the presentation on the work "Some theoretical and practical issues about socialism in Vietnam" by General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong has quite long content, but when it was designed to be posted on YouTube, there were still tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, even over a million accesses. Content should be practical, topical, urgent, highly accurate, attractive in format, diverse, innovative, common language, easy to understand, simple, concise, close to life, suitable for the language habits of the public. Thereby it will attract cadres, Party members and people as well as impress readers, listeners, and viewers without depending on the length of the content. Obviously, it is necessary to have a more correct and complete awareness of the characteristics of political information, which should be differently transmitted compared to information of entertainment. In addition, it is also necessary to take into account the fact that the writings of individuals representing hostile forces, opportunistic, and degenerate elements aim to distort and deny Marxism - Leninism, Ho Chi Minh Thought, the Party's guidelines and opinions, the State's policies and laws, the theory and practice of building socialism in Vietnam, distorting national history and the revolutionary history, qualities, reputation, and private lives of high-ranking Party and State leaders are often systematically distorted, fabricated, and disguised as "memoirs", "recommendations" and "literature work", thus they are also very long and have many problems.

To effectively refute and expose the tricks and purposes of these web pages, there must be basic, in-depth research, scientifically and convincingly argued, and published systematically in all kinds of media. Therefore, to enhance innovation and further improve the quality and effectiveness of political communication on social networks, it is necessary to conduct thorough and scientific research on the characteristics of political communication content, reception characteristics, political information interaction of netizens. On that basis, we can propose, select, and design appropriate forms and methods of transmission and interaction; avoid subjective, emotional, even arbitrary suggestions that lack scientific ground.

5. Innovating political communication on social networks requires a highly developed and secure technology platform, but domestic social

networks have not yet developed to be diverse, not strong enough, and insecure

Social networks used in Vietnam today are usually of two types, which are social networks provided by foreign businesses across the border into Vietnam, operating without a license, and domestic social networks, which are social networks provided by businesses with licenses issued by the Ministry of Information and Communications, required to comply with Vietnamese law. It is a fact that foreign social networks provided outside Vietnam are small in number, but have a large number of access and usage. As of June 2021, in Vietnam, the number of Internet users is nearly 70 million (accounting for more than 70% of the population), the number of social media users is nearly 76 million (accounting for about 73.7% of the population, of which Youtube is the application with the most users (92%); Facebook (91.7%); Zalo (76.5%); Instagram (63.5%)(²). Currently, our country has 443 domestic social networks licensed to operate. However, the number of their users is not high, the level of impact and influence is low; they are not only rarely used but also not used effectively in political communication. Isn't it a paradox? Vcnet is an electronic communication information system opened on June 11, 2019, bringing many benefits to the communication industry nationwide in managing and operating the industry's activities. However, according to current assessments, Vcnet as well as some social networking sites serving political communication in our country such as Ivanlevanlan, Huong Sen Viet, Viet Nam thịnh vượng (Prosperous Vietnam)... have failed to attract a large number of people and various types of participants, not yet have influence on society as expected. Due to their low-rank utility and security, limited influence, many people in the political communication work and political theory lecturers have not used these social networking sites in their practical work and professional activities. Obviously, our country's social media ecosystem is not strong enough to compete with foreign social networks and therefore, there lacks favorable and suitable space for forces to deploy political communication content and convey official and positive information to proactively attack, overwhelm, and dilute false, distorted, and malicious information spread on social networks operating inside and outside Vietnam.

In political communication on social networks, it is necessary to thoroughly understand the viewpoint of “using good to suppress bad”, “using positivity to repel negativity”, closely connecting “building” and “fighting”, “building” is fundamental, “fighting” must be resolute and effective. However, with the social media ecosystem as mentioned above, it is very difficult for political communication in cyberspace to implement this important viewpoint and motto. Therefore, on the one hand, it is necessary to build an effective hacker defense system, improve the network security environment, use technical tools and technology to prevent, filter, and remove false information, distortion, bad news. On the other hand, it is necessary to continue to research, invest in building and developing domestic social networks that are strong enough to compete with foreign cross-border social networks for information, and at the same time have the ability to transmit a wide range of information. The amount of official information should be large enough, with appropriate frequency and duration to overwhelm and dilute false and distorted information about Vietnam, creating widespread and highly effective political communication on social networks.

6. Innovating political communication work on social networks requires widespread participation and high responsibility of cadres, Party members, and people, but in reality the scale and responsibility of participation still has many limitations

Political communication work on social networks is an important part of ideological work. From the essence of the issue, the subject of this work is the entire political system and the entire people. The scale, level, pace, and nature of the process of innovating political communication work on social networks depends on the scale, level, and nature of the participation of the subjects in this work. In the past, or maybe even now, due to the lack of complete and unscientific awareness of a certain part of society, communication was considered a one-way, imposing activity. Therefore, this section considers the people only as communication objects without seeing their great role, initiative, and creativity as communication subjects. When social networks are used as a tool and a means of political communication, their functionality, utility, and high interactivity make those participating

in using social networks not just recipients of influence, but also and more importantly, becoming true subjects of political communication on social networks. Therefore, it is necessary to research and consider the problems posed to people when participating in political communication on social networks with the above “dual role”. Considering the current state of awareness and practice of participating in social networks, from the need to innovate political communication on social networks, attracting the participation of the online community (including cadres, Party members and people) innovating political communication on social networks is raising issues that need to be addressed such as:

- Lack of correct and complete awareness of the position, role, and social responsibility of social media participants in political communication work in cyberspace.

- Lack of necessary understanding of the characteristics of the online environment and the necessary skills when participating in social networks as both subjects and recipients.

- Lack of full understanding of our country's and international legal systems on issues related to social networks. In general, the awareness of compliance with the law as well as the legal culture of social networks is low. This problem is caused by the fact that the system of legal regulations on social networks has only recently been issued, communication and dissemination are slow, and sanctions are not strict enough to deter.

- The awareness and behavior of participating in political communication on social networks as a subject lacks initiative and self-awareness, that is the sharpness and alertness of a “wise netizen”.

Social networks form a virtual world. Participants can remain anonymous in that world. Therefore, some people believe that on social networks they can have “freedom of speech”, can say whatever they want, write whatever they wish, leading to violations of communication standards, ethics, and law on social networks. The cultural aspect in using social networks requires each cadre, Party member, and citizen when participating in social networks to show themselves as responsible citizens before the Party and the nation, the peoples so that each post, image, comment, posted information should have a positive meaning and the effect of raising awareness, strengthening trust

in the Party, the regime, and the cause of innovation and development of the country. Comments must be objective, sensitive, and have appropriate emotional attitudes. They should not post opinions and comments that are not objective, even biased, prejudiced, or malicious. When participating in social networks, every cadre and Party member, especially leaders and managers, must be exemplary in observing speech discipline and not use social networks to exploit, provide, or share unverified information. It is necessary to consider thoroughly, carefully select, accurately verify information before posting it online and be responsible for the information provided and shared. At the same time, it is required to proactively post positive information, truth, goodness, and beauty values on social networks to spread widely in the online community.

Comprehensively and thoroughly solving some of the urgent issues raised above to innovate political communication on social networks requires a system of solutions that affect both subjects and recipients, content and methods, means and conditions and environment of communication activities. In particular, the focus is on solutions to innovate and strengthen leadership, direction and management; build and develop the force and improve staff capacity and qualifications; innovate the content and form of communication. Especially, it is imperative to create a social network ecosystem, especially a domestic social network ecosystem to ensure proactiveness, combativeness, strength, and energy source for political communication work in cyberspace./.

(1) Luong Khac Hieu (2013), *Communication theory*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, pp.87-97.

(2) Academy of Journalism and Communication, Communist Review (2022), *Proceedings of the Scientific Conference "Using social networks in political communication in Vietnam today"*, Hanoi.

* The article shows the research findings under the ministerial-level project: "Political communication on social networks" conducted by Associate Professor, Dr. Nguyen Thi Truong Giang, and chaired by Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics.