

A study on the use of mainstream and social media by ethnic minorities in Vietnam

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Abstract: *Despite the rapid growth of information and communication technology in Vietnam, there seems to be a significant disparity in media use among people in lowlands, highlands and ethnic minority areas. While urban areas are saturated with information from different types of media, in remote areas, especially in ethnic minority areas, access to mainstream and social media by ethnic minority people is still limited. In light of these issues related to ethnic minority people, this paper examines ethnic minority people's use of mainstream and social media in Vietnam. Findings are based on a questionnaire survey with sample size of 450 ethnic minority people from 8 provinces of typical ethnic minority areas in Vietnam, and on in-depth interviews with 20 leaders, managers, journalists and reporters from news organisations. While the survey results help to discover their media use (such as proportions of media use, media use duration and time frame, and motives for using media), the interview results aim to explain why there are differences in their use of mainstream and social media. Key findings show that when considering the usage of mainstream media along with social media, television is the most used means of media whereas social networks (including Facebook and Zalo) have the second highest percentage of usage, followed by the rest of mainstream media types. Interview findings further explain the features from the survey data.*

Keywords: *Mainstream media, social media, media use, media access, ethnic minorities.*

1. Introduction

The Vietnamese Government recognises 53 ethnic minorities, making it a multi-ethnic country [1]. The majority of ethnic minorities are concentrated in the mountainous and rural regions of Vietnam, which are affected by hard terrain, natural disasters, scattered population and limited access, but particularly vital to

the country regarding socio-economics, national defence, security and ecological environment. In recent years, the Party and State have issued and implemented a number of specific policies and initiatives in order to provide favorable conditions and gradually produce upward mobility for ethnic minorities. The National Assembly (NA) approved the Master Plan for Socio-Economic Development in the Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas (EMMAs) in November 2019, not only marking an important historical milestone, but also demonstrating the Party and State's interest in the socioeconomic growth of these areas.

In this effort, media are crucial channels to leverage the implementation of any economic, monetary, financial, fiscal, and structural reform. The impacts of media, including media coverage and access in ethnic minority areas, are determined by how well they disseminate information about policies and laws, persuades people to act in accordance with policies and laws, and build consensus and a sense of unity among the populace [2]. Local governments have worked closely with news organisations in recent years to deliver free newspapers and radio programs which have contributed to raising people's awareness on socio-political, economic, and cultural development issues. However, media access by ethnic minority communities is met with several obstacles. Reporting for these areas lacks substance and is overlapping, mostly in the national language, while the media representation of ethnic minorities is inaccurate and biased. It will become increasingly vital to discover the information needs and media access habits by ethnic minorities to improve media effectiveness in getting ethnic minorities more integrated into the society and helping to provide them a better quality of life.

This paper examines the current media usage and behaviors of ethnic minority people and proposes solutions to improve the quality and effectiveness of communication works that satisfy the media access needs of this specific audience. Findings, which are based on a questionnaire survey with a sample size of 450 ethnic minority people from 8 provinces of typical ethnic minority areas in Vietnam, and on in-depth interviews with 20 leaders, managers, journalists and reporters from news organisations, indicate that new media is penetrating and becoming increasingly important in these communities' social life and their media usage habits are constantly shifting. The paper contributes to existing studies on ethnic minority communication policies in Viet Nam by assessing ethnic minorities' media usage and examining their needs, wants and behaviours. It also seeks to shed light on factors affecting the implementation of communication policies for ethnic minorities across the country. Finally, we identify important gaps in the existing literature to present key priorities for future research in order to gain new insights into ethnic minorities' media usage.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Mainstream media and social media*

The introduction of communication technologies has posed significant challenges to conventional media. As a result of the expanding media convergence, conventional mainstream media confront strong competition.

In the past, mainstream news media—newspapers, magazines, radio, and television—were the primary avenues of information dissemination and mass-mediated messaging, with trained professional journalists working exclusively as disseminators of news and information. This exclusivity enjoyed by the mainstream media and professional journalists, however, came to an end with the introduction of new media technologies [3, pp.15-32]. The bottom-up and interactive character of social media, with the appearance of citizen journalists and user-based content creation, appears to undermine the traditional media's top-down and dominant structure [4, pp. 23-55]. These differences in the form, structure, and practice of mainstream media and social media have sparked a wide range of interest and concerns.

Social media is defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” [5, p. 61]. Since their appearance, these social network sites have evolved from a method of keeping in touch with friends and family to becoming effective platforms used by companies to reach their consumers both locally and worldwide. Social media platforms include social networking sites like Facebook, photo sharing sites like Flickr, video sharing sites like YouTube, business networking sites like LinkedIn, microblogging sites like Twitter, and numerous others. Social media has become an integral part of most Vietnamese people's everyday lives in recent years, owing to the country's soaring smartphone and internet usage rates. Because of its highly connected and young, digitally literate populace, the country has been among the nations with the highest number of social media users worldwide. According to WeAreSocial [6], there are more than 72 million social media users in Vietnam, equivalent to 73.7% of the total population in 2021. The number of social media users in Vietnam increased by 11% between 2020 and 2021. The leading active social media apps among internet users in Viet Nam as of 2nd quarter of 2021 range from internationally to locally developed platforms, such as: Facebook with 96% of Vietnamese Internet users, Youtube (86%), and Zalo (85%).

2.2. *Uses and Gratifications Theory*

Uses and Gratifications Theory originates from communication studies

and addresses the selectivity of media use which has long been recognised as a critical aspect in limiting media effectiveness. Media effects theories illustrate that the audience can be influenced in a variety of ways through news and entertainment media. This notion was prominent in early classic communication models on the process of communication and message dissemination, which were linear and one-way [7], or considering the medium as the cause and the response as the effect [8, pp. 4–5]. Later on, modern conceptualisations of the communication process evolved to be two-way in which both the message or the medium and the audience shape the other. McQuail [9, pp. 420-430] stated that “the way media select, process and shape content for their own purposes can have a strong influence on how it is received and interpreted and thus on longer-term consequences”, though audiences still had autonomy over the media messages they absorbed. Theoretical perspectives such as uses-and-gratifications [10, pp. 164-181] and selective exposure theory [11, 12], were developed as media users were put at the center of the process.

Uses and Gratifications Theory is interested in the reasons and motives that people have for utilising particular sorts of media, with its core premise being that people actively and purposefully utilise media to meet their needs. Thus, it aids in explaining how individuals use media to satisfy their wants, their motivations for using media, and the repercussions that result from these requirements [13, p. 20]. Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a valuable alternative to the media effects viewpoint, particularly for social media, which allows for considerably more engagement and user contributed material [14]. With so many media options for information and entertainment accessible, people utilise online and conventional media platforms for a variety of reasons and objectives, which are decided by their personal tastes and choices [15]. What is more, the structure and characteristics of both mainstream media and digital media may play a role in the information that audiences pay attention to on both platforms, which may unwittingly alter their assessment of the level of dependability on both platforms. The “medium is the message” hypothesis, developed by Marshall McLuhan [16], explains the phenomenon by explaining the link between the qualities of the media and how they impact people’s attitudes and experiences. While commonly utilised in other areas, uses and gratifications theory can be useful in explaining social media usage. According to McQuail [17], the aims of media usage may be classified into five categories. The audience wants to: a) be informed or educated, b) identify with characters of the situation in the media environment, c) simple entertainment, d) enhance social interaction or e) escape from the stresses of daily life. The idea of uses

and gratifications has also been widely applied in the study of politics and the transmission of political messages [18; 19].

This perspective will help to better understand how ethnic minorities use new forms of social media to gratify their needs, what their motivations are, and the consequences that result from their needs in the context presented here.

2.3. Media use of ethnic minorities

With the rise of globalisation, migration as a consequence is a well-known phenomenon all over the world. European countries with a large number of immigrants and a strong research record in this sector are given special consideration when it comes to ethnic minorities media research. Several studies have explored the impact of media on integration of ethnic minorities into the host culture, as for migrants, and the majority ethnicities.

Simon Cottle [20] featured scholarly debates about media representations of 'race' and ethnicity societies in Europe and North America with usage of ethnographic field methods. In this field of research, there have been different lines of research with a wide array of focus: on media content [21; 22], especially ethnic minorities representation. Nunn [23] explored the problematic issue of news stories that create tensions between ethnic and dominant cultures, or within the ethnic communities. Many studies also revealed that mainstream news outlets have a tendency to rely on a narrow-repeated array of sources when reporting on ethnic groups, with an inability to fully include ethnic minorities' perspectives in these stories [24]. It has also been pointed out that human resources for mainstream newsrooms are not ethnically diverse [25].

However, there are still gaps in how ethnic media (media by and for ethnic minorities) actually manifest and cater to this particular audience. La Ferle and Lee [26] has raised the concern of the best method to approach ethnic minorities, especially with considerations about tactics and messages directed at them. Studies dealing with new media forms and technologies, as well as transnational cultural and communication spaces have intensified. Recent research on media usage and ethnic minorities has started to feature the use of social media. Mengni Wang [27] examined the relationships between the usage of social networking sites and acculturation among Chinese students who are studying in U.S. colleges in the process of cultural adaptation and maintenance. Little study has been conducted on the motives and gratifications that migrants associate with the usage of specific media types. However, with the rise of social media, when audiences are no longer passive consumers but active participants, it is increasingly more important to examine what people do with media rather than simply what media does

to people. Furthermore, because Uses and Gratifications Theory is anchored in media and communication studies, applying this theory to integration will be a novel method in this discipline, providing a unique and beneficial interdisciplinary viewpoint.

Pertaining to the increasing complexity of the media environment across the world, there are still largely under-researched spaces with many limitations and data gaps. Ethnic issues in general are still largely misunderstood and misrepresented.

3. Media use of ethnicity minorities in Viet Nam

Research on ethnic minorities and their media use of integration is still a rather young field. In particular in Viet Nam, this research area has only been a focus in the last two decades. Several studies have explored the impact of different media (printed, broadcasting media...) on acculturation and integrating ethnic minorities, and how these channels can facilitate better understanding, especially between institutions and ethnic minorities. Since 2001, presentations in a conference by the Ministry of Culture and Information on “Strengthening and renewing communication and information work for ethnic minorities and mountainous people” focused on exchanging information targeting ethnic minorities. Lu Thi Ngoc [28]’s thesis on “Improving the quality of printed newspapers to target ethnic minorities”, with a case study of Thai people in Tuong Duong (Nghe An) explored theoretical issue about the role of the public in the communication process, the characteristics of the ethnic minority audience, press policy for ethnic minorities in Vietnam, thereby proposing recommendations to improve ethnic media. Dang Thi Thu Huong [29] explored the ethnic communication particularly on sustainable development - theoretical and practical issues with a case study of the Northwest region in Vietnam.

A new interdisciplinary approach to ethnic media also started to gain the attention of researchers. The Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment (iSEE) and Nguyen Van Chinh [30] published the work on “Vietnamese media coverage on ethnic minorities from the lens of cultural anthropology”, demonstrated that current media was successful at introducing the diversity and richness of ethnic cultures in Vietnam, and at the same time identifying the difficulties ethnic minority groups are facing. However, the portrayal of ethnic minorities in mainstream media is considered “more negative than positive” in this research. This trend is also highlighted in another of iSEE’s study with the Academy of Journalism and Communication, “Portrayal of ethnic minorities in printed newspapers” [31]. In order to improve the media’s portrayal of ethnic minorities, a strategy for reforming

communication about ethnic minorities and mountainous areas is required; to enhance the objectivity and transparency of information on ethnic minorities. In particular, the journalists need to have a better understanding of ethnic cultures, instead of extrapolating from limited knowledge and reporting one-way when writing about ethnic minorities.

In recent years, social media use of ethnic minorities has also been mentioned in studies. What needs to be examined further is whether social media can play a significant role for ethnic minorities and the communication process. Another research by iSEE (2019) on the ethnic minority's youth in cyberspace with their increasing participation in online activities, even though from an interdisciplinary approach, has illustrated how new media penetrated the life of ethnic minorities and raised concerns on how ethnic minorities youth can be better equipped with digital skills and maintain their cultural identity in a Kinh people dominant space. Recent research by Luu Van An [32] on "Communication practices in ethnic minority areas, current situation and solutions" presented a theoretical framework, analysing the current impact of media in ethnic minority areas of Viet Nam in the two periods: 1986-2000 and 2001-2020. The study has pointed out the positive impact on the relationship between the ethnic groups in the region and ethnic minorities' exposure to the State's economic, educational, cultural and political policies, as well as the lack of coordination and comprehensiveness of the communication strategies to this particular audience. These results are important to the Party and State of Viet Nam's overall ethnic policies.

To conclude, so far, there have been many foreign and domestic research projects on communication, media, journalism, both theory and practice. Many works have analysed the role and great impact of the media on socio-economic life and cultures of communities and also shown the transformations of media, especially with new forms of media (tablets, mobile phones...).

The gaps lie in the approach of seeing the communication process from central regions to ethnic minorities as one-way and top-down. Previous studies have focused on the media use of migrants and media effects, describing media use habits or frequencies and the influence of the media on the individual or the audience, without examining the particular needs, demands and behaviors, the motivations and gratifications that the ethnic minorities linked with certain media forms. The present studies also lack reference to the emergence of the Internet and social media in the technology age, which has completely changed media consumption behaviors by establishing new communicational and cultural space. It is crucial to analyse access to and usage of old and new media to see the differences in the usage of mainstream media and social media among

ethnic minorities, which contributes to draw a better, more comprehensive picture of the current media landscape in a fast-growing country like Viet Nam.

4. Research questions

- 1) What is the pattern of mainstream media and social media usage among ethnic minorities?
- 2) What are the motivations for using the mainstream and social media by ethnic minority people?
- 3) What topics do ethnic minorities prefer to access on mainstream media and social media?

5. Methodology

The study employed a mixed methodology which “integrates quantitative and qualitative research within a single project” [33, p. 628] to analyse the use of mainstream and social media by ethnic minorities in Vietnam.

Quantitative research

The survey covered 8 provinces where ethnic minority groups live across the North, Central, and South regions of Vietnam with a total of 450 respondents, equally divided among 150 respondents for each region. It consists of representative samples from Quang Ninh and Son La for the North region population, Thua Thien-Hue, Quang Nam and Ninh Thuan for the Central region and Kien Giang, Bac Lieu and Soc Trang for the South.

The majority of this sample are drawn from ethnic minority groups, in addition to a smaller comparison group of Kinh participants, who were born and reside in the area of the ethnic minority's living area. The distribution of ethnicity in the survey sample is as follows:

North: Quang Ninh province consists of the Muong, Tay people; Son La: Muong, Tay

Central: Thua Thien-Hue: Pa Co ; Quang Nam: Co Tu; Ninh Thuan: Cham

South: Kien Giang: Kinh, Khmer; Bac Lieu: Kinh, Khmer; Soc Trang: Kinh, Khmer.

Data was collected by disseminating questionnaires to ethnic minorities during the year 2020 and findings were based on 450 valid survey responses.

Qualitative research

20 in-depth interviews were conducted with leaders, managers, journalists and reporters of news organisations from central and provincial news organisations. Interviewees should meet the criteria of being directly in charge of reporting issues of ethnic minorities or having experiences or knowledge in reporting the topics related to the ethnic minority groups. Those interviewees provided comprehensive insights into how ethnic minorities use mainstream media in comparison with social media.

In this research, all of the above interviewees were called alternatively by the word “journalists”. The analysis of interview data allowed the research team to explain the figures from the survey data.

Description of ethnic minorities participated in the survey

In terms of gender, 63.1% are males and 36.9% are females. Regarding age, 28.7 % of participants are at the age of 30 and under, 41.3% belong to the 31-40 age group, 30% are the number of people aged 41 years and over. With regard to literacy, 90.0% of respondents are able to read and write Vietnamese and 34,0% can read and write their own ethnic language.

The majority of respondents have a high school education or higher. High school: 29.4%, intermediate/college: 20.0% diploma, undergraduate: 18.7%, primary school: 13.5%, never attended school: 4%, post graduate: 0.4 %.

Government officials and public servants make up almost one-third (33.9%) of all responses, making them the occupation group with the greatest percentage. Others are agriculture, forestry and fishery occupations: 26.5 %, students: 13.1 %, unskilled employees: 11.3%. The rest are retailing, services, laboring, handicraft manufacturing, housewives, retirees, the old and the unemployed.

6. Findings

Conditions, facilities, equipment

The majority (81.1%) of households have audio-visual devices, in which the number of devices in the household usually falls between 1-2 devices (accounting for 59.5%). 14.4% of the households have three audio-visual devices, and the rest have four or more devices. Only one household has the highest number of devices, with seven devices.

Smartphones and flat-screen television ownerships occupied the highest percentage (57.3% and 53.8%, respectively). Followed is regular television (tube television, old model) accounting for 36.4%. 26.4% have mobile phones that can receive signals from FM and AM radio stations. Other ownership: laptops: 21.1%, personal computers: 11.1%, tablet 6.0%, and radio or cassette: 4.4%.

Regarding geographical area, remote areas: 52.4% of households, mountainous areas: 41.1%, border areas: 27.3%, not in the above areas: 12.2%.

Access to mainstream and social media by ethnic minorities

Research question 1: What is the pattern of mainstream media and social media usage among ethnic minorities?

Most frequently used forms of mainstream and social media

The findings show that there is a clear difference in the frequency of media usage among media types. Television is the most popular medium with the highest frequency with 76.4% of people using daily and 14.4% using several times per week. Only a small percentage of people have little or no access at all,

followed by social networks with 61.3% of people using daily and 13.5% using several times a week. However, up to 21.4% of people hardly use social networks.

Correlation data show that men have a higher frequency of reading printed newspapers or magazines compared to women.

Regarding age groups, older people use televisions more frequently, especially among those aged 31-40 and the ≥ 41 categories compared to the younger group ≤ 30 years old. Print newspapers or magazines and online newspapers are more prevalent in the age group of 31-40 years old than in two younger age groups. There is a significant gap in the popularity of social media usage of the young age group compared to that of the older age group. Specifically, 75.0% of people in the ≤ 30 age category, 70.7% in the 31-40 category use social media daily, while only 34.8% of the ≥ 41 age category does so. In contrast, up to 50.8% of people at the age of ≥ 41 hardly or never use social networks, while only 14.1% and 14.7% of the ≤ 30 and 31-40 age categories do so.

Time frame by ethnic minority people

Television is the most popular channel with the time frames having higher consumption rates, including: in the evening (62.0%); in the early evening (43.6%); at noon (40.9%); in the early morning (38.7%). The time frames in which people interact with social media is slightly different, with 33.1% of people are online at noon; 29.3% in the evening; 28.4% in the late evening; 22.7% in the early morning; and 20.7% in the early evening.

The rate of listening to radio is highest in the early morning with 14.4%. Other time frames also have a higher percentage of listeners including late afternoon; late evening; noon; and in the early evening (ranging from 8.7% to 7.1%).

Despite the low rate of reading print newspapers or magazines, the results show most people do so in the early time frames of the day, especially early morning and morning, the consumption rate for 2 time-frames is 11.3% and 11.8%, respectively.

Gaps are also evident between age groups in terms of timeframes for television viewing, with the 31-40 age category having the highest rate of early morning consumption (51.9%). In the early evening, the older people are more likely to watch television, which the consumption rate for the 3 age groups in ascending order is: ≤ 30 years old (53.5%); 31-40 years old (63.8%); ≥ 41 years old (68.1%).

In the 5 time-frames with the highest percentage of people online, the youngest age group also has a much higher access rate than the older age group, especially the oldest group.

Consumption time by ethnic minority people

The average time per day spent on television viewing by ethnic minorities

accounted for the highest proportion (approximately 83 minutes), followed by using social media use (approximately 68 minutes). Time spent on other means of media are much lower, with approximately 29 minutes for reading online newspapers, approximately 26 minutes for listening to radio and 17 minutes for reading printed newspapers, with an average time of approximately 17 minutes/day.

The most obvious difference in using social networks is that the younger the age category is, the more time spent on average for social media usage. Specifically, while the oldest age group (≥ 40 years old) has an average usage time of approximately 39 minutes/day, the youngest at the age of ≤ 30 has the highest average usage time with more than 94 minutes/day. Average television viewing time follows a similar trend, with the ≤ 30 age group having an average time of approximately 70 minutes/day while the ≥ 40 category ranking the highest, with 97 minutes/day.

Research question 2: What are the motivations for using mainstream and social media by ethnic minorities?

There were three main reasons which decided the media use by ethnic minorities, including (arranged in order from most chosen to least chosen): easy to read, listen to, or watch (58.2%); informative (43.3%); and easy to understand (41.8%). The rest are other reasons with a lower selection rate (such as being quickly updated, being highly entertaining, being convenient, having attractive audio and visual, eg.)

Meanwhile, the correlation analysis between the three age groups reflects various reasons for media selection. First of all, for media that is “easy to read, listen or watch”, the ≤ 30 years age category has a higher rate of considering this factor than the two older age groups, 69.8% compared to 53.5% of the 31-40 age category and 54.1% for the ≥ 40 age category. With “quick update”, the age group of 31-40 tends to focus on this factor (40.5%), followed by respondents of the ≤ 30 years old group (33.3%), and lastly the ≥ 40 age category with only 18.5% ($P\text{-value} < 0.001$). The two other factors including entertainment and convenience also reveal different perceptions and motives of respondents among different age groups. Accordingly, the younger demographics of ≤ 30 years old are more likely to prioritise entertainment than the two older age groups, with the selection rate at 45.0%. As for convenience, the rate of choosing this factor among younger age groups is twice as high as for the oldest age group, respectively: 30.2%; 33.0%; 15.6%.

The group that finished high school is most likely to select means of media that are easy to read, listen to, or watch (70.2%), followed by people who graduated from high school (64.5%). Meanwhile, for the reason of informative media, the

college group has the highest selection rate (56.2%) for media being informative, while the group that hasn't attended school or has attended primary school has the lowest (31.2%). The difference is more obvious and significant in choosing media for "quick update" - the higher the educational level, the higher the selection rate for this factor. For the "convenience" of use, respondents who have a higher level of education focus on this more than those who have a lower level of education.

Research question 3: What topics do ethnic minorities prefer to access on mainstream media and social media

Most popular topics for ethnic minority people

Since the information needs of people differ, the interest in different contents is also very diverse covering many aspects of political, cultural and social life. On social media platforms, information about domestic politics has the highest percentage of interest to respondents (54.4%), followed by social issues (45.3%) and security and defense (43.3%). Other 7 popular news topics including local news, international politics, culture and arts, health, sport, environment, weather, agriculture and law.

Regarding the domestic political news, men have a greater rate of access (58.8%) than women (47.3 %) (P-value 0.05). Similarly, men obtain foreign political material at a higher rate (38.4%) than women (23.6%) (P-value 0.005). Men also have more access to sports news (37.0%) than women (24.2%). Women, on the other hand, consume news on culture and art at a far greater rate (44.8%) than men (26.1%) percent.

Among age groups, the 31-40 age group has much higher access to domestic political news than the other two age groups, at 65.9%. The trend is similar for news on security and defense and local news and international politics, the 31-40 age group has the highest access rate with 54.1% and 44.3% respectively in comparison with the other groups. In contrast, cultural and arts, sports and environment, weather, and agriculture topics received higher attention from the ≤ 30 years old group, which is higher than the other two age groups (51.9%, 40.3% and 41.1%, respectively).

Analysing the correlation between 5 educational levels from lowest to highest (Did not go to school or Primary school, Secondary School, High school, Intermediate or College, University and higher) also reveals the difference in topics of interest. The difference is apparent regarding domestic politics. The higher the level of education, the higher the selection rate (28.6%; 40.3%; 50.4%; 71.9%; 76.5%, respectively). This correlation is also found in access to international political news with the selection rate increasing by education level.

7. Discussion

A survey with 450 responses and 20 in-depth interviews was conducted to explore the most used forms of mainstream and social media, the frequency of use, the motivations for usage, and the preferences of media content. Some major discussion about the key findings are discussed as follows:

Firstly, the survey results on the top popular news publications and social media platforms in ethnic minority areas show that the print newspapers with the highest readership rate are Nhan Dan - The People newspaper, followed by two provincial newspapers, the Bac Lieu and Kien Giang newspaper. The most-watched channel is VTV1, followed by VTV3. The most popular provincial TV channels are Vinh Long, Soc Trang, Kien Giang and Bac Lieu. VOV (Voice of Vietnam) and FM channels are popular radio channels. The Bao Moi (New newspaper) is mentioned the most among online newspapers and news sites, followed by Dan Tri, VnExpress, Vietnamnet, Kenh14, and others. As for social networks, Facebook is overwhelmingly mentioned at a very high rate, overwhelmingly compared to other social networks, followed by Zalo.

The Nhan Dan newspaper, an official newspaper of the Communist Party of Vietnam, is also an important newspaper for ethnic minorities. This could partly result from the fact that the Vietnamese Party and Government have made remarkable efforts to improve the literacy and the media access conditions of ethnic minority people. Moreover, they also have policies to urge these people to create the habit and increase the time for reading mainstream newspapers and accessing news programs on television and radio. In the periodic meetings held by the Party Cell or local government in the communal house, reading the national mainstream newspapers is considered as an official activity. (Interviews with journalists from the Nhan Dan newspaper and Lao Dong newspaper).

While The Nhan Dan newspaper's Newsroom Headquarters is located in the North, Vinh Long, Soc Trang, Bac Lieu and Kien Giang newspapers are located in the Southwest of Vietnam, with The Bac Lieu and Kien Giang belonging to the Mekong River Delta area whose inhabitants include Khmer (Cambodians outside Cambodia), Chams, and Hoa (ethnic Chinese) [34]. These newspapers are provincial newspapers with local news, which are familiar and close to the local people (Interview journalists from the Television and Radio Station and newspaper of Kien Giang Province and that of Can Tho Province).

VTV (Vietnam Television) and VOV (Voice of Vietnam) are also the most popular broadcasting stations since they are national channels with official news programs. Provincial television and radio stations broadcast the news programs of national television and radio channels on their own channels. This enhances the

opportunities for ethnic minority people to watch the VTV and VOV programs.

Regarding the most read online newspapers and sites, beside the online newspapers including Dan Tri, VnExpress, Vietnamnet, such news sites as the Bao Moi and Kenh14 are the most popular ones. According to a report published by Data Reportal [35] and covered by Statista (2022), as of December 2020, Bao moi belongs to the top five most-visited websites based on number of pages per visit in Vietnam, while Vnexpress, Kenh14, Dan tri, Vietnamnet belong to the top twenty. This shows that ethnic minorities are able to access most visited websites based on the number pages per visit in Vietnam. Kenh14 is the popular news site among young readers and the school age audience in Vietnam, therefore, it is also familiar to the younger ethnic minority people.

Secondly, television, social media and online newspapers are the three most frequently daily used forms of media. While the ethnic minorities at older age use televisions more frequently, those at young age use more social media.

Thirdly, generally speaking, ethnic minority people often use media, especially television and social media in the early morning, noon and evening. Mainly older people are interested in watching television in the evening, at noon and in the early morning, because the television stations broadcast the news program at these time frames. Ethnic minorities access mainstream media and social media in the early morning since they have the habit of getting up early to do farming. These living habits could also be affected by geographic conditions in highland or mountainous areas where sunrise and sunset come sooner than that in lowland areas (interview with journalists from the Thai Nguyen newspaper).

Fourthly, the majority of older people watch television and they often go to bed early (Interview journalist from Lai Chau newspaper). The number of people watching television after 9:00 pm fell down from 62% in the evening to only 21.3% in the late evening. Young people go to bed later (Interview with journalist from Lai Chau newspaper) and they still surf the social media, particularly Facebook, in the late evening. There is a minor difference in the percentage of people surfing social media in the evening and late evening.

Fifthly, except for working hours, the time for surfing the social media by ethnic minorities was spread rather evenly throughout the day, with the most active time frames being noon, evening, late evening and then early morning. According to journalists, the content on social media is always available throughout the day with no time constraints and program scheduling as that on television and radio (Interview journalist from the Television and Radio of Vinh Long Province). The convenience in carrying smartphones and the ease of access to digital devices like smartphones have enabled ethnic minority people

to surf social media in different time frames of the day. More and more, people are choosing to bring mobile phones or smartphones when going to the farming fields instead of carrying the radio with them as was the previous daily habit. They can access to radio programs or play music or entertainment programs via their smartphones (Interview with the Thai Nguyen newspaper)

Sixthly, the internet is increasingly available in ethnic minority communities (Interview with journalists from the Communication Centre of Quang Ninh Province) and the majority (57.3%) of ethnic people have smartphones. They purchase inexpensive Chinese smartphones with cheap price (mostly at the border areas) for around 200,000 to 500,000 Vietnamdong. Moreover, the Vietnamese Government and leading Vietnamese telecommunication groups such as Viettel have also had a policy to provide mobile phones and smartphones to ethnic minority people at the border areas or in the mountainous areas (Interview with the Communication Centre of Quang Ninh Province).

Seventhly, ethnic minorities prioritise their daily time for watching television (1 hour 23 minutes) and interacting with social media (1 hour 8 minutes) rather than other media forms such as reading online newspapers (29 minutes), listening to radio (26 minutes) and reading printed newspapers (17 minutes). Average time spent on television, social media and radio by ethnic minorities is more or less half of that of Vietnamese Internet users in early 2021. Accordingly, the Vietnam Digital Report in 2021 published by We Are Social and HootSuite [36] indicated that, as of early 2021, Vietnamese Internet users aged 16 to 64 spent 2 hours 40 minutes for watching television, 2 hours and 21 minutes using social media, 1 hour 57 minutes reading press media (online and physical print), and 41 minutes listening to radio.

Eighthly, the younger people spent more time on average using social media usage than older people while the older people spent more time viewing television than younger people. The older group also spent a slightly higher average time spent listening to the radio than the two younger age groups. In contrast, the two younger groups' average time spent reading print and online newspapers was slightly higher than that of the oldest group.

Ninthly, young people choose to consume media that is easy to read, to listen to, to watch or is highly entertaining and convenient. People at the age of 31 to 40 prefer choosing the media with quick update. It is also significant that the higher education level the ethnic minorities have, the higher motivation for choosing media with quick updates. College groups rather than the group who have not attended school or attended primary school also prefer reading informative media. These results show that people in ethnic minority areas make selective

decisions when using the media. The more educated they are, the more they choose to use media with instant updates and a variety of information.

Tenthly, the three most favourite media topics of ethnic minorities are domestic politics, social issues, security and defense. As mentioned above, the 31-40 age group prefer choosing quick update media. This can be explained by looking at the finding that this group has much higher access to domestic politics, security and defense and local news than the other age groups. The survey shows that one-third of respondents are government officials and public servants. Interviews with journalists show that there is a remarkable number of ethnic minorities becoming the leaders or managers of Party organisations or state agencies particularly in ethnic minority communities of ethnic minority groups (Interview journalist from the Quang Ninh Communication Centre). This may explain why domestic politics is the most favourite topics of the 31-40 age group.

Otherwise, young people from 30 years old and under pay most attention to culture and arts, sports, environment, weather and agriculture topics which they can easily access to on social media (Interview with journalist from Vietnam News Agency).

8. Conclusion and recommendation

The study on the usage of mainstream and social media by ethnic minority people in Vietnam was conducted based on the data of 455 survey responses of ethnic minorities and 20 in-depth interviews with leaders, journalists and reporters from different news organisations. The study draws a comprehensive picture of how ethnic minority people use mainstream and social media by analysing the particular needs, demands and behaviours, the motivations and gratifications that the ethnic minorities linked with certain media forms.

The study shows that more and more ethnic minorities are rather active rather than passive media consumers. This is true when the Use and Gratifications theory shows the importance of looking at what media consumers do with media rather than just what media does to them. Findings show that ethnic minorities have their own demands and choices when deciding to use different forms of media. Based on different age groups, education levels, gender and geographic conditions, there are significant differences between people habitually accessing mainstream media and those interacting with social media. Their frequency of use, time frames, the time duration, motivations and favourite topics vary depending on whether they are younger or older, with lower or higher education, etc.

Regarding the information needs of ethnic minorities, many interviewees believed that there are increasingly high demands for information and media access among them, while others stated that their needs vary depending on the

gender, education level, geographical condition and facilities (Interview with journalist from Vietnam News Agency). Furthermore, while the majority of people accessing to television and social media daily, there is still a high percentage of ethnic minorities barely reading print and online press media or listening to radio. There is even a certain amount of people who seldomly access to any means of media. Therefore, the recommendation for news organisations is to enhance interesting and easy-to-read, viewing or listen contents (Interview with journalists from Television and Radio Station of Phu Tho Province and Tien Phong newspaper). Mainstream media should include more dedicated columns or programs which target and meet the demands of different groups of ethnic minorities. News organisations should add more contents in their own ethnic languages (Interview with journalists from the Tien Phong newspaper). Journalists should improve the competence of media coverage on ethnic minority areas and produce more stories that are suitable, useful and attractive to different ethnic minority groups such as national politics, social issues, security and defense for older people and culture and arts, sports for young people. To help them reduce poverty, more content with economic development guidance should be added to the media outlets.

Regarding the role of media in satisfying their media access demands, mainstream media is the official, verified channel while social media is the channel without information verification. Interviewees expressed the concern about the negative impacts of social media on ethnic minority people because of overwhelming toxic or spam information, however, others believed social media plays a crucial role in engaging with ethnic minority audiences, particularly young people (Interview with journalist from the Television and Radio Station of Yen Bai Province). They also confirmed that mainstream and social media are the channels which help ethnic minorities access to or exchange the information with mainstream civilisation and contribute to eradicating hunger and reducing poverty and backwardness. In line with the trend of media digitalisation, national and local news organisations also should have official fanpages on social media to reach the ethnic minorities. Recommendations of journalists are for building official social media fanpages and channels using ethnic languages such as Khmer to target the ethnic community (Interview with journalist from the Television and Radio Station of Soc Trang Province)/.

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