Press Agencies Using TikTok as a Means to Approach the Public

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Abstract: *Communication on social media is a main way for the public to receive information and respond to the press. Among social media networks, TikTok is a prominent platform that has a growing number of users from a variety of backgrounds and ages, but especially people of Gen Z (those born between 1997 and 2012 when the Internet had already developed). In response to new challenges press agencies consider Tiktok an important counterpart to assist them in broadcasting, publishing and otherwise approaching the public. This confirms the increasingly significant role of the Vietnamese revolutionary press in the cause of renewal, construction, and defense of the Fatherland.*

Keywords: *TikTok, social media, the new public, approach.*

1. TikTok: A new social media network for a new public generation

Unlike YouTube, TikTok only allows users to publish short videos with funny and attractive effects. Thanks to this approach, TikTok videos can go viral very quickly on the Internet and are widely shared on other social media, especially Facebook. TikTok has always focused on developing a comprehensive environment to encourage people to interact politely on their platform.

After three years of operation (2017 - 2020), TikTok has rapidly become one of the most popular applications among Millenials and Zoomers (those born between 1981 and 2005).[(1)] These are the active and young public groups who want to broaden their network, gain fame, confirm themselves and define their identity. Today TikTok is present in more than 150 countries using 75 different languages all over the world.

Communication on social media has become the main way the public receives and responds to news in the press. Platforms such as Facebook, Zalo, and Instagram have gradually become a source to provide the public with information about different aspects of social life. With some basic searches, the public can access the issues that concern them[(2)]. According to a survey conducted by Jeffrey Gottfried and Elisa Shearer, up to 63% of the public is using social media to get news from the press. A similar finding shows that 51% of the public said that they use social media to search for, read and share news[(3)].

In recent years, press agencies have also made considerable adjustments to adapt to the digital era. Journalists use social media more frequently to update

information and adjust their products on all platforms: taking photos using Instagram[4]; using Snapchat to enhance their work efficiency and manage the reporter team effectively; developing internal messaging tactics; communicating within the agency safely with Zalo; asking Twitter to provide press agencies with information and following the public's responses and opinions during events, etc.[5]

The survey findings of Research Company Ypulse in 2020 showed that 26% of Gen Y (born between 1981 and 1996) received information through TikTok. This figure went up to 51% with Gen Z[6]. TikTok is a social media site that attracts young generations, especially Gen Z (those born in the Internet era between 1997 and 2012). TikTok has also gained the attention of the press as a new platform. Big press agencies around the world are taking advantage of this social platform, such as Vogue Italia – an Italian fashion magazine (account @ vogueitalia), MSNBC – a USA cable TV channel (account @msnbc), The Dallas Morning News – a daily newspaper in the Dallas-Fort Worth area of Texas (account @dallasmorningnews), etc.

TikTok uses artificial intelligence (AI) to note users' hobbies and to suggest and individualize types of videos suitable to each user. This increases people's curiosity about the application. Tracking users is an indispensable factor that makes the experience of the product more interesting. TikTok's great success is that it's use of AI has a positive approach to controlling what people watch on the platform, which is an underlying strength of social media. In the future, this will be an opportunity for press agencies to understand the public's needs so that they can provide appropriate information.

TikTok also has an effect on the public's behavioral decisions, especially the young public group of Gen Z, toward the products of press agencies because this platform mainly focuses on short-form video content which is easier to use and more likely to go viral than other social media. According to the latest report of We Are Social, published in October 2021, the number of Tiktok users above age 18 in Vietnam is 39.65 million which shows an increase of 5.4 million people in a short time. The figure of 39.65 million users ranks Vietnam in sixth place globally in the number of TikTok users after the United States, Indonesia, Brazil, Russia, and Mexico [7]. The multiplying growth of this platform poses a challenge to press agencies. This is, if they want to survive and develop, they cannot keep their traditional approach and stand outside the trend. Instead, they have to change their mindset and take appropriate actions to respond to the development of the public orientation.

Recently, press agencies have created accounts on TikTok and updated their news products in the form of one-minute videos to approach the public, interact with them, distribute news, respond to them directly and explore new sources of content. One issue that press agencies have to take into consideration is that they should highly value TikTok, continue to maintain and develop their use of it

as a communication channel, communicate with the public effectively, and have strategic plans for using TikTok in the future.

2. The reality of press agencies using TikTok to approach the public

The Vietnamese revolutionary press is facing both opportunities and challenges. Social media has significantly affected the way the public responds to information as well as changed the working methods of journalists and press agencies both positively and negatively. In response to the demands of the digital era, to survive and develop, the press agencies around the world in general and in Vietnam in particular have to change dramatically. World-renowned press agencies such as The Washington Post, NBC News, USA Today, ESPN, CBS Sports, The Dallas Morning News, BBC, Kyra TV, Tagesschau, and 20 Minutes have already appeared on TikTok. In Vietnam, VTV24, Vietnam Plus of VietNam News Agency, Thanh Nien Newspaper, and dozens of other press agencies have explored TikTok since 2020. Thanh Nien Newspaper with more than 1 million followers and VTV24 with more than 4 million followers are the agencies that have succeeded in using TikTok, in terms of both advertisement profit and information content.

TikTok has the potential of helping press agencies to approach the segment of the public who less frequently access other traditional mass media such as newspapers, television, or radio. On TikTok, the distance between the press agency and the public is just through some "touches" or "clicks." Users can simply interact with the press products by using "like," "save videos into favorites," "comment" and "share" buttons which are vertically arranged on the right of the device screen. Especially, to accurately identify the public's hobbies and tastes, TikTok has used AI to create the "For You" feature which includes personalized and optimized content for each public group. Specifically, if the users like, comment or share videos related to political news, they will see more videos of this content on their newsfeed. To cope with that reality, press agencies have to be aware of the changes in the way the readers get the news and the way the news should be broadcast in the novel media ecosystem.

Currently, several press agencies which have pioneered in exploring TikTok and have a high interaction rate are The Washington Post with more than 1.4 million followers and ESPN sports channel with more than 24 million followers. For example, one of ESPN's products named "How high can Jadon jump?" had a record number of interactions with 9,372 likes, 5,026 comments, and 13,000 shares[8].

Personalization allows TikTok accounts of press agencies to understand the public's favorite content over time, hence they can create their strategic direction as social media is increasingly developing. For example, the TikTok account of NBC, an American television broadcast network, which provides a variety of news and updates on the latest news about social life, has attracted a great deal of the public's attention. They can express their own opinions and respond to opposing viewpoints through direct comments under each video. Recently, the video named "NYU Commencement (Taylor's Version)" has attracted 360,600 likes and

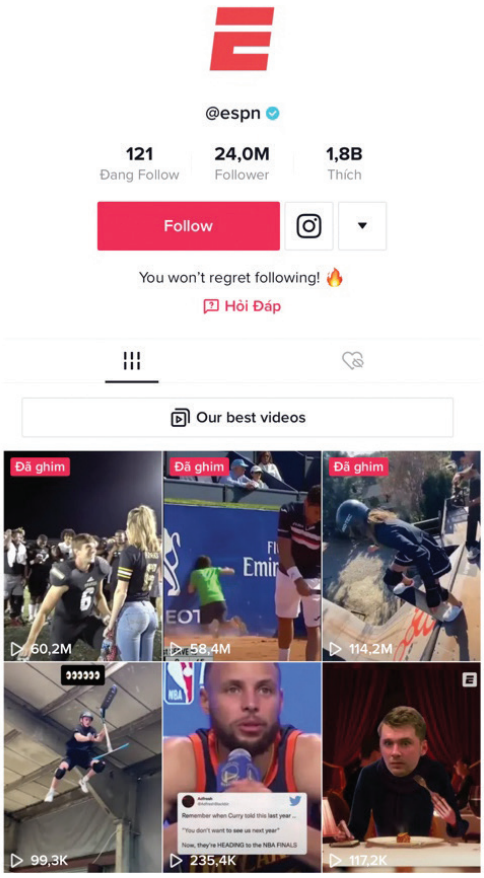


Figure 1: The TikTok account of @ESPN Sports Channel with 24 million followers[9].

1,323 comments from the public worldwide[10]. Another example is The Washington Post which posted its first video on TikTok in May 2021. By December 2021, its videos have more than 2.7 million viewers with an interaction index of 1,443 comments and 521,000 likes[11]. It can be seen that the increase in the interaction rate can motivate the development of press agencies.

For a news product, when the public comments about it and shares it on TikTok, it can go viral and reach millions of people within 24 hours[12].

Exploring TikTok not only helps press agencies develop a new platform to broadcast their content but also makes it their secondary channel to reach the public who are social media users as well. The public is both the object of services and news consumers, but they can also be distributors and advertisers for the press. In addition, journalists can learn useful things such as examining the issue from a new perspective through discussions in the comments or by having more topics of content through information shared by the users via the "tag" feature on TikTok.

TikTok has impressed the public by providing a new feature known as "Duet" of responding to the products of press agencies. Duet on TikTok is a way the public can combine the content of their video and others' videos to create one single video which includes two different contents. This interesting feature was favored and widely used by the public thanks to its high rate of connectivity which helps them express their personal attitudes and opinions towards the products of press agencies.

The utmost objective of the press is to serve the purpose of mass communication and to approach the public of all ages and social classes on all its platforms. The more platforms are explored, the more widely the news can be spread to the users. TikTok is the social media of younger generations, and also a channel for the press to interact with them. Young people can become "loyal readers" of press agencies in the future.

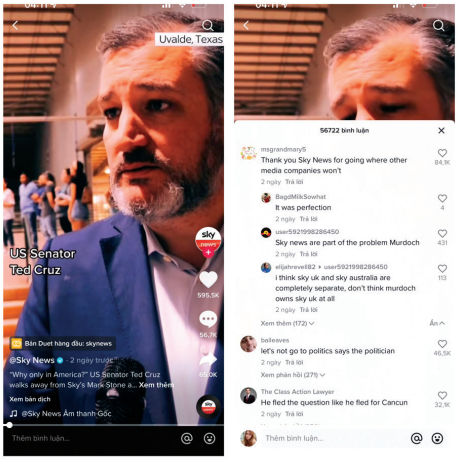


Figure 2: The public's comments under the videos of Sky News on TikTok[13]



Figure 3: The public using Duet to express their emotions while watching the news from Fox News (Source: @Eric)

However, the TikTok accounts of several press agencies in Vietnam still have some limitations; for example, their videos often last more than two minutes which is too long in comparison with the current trend of creating short videos (no longer than 60 seconds). In addition, some technical requirements related to the video frame or techniques to create "first-see" impressions are not being paid adequate attention. Similarly, creating content based on popular trends, one of the "specialties" of TikTok, is not widely applied. Hence, there are some suggested solutions which can help to develop the young public group in the upcoming time.

3. Some suggested solutions to attract the public's attention toward the press on TikTok

First, it is specifically necessary to analyze the young public group on TikTok.

Analysis of public groups can be based on age, career, hobbies, psychology, and needs so that groups of strategies can be built, and suitable solutions can be offered to different user groups. Only in this way can the information be successfully transmitted to the audience. To succeed in spreading a great amount of information in a short time on TikTok and helping the young reader group remember it for a long time while understanding and sharing the messages, journalists are required to understand and imitate the voices exactly, using specific TikTok language to gain trust as well as establish credibility with each public group.

Second, it is important for the press to have a specialized department to develop products on digital platforms.

The development of new means of communication entails the emergence of new public generations, which requires journalists to constantly change their working methods in a more specialized, modern and intelligent way. This specialized department will be in charge of researching the markets and the new public generation thoroughly and then cooperating with the public to produce a variety of products, mainly videos, and update them on social media including TikTok. This channel will help to increase the number of users from the new public, expand the markets and the share of advertisement, and increase the reputation of press agencies in Vietnam. This is the most significant strategy and measure which can take advantage of mass media in the digital era.

Third, it is essential to maximize resources.

The plans to build strategies and solutions should be widely announced to the entire staff at the agencies. Human resource staff in relevant departments should collaborate. All involved staff including journalists, reporters, managers, customers, experts, and their counterparts should be encouraged to generate and share creative ideas. Competitors' advertising ideas should also be considered. Through this, reporters will have many opportunities to become more creative, enhance their skills, update to the latest technology, and update their products. These challenges and opportunities will lead to the appearance of many creative and unconventional solutions which can take good advantage of technology to innovate their operational models and methods of conveying information. Especially, in the digital era, it is important to create a "collective imprint" by encouraging team ideas and teamwork instead of monotonous individual work as previously.

Fourth, it is important to evoke the emotions of the public on TikTok.

Press agencies should encourage the public to share their opinions about the press products, evoking their emotions, national pride, and national cultural symbols. The use of emotional signs helps to attract the public's attention and lengthen their interaction time with the products of press agencies. Nowadays, the news is not published in traditional ways using radio or newspaper agents, but via social media. Therefore, emotion becomes the most important factor which attracts the public to share the press products[14].

Fifth, it is crucial to optimize the video duration and ratio to suit the public's experience on TikTok.

While only lasting 15 seconds, short TikTok videos are generating a content-creating revolution around the globe. The current products of press agencies are mainly created by shortening and editing the news programs published online in newspapers or TV programs. This traditional approach leads to a lack of creativity and the stereotype of duration.

Most of the public access TikTok on their devices, so press agencies should take into account the precise horizontal frame size of TikTok videos which is usually

4:3 or 16:9 so that the screen is filled and the public can fully experience the videos on their phone screen.

Sixth, it is advisable to explore the Livestream feature on TikTok.

Livestream or "live broadcast" has always been an interesting experience for many social media users, so media channels often choose it to approach the public. Livestream can be a way for press agencies to increase the approach and interaction index with their public.

In addition, TikTok Live also offers a supporting resource of thousands of effects and labels which are updated weekly. Thanks to that, press agencies can freely live stream and interact with the public most vividly. Furthermore, TikTok Live has the Co-Host feature which allows people to invite a friend to join their Livestream. This feature helps press agencies to attract and interact with the public more easily.

Seventh, it is suggested that creativity contests should be organized.

Press agencies should frequently organize creativity contests which encourage the public to make creative videos on TikTok, and then share and spread their videos on their accounts. For example, Thanh Nien Newspaper has implemented this strategy successfully through the contest "Covid Dance."

Eighth, it is recommended that measures should be taken to quickly prevent toxic and harmful content.

To develop a healthy and safe social media, press agencies need to raise the public's awareness, orient mass communication, implement policies to manage the use of social media, and ensure the legal issues of the host countries.

There should be a mechanism to monitor, detect and request social media to quickly remove videos with malicious content that affects national security and sovereignty, as well as the healthy development of children who make up to 25% of the total number of TikTok users[(15)]. The offenders must be strictly punished under the provisions of the Cybersecurity Law, the Criminal Code, and related decrees against individuals who distribute malicious videos on TikTok. While effective solutions to control social networking platforms have not yet been implemented, users need to be aware of self-protection. Families, especially, should pay attention and supervise their children when they are accessing content on the Internet.

Ninth, press agencies and journalists should constantly strive to meet the new requirements.

Press agencies need to be supported to invest in building infrastructure and technology platforms to manage their online editorial offices; warned early of security risks; and offered timely remedial solutions. The State also needs to develop mechanisms and policies to develop linkage models between the press and digital technology companies, telecommunications carriers, advertising businesses, and cross-border content distribution platforms.

Fewer and fewer viewers want to spend 45 minutes watching news programs on television, so if TV stations split news stories and reports and upload them to digital

platforms, the number of viewers will certainly increase because this approach is more accessible for young users who are regularly active on social networks. Digital platforms will help press agencies interact directly with their audience, understand who their audience is, and accurately measure the effectiveness of their message. However, to do that, nowadays press reporters should not only have expertise and foreign language proficiency but also technological skills to optimize digital tools. More importantly than ever, press agencies and journalists need to make constant efforts to update their knowledge of journalism in the Industrial Revolution 4.0, be ready to take on challenges, and go in company with trends to grow and develop, while still keeping the fire of the revolutionary press alive./.

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