

Reading Legal and Political Theory E-books among Young People: Current Situation

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Abstract: *In the 21st century - the era of digital technology, along with the rapid development of science and technology, the emergence of social networking platforms and smart, convenient and smaller audiovisual media as well as the explosion of the global Internet, reading e-books instead of conventional paper books is becoming more and more popular. Many people are of the opinion that this is a revolution in reading culture as readers, being at a certain location, with handy smart devices and access to the Internet are able to read any books they want without having to go to the bookstore or library. This brings a good prospect with many advantages, saving time for readers. This trend is in line with the policy of the Party and State “strengthening the management and development of various forms of communication and information on the Internet”⁽¹⁾ including e-book publishing. In the documents of the 13th National Party Congress, our Party emphasized the need to “improve the quality, ensure the security and safety of the information, press, Internet and publishing systems; strengthen the capacity of cyberspace management”⁽²⁾. The article provides an overview of the current situation of young people’s reading of legal and political theory books in the form of digital format, thereby making some suggestions to increase reading this type of book among young people.*

Keywords: *legal e-book; political theory e-book; young people.*

1. Survey on young people’s reading of legal and political theory books in the digital format

It can be affirmed once again, the era of information explosion and the development of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 has had a strong influence on all areas of life. The way people receive information has gradually changed. The digital revolution with smart and modern utilities and diverse application software has changed the face traditional books and has gradually “digitized” them. This both offers particular advantages and presents certain limitations.

To find out the current status of young people’s reading legal and political theory digital books, the research team conducted a survey on 300 samples. The questionnaire included personal information and questions to find out the needs and practices of young people towards reading books in general, legal

and political theory books in particular. Some of the results are shown by the figures and graphs below:

- In terms of gender, there were 80 men, accounting for 26.5% and 220 women, accounting for 73.5% participating in the survey. The large gender disparity is due to the following reasons: (1) more women agreed to spend time taking part in the survey, while men were often reluctant to answer because fear of losing time; (2) women tend to spend more time reading legal and political theory books as they are more industrious, hardworking; (3) most men often prefer self-help books to research books.

Regarding the age, more young people who are technology-loving took part in the survey: 58% (174 people) surveyed are aged from 18 to 22; people of this age group are mostly students who are required to study and research legal and political theory books at university. Participants under the age of 18 are students of high schools, they have little interest in legal and political theory books, so the survey response rate is the lowest at 7% (21 people). The 22-25 age group has a survey response rate of 16% (48 people). People of this age group often start their own business, they show less interest in books which are not startup instructions. From 25 to 30 years old bracket, there are 57 people (19%) indicating that starting at this age, readers have a need to improve their knowledge of legal and political theory.

Regarding education level, more than 80% of the people surveyed are undergraduates, only 0.4% have doctorate degrees while the rest possess bachelor's and master's degrees.

With regards to occupation, more than 80% of the people surveyed are students. The percentage of young people who are lecturers and researchers participating in this survey is very low, only 3%. Those who work as office workers account for 12.3%, self-employed people make up 2.3%. Especially, the percentage of young people who are workers interested in this survey is extremely low at 0.3%.

In terms of region, the number of people surveyed mainly are from the North, 201 people (67%), specifically, from Ha Noi, the capital and the political center of the country, where the headquarters of central agencies are located. Therefore, the intellectual level in Hanoi is quite high, people have a certain understanding of the law; the number of legal and political theory books readers are therefore also higher. Readers from the Central and the South are 48 people (16%) and 51 people (17%) respectively. In these two regions, the research team did not receive the expected number of responses because the youth's interest in books is not as high as that in the North. The climatic and

economic conditions of the region also determine the personality and cultural enjoyment needs of young people in the Central and Southern regions. They are more interested in books that serve their personal development needs.

From the above individuals' characteristics, the research team delved deeply into the current situation of legal and political theory book reading, which is shown in the charts below:

First, the number of legal and political theory books read.

Based on actual survey data, nearly half of the participants (46.7%) only read 1-10 legal and political theory books; 45.3% of respondents have not read any books of this genre, or they may not remember if they have ever read one. (this can be counted as not having access to this book section).

Second, legal and political theory books reading frequency.

Regarding the frequency of interaction with this type of book, the answers "infrequently" and "seldom" also account for a very high rate (both over 50%). The percentage of reading legal and political theory books from often to very often is quite low (17.4%). Especially, up to 27.9% of respondents answered that they rarely read legal and political theory books because the books have highly professional and "dry" contents which are not attractive to young people. It is common that young readers often opt for thin, short books with easy to read contents. Whenever it comes to legal and political theory, they rush to look for a solution to that problem, without actively digging deep the whole book.

Third, channels to access information on the Party and State's guidelines, policies and laws

It can be seen that, in the industrial revolution 4.0, social networking platforms thrive through mass media. Readers can obtain information on the guidelines, policies and laws of the Party and State through many other attractive information channels besides books and newspapers. With the advantage of providing quickly updated information, current affairs, and an eye-catching interface that matches young people's interests, it is not difficult to understand why 33.7% of readers said that they received more information from the Internet –than from radio and television, which are considered the most effective means of conveying information to readers in the twentieth century. Universities now attach great importance to teaching legal and political theory, and at the same time, the Ministry of Education and Training has stipulated that in the framework of university training programs, a certain percentage of time must be spent teaching these contents. This explains the figure of 22.7% of readers getting information about the guidelines, policies and laws of the Party and State through their studies.

Fourth, the importance of the legal and political theory books readers have read.

Although the number of readers reading legal and political theory books on a regular basis is not high, over 70% of readers rated legal and political theory books they have read as important. This is because the legal and political theory book is a tool to propagate the lines and policies of the Party and State in a direct and extensive way among all strata of the people. That Party documents and legal documents are published and circulated help readers to directly approach the Party's lines and policies. In addition, books explaining and commenting on lines, policies and laws are also published so that such guidelines and policies can easily penetrate the masses and directly improve political knowledge of the people.

Fifth, the purpose of reading legal and political theory books.

There are still some good points in orienting and improving young people's reading legal and political theory books. Most of the surveyed readers believe that reading legal and political theory books is to help them improve their understanding, awareness, responsibility and expertise (53.7%). In addition, up to 35.3% of readers read legal and political theory books to support their daily work, study and research. This is in line with the spirit of Directive 44/CT-TW dated April 16, 2020 of the Secretariat on innovation and improvement of quality and efficiency of publishing, research and study of legal and political theory books. The Directive requires Party committees at all levels and organizations to determine the learning and studying legal and political theory books as a regular task of party officials and members, and is one of the main activities in the periodical activities of grassroots party organizations. It is necessary to encourage the reading movement, researching and studying books, including legal and political theory books, for cadres, party members and people in order to educate and improve the theoretical level for cadres and party members; fight against deterioration in political ideology, morality, lifestyle and internal "self-evolution" and "self-transformation" manifestations" ⁽³⁾. This quick access and update of knowledge is thanks to the Internet, specifically e-books. Currently, many legal and political theory books have been digitized and published.

Sixth, the criteria to choose legal and political theory books

When asked about the criteria to choose books to read, more than 90% of readers referred to contents, subject, or topic of the book. It shows that readers pay little attention to the author or publisher; as long as the book has good contents and are suited to their needs, readers will go for it. This is the information for legal and political theory books publishers to consider, that

they just need to look for quality manuscripts without necessarily having to “run” after reputable authors.

It is a pity that a majority of young readers (85%) hardly care about accessing and exploiting legal and political theory e-books on websites specializing in this genre (eg Stbook.vn). This situation shows that young readers have not been informed about websites hosting legal and political theory e-books. It is evident that the public in general and young people in particular are now tending to be “lazy” to read books, “afraid” to read books and are losing the habits of reading legal and political theory e-books.

The current trend has seen numerous changes in the reading and enjoyment of written works. One of which is the digital reciprocal interaction between readers and authors, and publishing houses. Reading truly brings many new experiences with the enjoyment of multimedia components integrated in e-books; one may be able to instantly look up the contents of interest, to highlight them, to easily compare the contents with the extensions (besides the main contents of the book) which are integrated into the e-book. Moreover, the interaction, exchange of information, comments, reviews about a work between readers or between readers and authors, readers and publishers can be done right on the interface of the platform on the device, without resorting to emails, phones or any other forms of interaction... Reading books in the form of digital format will make young people more excited about legal and political theory books which are considered as dry and difficult to read.

2. Some limitations and causes

About limitations

In 2020, according to the report of the Authority of Publication - Printing - Distribution in December 2020, there were 9 companies licensed to provide online publishing and digital contents (accounting for 15% of the total number of companies), in July 2021 there were a total of 15 licensed companies (including 11 publishers and 4 companies publishing digital contents) out of a total of 57 publishers and nearly 300 companies participating in joint publishing activities across the country. By December 2022, the application of technology and implementation of digital transformation in the industry was accelerated; 19 publishers confirmed to have registered their online publishing activities (up 72.7% compared to 2021), contributing to an increase in the number of e-book titles by nearly 1.5 times. These efforts of these publishers have served to highlight the Publishing industry in recent times, reflected in the spectacular growth of audiobooks, creating momentum for a relatively strong development of reading culture, enhancing the position and role of the industry in the current period.

However, in recent years, the number of e-books published has not been as expected, it has even decreased, contrary to the general development trend of the world. In the period 2012 - 2013, e-books developed quite quickly, but from 2016 the number of registered topics gradually declined. The number of electronic titles (book titles) on the market decreased: in 2016 the number of ebooks registered was nearly 1,900 titles, in 2019, there were only 5 publishers capable of online publishing with nearly 2,400 titles registered; and in 2020, the number of ebook titles dropped to 2,000. In 2022, with 19 publishers registered for electronic publications publishing, the number of ebook titles was 3,350. This is contrary to the global trend as well as the readers' needs.

This situation is due to the fact that electronic publishing activities in our country still have many obstacles, specifically, legal regulations on the digital publishing licensing conditions; conditions and capacity for information technology application; copyright infringement (excess/inaccurate information, misrepresentation; pirated books; sharing and distributing information without a license; website infringing copyright). Therefore, up to now, some e-book platforms are too few to meet the needs of readers in general and young readers in particular. There are only a few to mention such as Ebook365.vn, Waka.vn, Vinabook reader...

Causes of the limitations

*** Objective reasons**

The information explosion and artificial intelligence have had a strong impact on publishing in general and legal and political theory books publishing in particular. Along with the strong development of television technology, digital technology, computer technology and global information network have brought people many conveniences in choosing and accessing information.

On the other hand, theoretical research activities, practical summaries - an important source for legal and political theory books publication have not kept pace with the requirements of life. Theoretical research in recent years has obtained some achievements, but there are still many shortcomings compared to the requirements of reality. Moreover, there are still purely theoretical, bookish researches with dry, simple, formulaic, and unconvincing explanations of available principles. The above situation directly affects the demand for legal and political theory books in general and books in digital format in particular in recent years.

The State's investment and incentive policy for publishing activities in general, including the publishing of legal and political theory books, is still not much. There has not been enough investment in time, human resources, finance,

mechanism...which has not attracted the attention of readers, especially young readers, resulting in a lack of good and valuable topics.

In Vietnam, no specific and long-term strategy has been established and developed for the development of reading culture in general and legal and political theory books reading culture in particular. The development of information technology has facilitated reading and new reading methods, contributing to the grouping of reading tastes of the public. Reading is popular among students and researchers working in an academic environment while the group of readers working outside the industry has fewer opportunities to read books. Readers in urban areas accounted for a higher proportion compared to readers in mountainous and rural areas. In mountainous and remote areas, people do not have habit of reading books because living conditions are difficult and insufficient. In addition, e-books are only updated where the Internet is available and the system of bookstores and libraries is developed; in rural areas, due to the lack of physical facilities and transport infrastructure, reading is limited and not all new books are updated. This has created a quite big divide among recipients and groups of readers.

*** Subjective reasons**

As legal and political theory books are not for entertainment, not easy to understand, the readers mostly read to serve some particular purposes such as teaching, researching or studying... (the survey results also clearly show that) - that is, they have not really read books in an active and relaxing manner nor read for simple interest.

While reading traditional books gives readers relaxation, time to contemplate and absorb intellectual values from books, reading e-books will make readers easily distracted (by notifications, messages, calls or advertiments or information from social networks...) and makes readers forget the main purpose of doing. Thus, the amount of knowledge acquired in the process of reading is not much, the distraction by many images and sounds will make the retention of information in the reader's brain not long. It can make one simply read without imagining, reflecting and thereby it is difficult to create cognitive value. When using e-books with a high frequency, readers will face the risk of eye strain because they have to look at the screens of electronic devices for a long period of time, their minds are stressed, especially when the devices are getting smaller. Printed books can help one avoid such effects.

Compared with traditional books, legal and political theory e-books require reading facilities (smartphones, desktops, laptops, specialized reading devices...). This means that readers need to have a certain financial capacity to

own reading facilities. That readers' economic conditions vary by regions leads to a limited number of people reading legal and political theory e-books.

3. Some proposals to increase young people's demand for reading legal and political theory books in the form of digital books

With the assigned functions and tasks of each publisher, along with the step-by-step research on electronic publishing, it is very necessary to publish e-books for readers in general and young readers in particular; However, in order to promote the e-reading culture among young people, apart from publishers, state management agencies in publishing are much needed to create a more open legal corridor. At the same time, each publisher needs to study specifically each level of e-books, e-books criteria, and specific requirements for the legal and political theory e-books. Specifically:

Firstly, legal corridor should be improved.

Having investigated the current situation and existing problems that cause difficulties and limitations in digital publishing, the research group have studied and classified problems to be solved for the development of electronic publishing activities, increasing the supply of publications for society, which are as follows:

- Administrative procedures in the registration of publications, distribution and deposit of e-books need to be simplified; infrastructure requirements should be simpler (Article 17 Decree 195/2013/ND-CP).

- In terms of infrastructure investment resources, it is necessary to invest in shared infrastructure for publishers participating in electronic publishing. In terms of human resources, the qualification requirements should only be bachelor's degrees in IT, requirements of seniority, operation, equipment management, and technical solutions... should not be too strict. Some requirements on equipments being served to publish e-books also need to be reduced.

- The situation of piracy needs to be solved to ensure the integrity of digital contents, verify the content's origin (online and offline tracing), and manage the number of books sold. Thus, the electronic publishing companies will increase its competitiveness, increase their revenue (the number of readers, the number of views, subscribers, ..); create the initiative to reach readers and be received by readers.

In short, the State needs to complete the legal framework for the development of e-publishing soon, because e-books are both a general development trend of world publishing and also the most effective method for young readers to easily access to books. This is considered a breakthrough solution presently. In

order to publish an electronic legal and political theory book, many factors are needed, of which perfecting the legal system, especially regulations on copyright protection, e-commerce, as well as tax and financial policies is vital. Thereby, publishers will be facilitated to develop into electronic publishing and book companies will participate actively and vigorously develop the e-book market.

Secondly, e-book levels should be built

That a publisher well understands the levels of e-books will help the building of e-book products that match the needs, tastes and technology use of each group of readers, including young readers. This is an important factor to attract readers to read the book, experience and quickly grasp the contents of the book.

- Level 1: E-books are simple; The contents of the book are mainly text, there may be additional still images attached to the contents as presented in the printed book. Books are usually viewed by page-turning, page-sliding, or regular scrolling. Books at this level are usually in the following formats: pdf, epub, mobi, prc, lit,...

- Level 2: E-books have illustrations that are images, audios, videos, and chart data embedded in the book. The contents are richer than e-books with only still data.

- Level 3: E-books have features that allow readers to have a reciprocal interaction between readers and the book's contents. For example, the reader answers the question and the book scores it, or the reader enters data and the book calculates the results.

- Level 4: E-books have complex organized data structures, big data and must be installed as software when viewed. The book interface is organized with a multi-level menu structure. For example, books are created with Web (html) programming tools, Flash, and some other programming tools.

Thirdly, topic selection and evaluation criteria should be developed.

In addition to paying attention to the levels of e-books, media, and display devices, the quality of book contents, especially the quality of legal and political theory books, is a key issue that any publisher should pay special attention to. Therefore, books in general and legal and political theory books in particular need to meet the general evaluation criteria and specific criteria for the legal and political theory book segment as follows:

- The general criteria of the titles that are evaluated as good books are: A book has high quality with ideological, scientific, artistic, educational and cultural value and is attractive. The contents of the book must have a positive effect on raising people's knowledge and developing culture; building the ideological foundation, worldview, revolutionary and scientific life view of society; building

ethics, lifestyle, training human resources, fostering talents, forming a learning society.

- Specific criteria: (1) Theoretical feature: a book has a deep and close scientific argument, making an important contribution to the theoretical treasure of the Party and the State on the development path of the country and ideology renovation. (2) Political feature: A book propagandizes revolutionary ideals and objectives, encouraging and motivating new factors, summarizing practices, disseminating experiences, promoting advanced examples, serving socio development. (3) Practical feature: a book proposes issues as a basis for the planning of guidelines and policies of the Party and State.

4. Conclusion

No matter how advanced a society is, reading is always valued, it is a necessary spiritual need. Books are an eternal need for readers. They are ever lasting, connect traditions and modernity, entertainment and aesthetics, awareness and education for the general public and young people in general. Young people are specific research subjects, studying and operating in a high-level educational environment. To attract readers and young readers' interests to read legal and political theory e-books, publishers need to have a long-term investment strategy on topics, contents and modern forms of expression, suitable to young people. In order to realize that, it is very necessary for them to get help, support and coordination from many levels and sectors, especially in the market economy mechanism, to have a direction to publish legal and political theory e-books in a synchronous, selective and reasonable manner... contributing to the development and preservation of reading culture in Vietnam./.

(1) Communist Party of Viet Nam (2021), *Documents of the 13th National Congress*, National Political Publishing House. H, p.146.

(2) Communist Party of Viet Nam (2021), *Documents of the 13th National Congress*, National Political Publishing House. H, p.272.

(3) The Secretariat, Directive 44/CT-TW dated April 16, 2020 of the Secretariat on renewing and improving the quality and efficiency of publishing, publishing and researching and studying legal and political theory books.