

Compliance with Ethical Standards in Digital Media Contents on Social Networks to Ensure Cyber Security

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Abstract: Every morning, many people choose to start a new day with very short reels of information or news feeds on social networks instead of watching the news on TV, the radio, the newspapers or websites. In the past, social mood was mainly measured through press channels, however, now social networks are gradually taking over the press and affirming this dominant position. This has created a major change in the way the public uses communication media, greatly affecting the flow and value of information transmitted. Reality also shows that in many cases, social networks have a huge impact on creating, orienting and leading public opinion, especially in some sensitive incidents related to social safety and order. Therefore, it is urgent to comply with ethical standards in digital media content on social networks to ensure communication security and contribute to stabilizing social order and safety, based on compliance with the Party's policy, guidelines and regulations, the State's policies and laws..

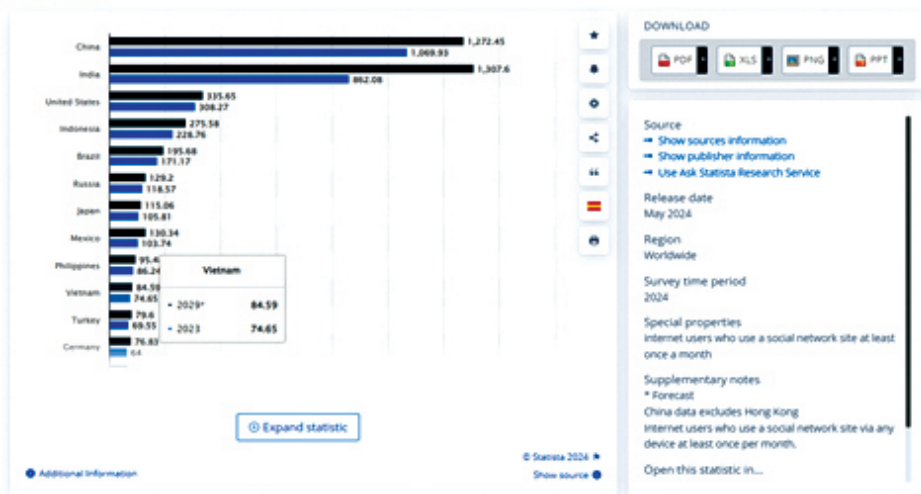
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Current situation of digital media content on social networks in Viet Nam

The robust development of modern technology and achievements in the 4th industrial revolution have resulted in innovations that increasingly affected human life. The birth of the Internet, particularly IoT, became a turning point in human history, have great impacts on all facets of social life, including politics, economics, culture, lifestyle, communication, and behaviour. With breakneck transmission speeds and diversity of data storage platforms, users tend to receive information instantly that demonstrates an increasingly developing society with multi-dimensional information. This lays a ground for the birth of digital media content on social networks which can be understood as media products in various forms, including text, still images, animations, videos, sounds... that are created, transmitted and posted on social network environments.

According to Data Reportal, as of January 2024, Vietnam's population reached 99.19 million people, including 78.44 million Internet users, accounting for 79.1% of the total population. Kepios analysis shows that from early 2023 to early 2024, social network users in Vietnam increased by 6.5 million (up 9.8%). Users aged 16-64 use the Internet for an average of 6 hours and 18 minutes per day and use social networks for an average of 2 hours and 25 minutes per day, 96.8% of them are for chatting and sending messages, 96.6% of them use social networks. The main reasons for using social networks include: 55% to keep in touch with friends and family, 31.1% to watch livestreams, 29.4% to search for content of interest on cyberspace. The most used social networking platforms are: Facebook, Zalo and Tiktok. The most popular social networking platforms include Facebook (31.6%) with 72.2 million Vietnamese users and TikTok (24.1%) with 67.72 million Vietnamese users⁽¹⁾. According to Statista, Vietnam will be among top 10 countries in the world having high social network users since 2023 and by 2029⁽²⁾.

Number of social network users in selected countries in 2023 and 2029
(in millions)



Source: Statista.com: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278341/number-of-social-network-users-in-selected-countries/>

According to Rapporteur's News No. 12 in 2022, young people are the largest participants in digital media channels, especially on social networks. Social networks have become a popular information update channel for students. More than 86% of students use social networks and/or electronic

newspapers to update information. Meanwhile, the rate of using print newspapers is less than 6%⁽³⁾.

Thanks to the Internet and the development of advanced technologies, a large number of people use social networks with high frequency, as a daily habit, creating a large-scale network that transmits information and interacts widely not only within the territory of Vietnam but also beyond countries' borders and continents. Under the breakneck speed of the Internet, information can be transmitted instantly via links, can be shared easily via social networks to many people. Tens of thousands of information and content are shared quickly in seconds, easily in different forms (text, images, videos, livestreams...), making it very difficult to control the information. Social networks become a powerful tool for information communication, creating both benefits negative impacts on the community.

The need to comply with ethical standards in digital content on social networks

Social networks provide people a forum where they can receive information, connect with each other, express opinions, thoughts, exchange ideas, and express their freedom of speech. To keep up with the flow of information and meet the public's reception needs, digital content creators must grasp news quickly, convey timely, topical, appealing information that can create a strong impression on social networks.

However, in addition to the information that is verified and quoted from the press and other official sources, there is also content that is subjective, written from one-sided observation and gossip, and has not been verified and hastily published with titles that attract as more viewers as possible to create a curious effect on the public. Those articles often follow negative and sensational information such as robberies, accidents, murders, following emerging trends without thorough research, reporting superficial news; digging up and prying into private life of others to discuss and gossip; advertising with unofficial links, buying and selling fake products, defrauding consumers, etc.

The virtual nature of social networks allows users to hide their identity and create a virtual self. With a personal account, participants can freely spread information as they like. The accuracy and objectivity of information do not seem to be the concern of many people.

As a matter of fact, on social networks there are many fanatical, reactionary, criminal associations. Taking advantage of social networks'

widespread popularity and freedom, elements that oppose the Party and the State are attempting to add or subtract, fabricate media products containing fake information, causing confusion between true and false, spreading false propaganda to distort the socio-political situation in the country; capturing and causing internal division, national security infringement. They use social networks to serve evil purposes, such as, to defame the image of certain individuals or organizations or to take advantage to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. Researches by Digital Daya, a management consulting company show that politically unstable countries tend to view social media as a threat.

Every day, thousands of quarrels and arguments take place along with countless subjective, harsh, insulting, and insulting comments. Many people, organizations, businesses... become victims of those malicious intentions. In just a second, honor, dignity, brand name are destroyed without any way to fix it. Quite a few suicides happen due to being scammed or manipulated in cyberspace. Unhealthy living trends also spread quickly. Personal information is also easily published without concern for copyright or the owner's opinion. Personal information theft is a real danger through the unrestricted dissemination of information on social networks.

It is common that most social network users prefer to focus on hot, new information rather than knowing where it comes from, whether it is accurate or not. The truth is that there are a lot of fake rumors appearing from unreliable websites but netizens don't pay much attention. Social networks don't seem to care about this either. Therefore, many people worry that the core values of media are at risk of fading away. The whole world has begun to feel the dangers of overfreedom on social networks and now is working together to find a way to overcome it.

For the above reasons, implementing Resolution No. 55/2017/QH14 dated November 24, 2017 of the 14th National Assembly, the Ministry of Information and Communications issued *Code of conduct on social networks* on June 17, 2021 aiming to build a healthy and safe cyber environment in Vietnam. The Code includes 20 principles applicable to 03 target groups: (i) State agencies, officials, civil servants, public employees, and workers in state agencies using social networks; (ii) Other organizations and individuals using social networks; (iii) Social network service provider in Vietnam. There are general rules applicable to all target groups, such as: (1) Respect and compliance with the law: Comply with Vietnamese law, respect the

legitimate rights and interests of the organizations, individuals; (2). Healthy Rules: Behavior and conduct on social networks are consistent with the moral, cultural and fine values of the Vietnamese people; (3). Information Safety and Security Rules: Comply with regulations and instructions on information safety and security protection; (4). Responsibility Rules: Take responsibility for actions and conduct on social networks; Coordinate with authorities to handle actions and information content that violate the law.

Previously, based on the provisions of the 2016 Press Law and 10 Codes of ethics of Vietnamese journalists, after consulting associations, press agencies, and experts, and press managers at all levels, the Vietnam Journalists Association has issued Codes of using social networks by Vietnamese journalists, including 03 Chapters and 07 Articles which came into effect from January 1, 2019.

Solutions to comply with ethical standards in digital media content on social networks

Firstly, raising awareness of people and the public about social networks in general and about ethical standards in particular. With the increasing development of life and communication technology, many people have the opportunity to access and use social networks, so social network users are extremely copious and diverse. Besides those who understand and know how to appropriately behave on social networks, in reality, many other people simply think that this is just a virtual space, therefore, they can do whatever they want in virtual world and are not bound by anything in the real world.

The public and social network users need to clearly understand and comply with the provisions of the Law on Cyber Security, ensuring that activities in cyberspace do not harm national security, social order, safety, rights and legitimate interests of agencies, organizations, and individuals⁽⁴⁾; understand the *Code of Conduct on social networks*, in order to create a healthy social networks environment in Vietnam, to build ethical standards of behavior and conduct on social networks, to educate awareness, create positive habits in user's behavior on social networks, contributing to building a safe and healthy network environment in Vietnam⁽⁵⁾.

The public and social network users need to improve their understandings of the law and be conscious and responsible Vietnamese citizens when creating accounts and using social networks in Vietnam; have proper awareness, know how to filter information, identify bad and toxic information (know how to identify fake accounts, unofficial accounts, false statements, distortions);

Regularly spread good things, share useful information, cultivate moral qualities, eliminate bad things, contribute to maintaining and ensuring communication security, towards a positive, cultural, civilized cyberspace.

The public and social network users need to be equipped with knowledge to protect their personal accounts, not to reveal personal information to avoid losing accounts or being scammed on social network platforms; Need to have basic understanding of information technology skills to operate on the application, such as blocking, deleting, bad reporting, denouncing content on social networks which is inappropriate to standards.

However, instead of doing it in a scattered way, first of all, we should target cadres, civil servants, public employees, and workers in organizations, agencies, and businesses. Then, they will spread the awareness to their relatives and friends. Because these people have a relatively high level of knowledge in society, and belong to and bound by a certain group or organization, it is easier to define and measure their changes and transformations of awareness.

However, changing the awareness and behavior on cyberspace of cadres, civil servants, public employees in agencies and businesses is changing on the top. We need a strategic plan to apply ethical standards of behavior on social networks to schools, educate behavioral skills and how to use social networks for students right from the elementary level, or later at the junior high school level.

According to surveys and statistics on social networks users, the number of social network users is increasingly getting younger, especially Vietnam is always one of the countries with the highest number of young people using social networks the region and the world. Young people are curious, interested in discovering new things or new trends in the world, and have the need, ability and conditions to access technology. Besides many are using social networks to search for information and materials for studying, supplementing knowledge, entertaining, connecting, and interacting with friends everywhere, a large number of them are relying too much on social networks or virtual worlds. Those people are caught up in cyberspace activities, resulting many behaviors that are not appropriate at their ages and cultures. Therefore, it is necessary to start educating and teaching young people about Articles in the *Code of Conduct on social networks* so that they have the knowledge to use social networks, know to listen and respect the diversity, opinions and views of others; at the same time, know how to protect their own opinions, not to believe or act blindly.

Secondly, the communication and dissemination work on ethical standards of the *Code of Conduct on social networks* needs to be paid attention and strengthened. As a matter of fact, many existing codes are not paid attention to, for examples, *Ethical Codes for Vietnamese Journalists*, *Rules for Using Social Networks for Vietnamese Journalists*. Even some reporters and journalists still do not know how many articles and what they are in the two Codes.

Besides using media such as newspapers and social networks, the cooperation and contribution of ministries, departments and branches in bringing ethical standards into agencies, businesses, schools is absolutely necessary. Furthermore, it will be highly effective to have coordination between state agencies, businesses and the community, especially social network service providers - the units responsible for providing platform services - in spreading communication and raising awareness of social network users. Besides, the communication method must be systematic, long-term, diversified, not boring and monotonous and must stick to vivid real-life situations.

In propaganda and raising social awareness about behavior on social networks, the press and communications contingent should be the core of the work. Because they have communication skills and often use social networks in work and daily communication. If this contingent has right and cultured behavior, they will be the leading birds in spreading the action very quickly, otherwise, they will have very negative impacts on public opinion and society.

In fact, recently, many journalists have participated in social networks and used it as an information channel to effectively serve their communication work. Many of them become “KOLs” with a very large number of followers. Just one article or comment of KOLs is posted; there are thousands of likes, shares, comments on it, creating a real forum for exchange and the ability to influence public opinion. However, some of their articles and opinions on social networks are easy-going, subjective, temporary, unverified that resulted in bad consequences to individuals and society. In many cases, while the truth was still unclear, without verification and conclusion from the authorities, some journalists hastily shared information on social networks, and this immediately became hot issue in many forums, in both virtual and real life. Even though in the end the information was corrected, it had caused confusion and mistrust in public. If journalists were more

responsible and cautious when participating and reporting on social networks, such incidents would gradually decrease, and social networks environment will be healthier.

Maggie Haberman, a New York Times journalist put three questions for colleagues to answer for themselves when participating in social networks:

1. Is it necessary to be said?
2. Do you need to say this?
3. Do you need to say this right now?⁽⁶⁾

Communication work should be disruptive so that each journalist must be aware that when participating in social networks, even though they are not in the name of an agency or editorial office, the public still view their perspective as of journalists. Therefore, the spread and influence will be much more than of normal people. Particularly, negative information will spread much faster than positive information.

Therefore, the information they provide must be accurate and reliable, socially responsible and consistent with their views and thoughts in the press. The only difference is that opinions, thoughts, and information in the press must go through a verification and editing process while on social networks, journalists must evaluate, consider and take their own responsibility for what they post. Nowadays, many journalists express their views in the press differently, even contradictorily on social networks. This can be demonstrated clearly when observing their statements and behavior in many professional groups. There are “two-faced journalists” who have spoken inappropriately on social networks, even misrepresented the Party’s views, contradictory to the Constitution; however, those journalists have not been seriously punished and continued to express their wrong views, making this situation more severe.

Thirdly, encourage press agencies, organizations, businesses, schools throughout the country to develop their own code of ethics on social networks based on specific conditions and characteristics, or introduce principles of conduct on social networks into the agency’s internal regulations, associated with the organization’s vision and mission to create specific criteria to follow. The heads of agencies and units themselves must be aware of the importance of social networks in general, responsible for building a culture of behavior on social networks in particular, and take specific actions to promote the awareness, considering it a content in human behavior and human resource management. It is important to create an environment with transparent

reward and punishment mechanisms, and replication of good behaviors in the agency so that people are fully aware of, comply with, and perform cultural behaviors in cyberspace. This also makes people with inappropriate behavior feel embarrassed and correct themselves.

The composing of these codes of conduct depends on specific agency, organization and target audience. For example, the codes for schools whose targets are teachers and students are different from the codes of state agencies whose targets are civil servants and public employees, and they are also different from the codes of conduct applied for the armed forces. The concretization of the Code of Conduct on social networks into separate sets of rules for specific targets is the best way to make policy close to the reality.

Currently, in the world there are various codes of conduct on social networks for organizations, businesses, schools, or provisions on conduct on social networks included in internal regulations. For example, in the 64-page “Policy Handbook” of Australian College of Engineering and Management, there is an entire chapter on “Social Media Policy” stipulating in detail what to do and not to do on social networks for staff, lecturers, and students in the college. Everyone recruited to work must read this handbook carefully and sign a commitment to comply with it.

We should take press and media agencies as a breakthrough point. One of the main reasons why the *Ethical Codes for Vietnamese Journalists, Rules for Using Social Networks for Vietnamese Journalists* have not been truly effective for a long time is that they have not yet been concretized into mandatory regulations in each press agency to make them truly become principles of daily conduct in the agency as well as in the working practices of journalists. This can become an experience for disseminating the *Code of Conduct on social networks!*

Currently, “*compliance with professional ethical regulations for journalists*” has been legalized, specifically stipulated in Article 25. Rights and Obligations of Journalists in the 2016 Press Law. In the *Ethical Codes for Vietnamese Journalists*, Article 5 clearly states that journalists need to be “*standard and responsible when participating in social networks and other media.*”

Along with that, each press agency should build a code of conduct on social networks according to its principles, purposes, functions, tasks, style, characteristics, audiences, and history. The code will be the control

mechanism that everyone in the press agency must follow. On June 5, 2018, the Voice of Vietnam (VOV) issued Regulation on the use of social networks for its officials and employees. It requires VOV's officials and employees when using social networks to be cautious, behave and be fully aware of their responsibilities "*as a member of the Voice of Vietnam, even when not using real name and does not display information about working at the Voice of Vietnam*". In particular, it encourages journalists to use social networks to introduce and promote good articles and valuable works, promote and spread good human values, thereby promote humanity and goodness in society. Article 13 of the VOV's Regulation on the use of social networks clearly states: "Units and individuals violating provisions in Article 6 of this Regulation, depending on the severity, will be disciplined according to the regulations of the Voice of Vietnam and the law. In particularly serious cases, resignation or dismissal may be applied."

Currently, many major press agencies in the world have designed codes of conduct on social networks for their journalists. At the end of 2017, two major United States' newspapers, the Wall Street Times and the New York Times, issued recommendations for reporters when using social networks. Both newspapers' reporters are not recommended to post opinions or comments on social networks. Instead of that, they are recommended to publish articles⁽⁷⁾.

In 2013, Kelly Fincham, a researcher conducted surveys on the codes of using social networks at 14 press agencies in the US and UK and came up with 10 principles to help journalists have standards and responsibility when using social networks:

1. Don't do foolish things: Be cautious when interacting on social networks;
2. Always identify yourself as a journalist by using your real name;
3. Remember that everything posted will be public even if it is in a closed group;
4. Do not publicly support or oppose any opinion;
5. Do not post information that raises doubts about benefits;
6. Verify information before sharing;
7. Balance when joining groups;
8. Promptly issue corrections;
9. Do not delete information on social networks, including false information, instead of that, admit mistakes and correct them;
10. Be careful when citing information on social networks in articles⁽⁸⁾.

Fourth, strengthen people and public's oversight on the cadres, civil servants, public employees and party's members' compliance with ethical standards on social networks. Besides organization's monitoring and management, it is essential for the whole society and the public to oversight the using of social networks. When an inappropriate behavior occurs, public supervision, in combination with condemnation of colleagues, agencies, law and the entire society will create a strong deterrence. Thanks to social networks' connection, it is not so difficult for people and the community to participate in public oversight.

To ensure that society and netizen's oversight on cadres, civil servants, public employees' using of social networks are effective, the following principles need to be done:

- Fair supervision of society and the community is an important factor that affects the behavior on social networks of cadres, civil servants, and public employees. Being overcritical or tolerant to misbehaviours on social networks does not help to make cyberspace environment become healthier.

- Netizen propaganda and mobilization work should be conducted on a regular basis to actively spread positive behaviors and actions, to help multiply good things, and especially dare to fight with bad and negative things to regain a healthy cyberspace for ourselves and the community. Ethical standards will not be able to come into life and bring effect if each individual in society does not dare to speak up, or ignores rude, uncultured, and inappropriate behavior to social standards.

- Publicize conduct that violates the law and ethical standards on mass media and social networks when the final verdict has been reached to ensure publicity and transparency, so that people know and condemn together./.

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