

Vietnam Television changes for development in the digital era

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Abstract: *All media agencies must transform themselves to avoid falling behind and continue developing in a society where authentic information is increasingly essential. They need to change to meet the public's needs and adapt to the growing information competition in the digital era. Of course, due to the characteristics of each type of media, changes do not happen in the same way across all media forms. Television is no exception. With its unique features and by leveraging the strengths of technology in the digital age, television has been continuously renewing itself in its way to affirm its role, position, and brand within the system of modern mass media.*

Keywords: *television; Vietnam Television; changes; digital era.*

1. Vietnam Television and its changes

Vietnam Television was established in 1970, with its first test broadcast at 58 Quan Su, Hanoi. This was an important milestone marking the birth of a new media type in Vietnam. Since then, over 50 years have passed, and throughout its development, by capitalizing on its advantages and new opportunities, as well as inheriting the strengths of technology and operational experience from earlier forms of media, television stations nationwide - from central to local - with hundreds of channels and many new transmission platforms, have continuously made breakthroughs in both the quantity and quality of programs, production methods, distribution, and effectiveness in serving the public.

Although inheriting the prominent features of television in the past, such as conveying information to the public through images and sound, the production process of television still includes basic stages such as pre-production and post-production, the current state of Vietnam Television is noticeably different. This can be seen in several aspects: technology (technology for operations, transmission, distribution, and reception); products; audiences; journalists' labour; and the organizational management of a modern television station or channel. These changes have shaped the characteristics of modern television. A survey shows some key results:

Firstly, television audiences have confirmed that they have noticed a clear change in the number and quality of programs today compared to the past. Specifically, in our survey with a sample size of 200 people conducted through social research methods with students, learners, and others who have studied or are currently studying the field of journalism and communications, the results from 189 valid responses are as follows: 85.2% of respondents believe that Vietnam Television has clearly changed compared to five years ago; 84.7% say that the number of programs has significantly increased; 77.8% feel that the quality of programs has improved with new, vibrant program formats; 65.1% believe that the programs and interaction methods with the audience are still not varied enough and difficult to implement; 17.9% were unsure or have not engaged with television on digital platforms.

Television journalists in Vietnam also confirm that Vietnam Television has clearly changed, and they are undoubtedly the most aware of these changes. A survey with a sample of 30 journalists who are directly involved in producing television products at both central and local stations in Vietnam shows the following results: 100% of journalists agree that Vietnam Television has undergone clear changes compared to five years ago; 90% believe the number of programs has significantly increased; 76.7% say the quality of programs has improved with new, dynamic formats; 53.3% feel that the programs and ways of interacting with audiences are still not varied enough and difficult to implement; 100% have engaged with television on digital platforms. For this group, an additional question was asked: “How have the revenue sources for your station and for you personally changed recently?” The response showed that 93.3% indicated that the revenue for their unit and themselves had decreased significantly compared to before.

Secondly, modern television has undergone significant changes compared to the past, specifically in five key aspects: (1) longer broadcasting hours, (2) more diverse and higher-quality programs, (3) easier and more convenient viewing (anytime, anywhere, on multiple platforms), (4) more convenient and faster production and operations for journalists, and (5) more audience interaction with programs, although the methods of interaction are still not very diverse. This result was surveyed by the author over the past five years at the Vietnam Television Station and some local radio and television stations.

Based on the data above, it is clear that Vietnam Television has changed in terms of both quantity and quality. However, television today still faces many challenges and requires fundamental changes, especially focusing on adapting

to modern audiences, exploiting the convenience of new technologies and techniques, and developing dynamically in the digital media environment.

Initially, television in Vietnam broadcasted about 2 to 3 hours a day with only one channel. Now, television has made significant changes. Programs are broadcast for an average of 18 to 24 hours a day. Each station has one or two channels, with the national television station having dozens of channels, broadcasting through both promotional and subscription-based methods. Thanks to the application of modern technologies, television products in Vietnam are now also streamed on social media platforms. This helps increase the duration of programs and provides an opportunity for the public to access diverse, lively information from television with a large quantity and frequency.

Along with this, television now offers not only news, current affairs, specialized programs, or entertainment programs (music, soap operas), but also a wide range of new formats like reality television shows and short-duration programs (around 2-3 minutes, catering to the public's habits when consuming information on social media), which are continuously emerging.

Television products, which were previously broadcast and watched on one platform, are now available on multiple devices and platforms. Television is no longer just broadcast on traditional platforms (terrestrial, cable, satellite television) but is also available on new platforms (Internet - OTT, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok). Notably, after many years of testing and preparation, in June 2023, the national digital television platform VTVgo was officially launched. This platform can stream dozens of high-quality television channels and thousands of hours of on-demand programming.

Currently, VTVgo has over 8 million regular users, including 6 million users on mobile devices and 2 million users on smart TVs. With smart devices that have VTVgo installed, users can easily watch seven essential national television channels, including VTV1 (Vietnam Television), VTC1 (VTC Digital Television), Vnews (Vietnam News Agency), QPVN (Ministry of Defense), ANTV (Ministry of Public Security), National Assembly TV (National Assembly Office), and People's TV (Nhan Dan Newspaper). Additionally, the national digital television platform VTVgo also includes some local television channels from across the country. After being added to VTVgo, these channels have reached millions of viewers both domestically and internationally. By placing these essential national and local channels on the VTVgo platform, it has helped spread political programs from radio and television stations to domestic and international audiences, promoting the role of key media agencies

and widely disseminating the cultural values of the Vietnamese people to both domestic citizens and international friends. This offers the public easier and more convenient access to television information compared to the traditional broadcasting sector.

The changes are not only evident in television products but also in the working processes of journalists and collaborators at television stations across the country. While the technology and technical equipment used for television production in the past were analog—bulky and cumbersome—today’s television technology is digital, characterized by modern, compact, and dynamic features. Even journalists or the public can now afford basic equipment like smartphones, cameras, or personal camcorders to produce television content to a certain extent. Moreover, new technologies have been applied in television production, broadcasting, and viewing, such as the use of artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and cloud computing.

The data above preliminarily affirms that modern television in Vietnam has undergone significant changes to align with current realities, fostering development and attracting more audiences.

2. Factors driving the changes in television in Vietnam

- The Development of Technology with Numerous Benefits

In the past, watching television required turning on a TV set. Now, with modern devices and high-speed Internet, anyone can watch their favorite television programs on personal mobile devices such as smartphones or tablets. The term “watching TV” now implies being able to view content anytime, anywhere, on various devices, no longer limited to television screens.

Technological advancements have brought numerous benefits for all demographics. Today, the Internet and technology have fundamentally transformed the traditional television sector, from production to transmission and viewing. High-speed Internet technologies like 3G, 4G LTE, and 5G, eSIM, which enable connectivity for all devices at any time, as well as AI, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and Machine Learning/Deep Learning, have significantly impacted the television industry. In fact, OTT applications like Netflix, YouTube, HBO Now, and YOUKU are dominating the landscape, putting traditional television with its global digital platforms under pressure. AI and AI bots are changing the way content is distributed and presented to audiences.

Along with significant benefits such as reducing costs compared to traditional delivery methods, and eliminating geographical limitations, digital

broadcasting has an additional advantage over traditional methods: audiences are no longer restricted by broadcasters' schedules and can watch or listen to any content they wish at any time.

The development of technology has also impacted the way the public engages with television. Nowadays, audiences can access information on multiple screens, watch television online via the Internet, and distribute and store television content online. Technology has enabled broadcasters to easily interact with viewers and producers, and vice versa. It also facilitates programmatic advertising, which targets specific audiences. According to statistics, "in 2022, 7 out of 10 people worldwide used mobile phones, 62% had Internet access, and 60% had social media accounts. In Vietnam, there are about 70 million Internet users and over 50 million people are active on social media"⁽²⁾. These numbers highlight the explosion of new technologies (such as the Internet, telecommunications, and IT technologies). The availability of these technologies with their benefits has helped the public access information, including television content, more flexibly and easily.

The Vietnam Television industry is facing both opportunities and challenges. New technologies and emerging methods of working are overtaking those of earlier generations. Therefore, if television does not adapt its mindset and actions, it will "lose" its audience and diminish its appeal to advertisers.

- The demand and conditions for the audience's reception of television content have evolved.

Television audiences are becoming increasingly dynamic, with less time to watch TV. They have many tasks to improve their lives, numerous relationships to nurture, and need time for learning, experiences, and improving their quality of life. As a result, if television does not innovate, fail to recognize audience psychology, and adapt to changes in lifestyle, living habits, and the public's behavior in modern society, it will struggle to attract a large audience.

Along with this dynamic shift, audiences are also becoming more proactive in consuming media content, including television. This proactivity is reflected in their ability to choose the type of media, platform, channel, and timing of content. Never before have audiences been able to access television content as easily and comfortably as they can today. With just a mobile phone, anywhere with Wi-Fi, at a convenient time, the public can select programs and information they enjoy. This proactivity is also evident in the way audiences can easily and actively interact with television content.

These shifts in audience behavior have led to changes in television: changes in production, delivery, and viewing of content. If television does not adapt to meet the needs, desires, and psychological preferences of audiences (from content to delivery methods), it will gradually lose its viewers.

- Declining revenue in the television industry

Currently, most television stations or channels operate independently financially. These units must find suitable funding to support their operations. There are several revenue sources, with advertising being the largest. However, surveys in recent years show that revenue from advertising has decreased sharply, which significantly impacts the livelihoods of staff and reporters and the ability to continue producing television programs.

According to a survey by the Ministry of Information and Communications, “Revenue from Radio and Television stations in 2021 decreased by 10% compared to 2020”⁽³⁾. In particular, “Stations have faced many difficulties as they have to ensure regular operational funding from 2020 as per the planning. The revenue of television stations primarily depends on the state budget and advertising. Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, advertising revenue for these stations is estimated to have decreased by 40-50%”⁽⁴⁾.

There are many reasons for this situation, but one major cause is the strong development of social media, multimedia communication methods, smart devices, and the ongoing trend of digitization, which has posed significant challenges for television stations in maintaining their audience and developing digital platforms. Furthermore, revenue from advertising services has significantly dropped because domestic media outlets are facing competition from other communication methods, social media platforms, and platforms like YouTube and Facebook for advertising and communications. Additionally, many businesses have cut down on spending for advertising activities. Clearly, advertising revenue is no longer the sole or sustainable source of income for stations. In conclusion, the financial shortfall is one of the reasons forcing television stations to “transform,” innovate, and find new, appropriate ways to generate revenue.

3. Solutions for the television industry to continue evolving effectively

The recent changes show that the Vietnam Television industry has recognized the need for innovation and has taken steps in that direction. However, to successfully implement the strategy “Digital Transformation of Journalism by 2025, with a Vision to 2030,” as outlined in Decision No. 348/QĐ-TTg by the Government on April 6, 2023, and to develop television in a

professional, modern, and globally integrated manner, the Vietnam Television industry must embrace flexible and creative changes.

- Change in awareness

This is an urgent issue in the current context. As the world evolves, media organizations, social networks, and other forms of communication are “exploding,” and television cannot “stand still” outside this “earthquake.” Television that “stands still” is outdated, backwards, losing viewers, losing revenue, and losing its brand. Only when the industry recognizes the need to innovate, to do things differently—from organization and production to management—can it take appropriate actions to attract more viewers and generate revenue in a competitive, healthy environment. Change is not only necessary for leaders and managers but also for every member of the organization. Each person plays a role in driving change. Only when there is reasonable change within the available conditions can the television industry evolve to be modern and integrated with regional and global media.

- Change in investment and technology application

The history of television development has seen many technological changes, and this process continues today. In the early decades, Vietnam Television used analog technology for production and broadcasting. In those difficult times, access to television was a source of joy for the public, as it provided vivid images and sounds, allowing people to witness events realistically and objectively. Today, with the advancement of 4.0 technology, television has more opportunities to improve quality through digital technology, from production to viewing. Through television sets, viewers can watch programs through terrestrial broadcasting, cable TV, or satellite TV. However, this is no longer the limit. With the remarkable advancement of science and technology, viewers can access television content not just on traditional platforms like TV but also on many other platforms. These include Internet television (OTT), YouTube, TikTok, fanpages, etc. Viewers can access content anytime, anywhere, on various devices such as smartphones and laptops.

Through new technology, reporters and editors also have more opportunities and flexibility in producing television content. In the past, television production often required bulky equipment such as VHS cameras like M7, M3000, M9000, or Umatic, Betacam, and DVCam cameras. However, today, there is a wide variety of compact and user-friendly recording devices, and in some cases, modern personal devices such as personal cameras, cameras, or smartphones can be used. Nevertheless, new technology is always “expensive,”

so when investing in technology, TV stations must have a strategic plan and a focused approach. Which technology should be purchased? For which stages of production? When? How should the transfer and application be carried out effectively to avoid merely following trends and wasting resources without fully exploiting the benefits of new technology?

- Change in transmission methods

Television is a medium that requires many devices at various stages, from production to transmission and distribution. Technology investment needs to be synchronized across these stages to ensure quick and high-quality production, as well as seamless transmission of content to the public. Special attention needs to be paid to changes in the transmission methods. If television content is still only broadcast on traditional platforms and viewed through television, this means limiting the audience and potentially losing viewers over time.

The first method of transmitting television content was through terrestrial broadcasting, followed by cable TV and satellite TV. These methods are still in use today, though not very effective. To minimize these limitations and expand convenience in receiving information as technology evolves, it is necessary to exploit the Internet and social media platforms for broadcasting television content. Platforms like YouTube, fanpages, and TikTok should be leveraged, as these can transmit information quickly and vividly. Importantly, through these platforms, audiences can actively engage with the content. To fully utilize these platforms, production units need to create content that fits the characteristics of each technological platform, such as adjusting the product's duration, size, and optimizing titles, links, and articles across platforms.

- Change in content

There needs to be a shift in how television products are defined. A television product is no longer just a broadcast program transmitted via traditional methods; it now includes a wide range of formats distributed across various platforms. These products are no longer confined to tapes but can be stored on memory cards, files, big data, links, and platforms, allowing for large quantities to be stored and easily accessed and searched.

Content remains a key factor in the survival and development of television. It needs to be fresh and engaging, moving beyond the typical "staples" like news programs, columns, and entertainment shows (such as music, game shows, and soap operas) that have existed for decades in a standardized format. Content should be developed to offer diverse and

attractive “spiritual food” that appeals to modern audiences. Furthermore, content should not only serve as a medium for delivering information and guiding public opinion but also increase its humanity, emphasize traditional values, and strengthen family and social bonds in a way that appeals to various age groups.

- Change in interaction with audiences

In Vietnam, as part of a new development strategy, VTV is repositioning itself with the strategy of “anytime, anywhere, on any device.” Television programs are focusing more on interactive engagement with the audience, going beyond traditional methods like receiving handwritten letters by mail, SMS messages, or calls to a hotline. Modern television should leverage interactive elements through software, the Internet, and social media platforms that the station is using.

Through various forms of interaction, audiences can engage with the program, experience it, and express their thoughts. These interactions create a connection between the audience and the characters, as well as between the audience and the production team. When given the opportunity to participate, especially through diverse and convenient means, the audience becomes excited as they can share their opinions and assert themselves. This is a key factor in stimulating the audience to continue following the program and participating in future ones. Additionally, through this participation, comments provide an opportunity for broadcasters and journalists to gather ideas and insights from the public for further consideration.

For smooth two-way interaction, the TV station should have a dedicated team to develop strategies to attract viewers into interacting with the program, as well as a quick and appropriate response system to handle any feedback or exchanges from the audience.

Furthermore, TV stations and broadcasters need to change their perspective on the role of the modern audience. They must understand their audience better and be aware of the shift in how the audience receives information. Television viewers are no longer passive consumers of content (watching whatever the station broadcasts). Modern viewers are considered “customers” who are dynamic, proactive in receiving information, and eager to interact, provide feedback, and make requests to the station in order to receive content that suits their preferences. When TV stations recognize the importance of their audience and acknowledge their evolving role, they can create products that meet the expectations of these “customers.”

At the same time, there needs to be a redefinition of the role and skills of television journalists. Journalists and reporters should not just be skilled in one area but should be proficient in many tasks. They need to master the use of various technologies in their work to compete with media products across other platforms. To achieve this, TV stations must invest in their workforce, equipping reporters with the necessary skills, knowledge, and expertise.

In conclusion, to avoid falling behind and to remain relevant in the rapidly developing society, Vietnam Television must undergo necessary changes to align with the advancement of new technologies, the increasing demands of modern audiences, and the fierce competition among media platforms./.

(1) <https://vtv.vn/truyen-hinh/vtngo-chinh-thuc-tro-thanh-nen-tang-truyen-hinh-so-quoc-gia-2023060513032916.htm>

(2) <https://nhandan.vn/phat-thanh-truyen-hinh-trong-ky-nguyen-so-post758002.html>

(3) <https://www.vietnamplus.vn/tao-suc-bat-cho-nguon-thu-bao-chi-trong-boi-can-h-lam-phat-tang-cao/869455.vnp>.

(4) <https://vietnamnet.vn/nguon-thu-quang-cao-cua-cac-dai-phat-thanh-truyen-hinh-giam-40-50-i407395.html>.