

Section 2. Political science

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THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN VIETNAM'S ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN NOWADAYS

Abstract. This study examines the impact of mass media in Vietnam on anti-corruption activities by using descriptive statistical methods, analytical methods, research and investigation, and surveys. The author then discusses some theoretical and practical issues about the role of the mass media in anti-corruption activities in Vietnam nowadays, laying the foundation for proposing some solutions to improve the effectiveness of the mass media in controlling the power enforcement of the State in general, and anti-corruption in particular.

Keywords: Mass media; anti-corruption; supervise; control; Vietnam.

1. Some theoretical issues on mass media in anti-corruption

1.1. Overview of mass media

“Mass media is understood as a system of media directed to influence a large number of social publics (people in different regions, country and region, or the international community) to inform, share, attract and gather, educate, persuade, and organize a large number of people to participate in solving economic-social-cultural problems that have been posed, [12]” wrote author Nguyen Van Dung. Based on the technical characteristics and communication methods, people divide mass media into different types: Books; newspapers; films; broadcasting; TV; advertisements; Internet; Tapes, video and audio discs [15, 12]. Since the press plays a crucial and fundamental role in mass media, it is frequently possible to use the press to talk about the media in a narrow sense. Vice versa, in order to talk about the media, we must first discuss the press. In the scope of this article, the author only mentions mass media in the

narrow sense which includes: Newspapers; broadcasting; TV.

1.2. Identify corrupt behaviors according to Vietnamese Law

Corruption means an officeholder's abuse of his/her official capacity for personal gain. According to Article 2 of the Anti-Corruption Law in Vietnam nowadays, corrupt acts include:

First, acts of corruption committed by office holders in state authorities, organizations and units include: Embezzlement; Taking bribes; Abuse of one's position or power for illegal appropriation of assets; Abuse of official capacity during the performance of tasks or official duties for personal gain; Acting beyond authority in the performance of one's duties for personal gain; Harassment for personal gain...

Second, acts of corruption committed by officeholders in non-state enterprises, organizations include: Embezzlement; Taking bribes; Bribing or brokering bribery to settle the affairs of the enterprise or organization for personal gain.

1.3. Mass media – an effective tool in anti-corruption nowadays.

The mass media fulfills its role in anti-corruption arising from the performance of its basic functions.

First is the information function. The information function is the most fundamental function of the media and it is thanks to this function that many corruption cases are revealed to the public. The media will accurately and objectively inform the public about past and current events, as well as provide information obtained during investigations of the individuals and public authorities.

Second, the mass media performs the function of supervising and social criticizing. The media's supervision function is critical in a democratic society where citizens must be aware of what their government is doing, Curran, J 2007 emphasizes "*The basic democratic function of the media is to act as a watchdog to check on the State*" [3]. The media acts as a watchdog, observing state activities and exposing political leaders' abuses and incompetence in order to caution them or warn the public of the need to replace them in the upcoming elections. Moreover, the mass media serves as a social critic, promoting and enhancing the government's accountability on issues of public concern and debate, thereby preventing corruption and acting beyond authority.

Third, the mass media becomes a forum for public discussion. In modern society, the press institution can create a "Public Sphere". The public sphere enables the publication of official reports on corruption and acts beyond authority, as well as voices expressing political views from political staff, interest groups, and the general public; it also enables people's will to reach the government quickly, clearly, and effectively.

Fourth, the mass media orients public opinion and reports public opinion. The media plays a role in orienting public opinion: "*The press may not always be successful at telling people what to think, but the press is extremely successful at telling people what to think about*" [1, 120] it has both the role of reporting and disseminating public opinion. Due to public pres-

sure, state agencies are being forced to investigate and handle corruption cases more quickly. In Western countries, especially the United States, mass media is considered the "*fourth power*", after the legislative, executive and judicial powers. And in China, up to 80% of corruption cases discovered are reported by the people and the press. The role of the people and the media in anti-corruption efforts are also highly valued and effectively promoted in Singapore, as Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew stated: "*The greatest strength is public opinion, which rebukes and condemns the corrupt*" [2].

2. The practice of mass media participation in anti-corruption in Vietnam nowadays

Currently, approximately 40,000 people working in the journalism field, with approximately 17,000 working in the broadcasting sector. 17,161 people have been granted press cards for the period 2021–2025. 95.9% of journalists have a university or postgraduate degree [6]. Journalists are pioneers in the prevention and fight against corruption through their sharp-witted articles.

First, mass media must inform and propagate the Party's guidelines, lines, and policies, the State's anti-corruption laws, and the activities of the Central Steering Committee on anti-corruption. The mass media has spent a lot of time and columns analyzing, evaluating, and propagating the Party's guidelines, lines, and policies; State anti-corruption laws, such as: New points in the Document of the 12th and 13th Party Congresses on anti-corruption; Directive No. 27-CT/TW, dated January 10th, 2019 of the Politburo on strengthening the leadership of the Party in the protection of whistle-blowers and people who fighting against corruption and negatives acts... Nhan Dan, Tuoi Tre, and Thanh Nien newspapers have always had sharp journalistic works on anti-corruption; they also have many separate articles on their electronic interfaces, written by correspondents in 63 provinces and cities that implement content on anti-corruption, negativity, and wastefulness.

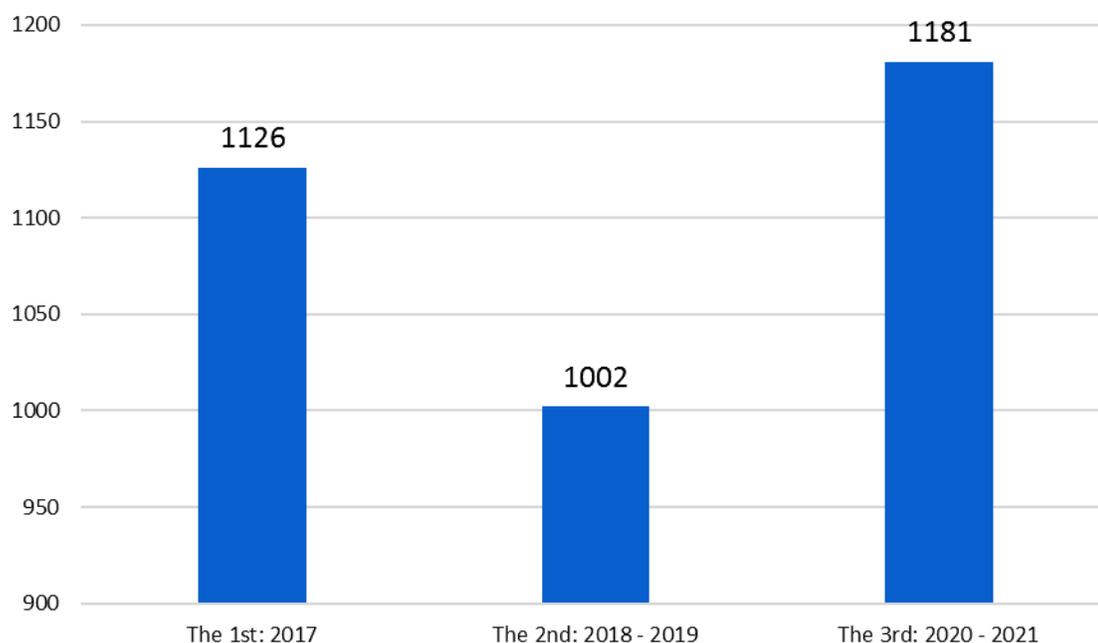


Figure 1. The number of journalistic works in the “Journalism in the Fight against Corruption and Waste”

Vietnam News Agency organizes many columns such as “*Internal Affairs*”, “*New documents and policies*”, “*Law*”, “*Anti-Corruption*” ... ; Vietnam Television has thousands of news, images and propaganda reports on news bulletins and on the system of categories, which are broadcast on the “golden hour” frame, such as “*Recognition of recession*”, “*Complete improving institutions on anti-corruption*”, “*Controlling power*”, “*No forbidden zones*” ... In particular, in recent years, various genres of films about political commentary and anti-corruption have also been produced such as: “*The Provincial Party Secretary*”; “*The Provincial Chairman*”, “*Cheating Justice*”, “*Life or Death*”. The Voice of Vietnam has published a number of articles: “*The Party’s anti-corruption campaign and the People’s trust*”; “*Hot above cold below*”; “*Fire up for the anti-corruption burning furnace*”... Furthermore, media agencies have produced many programs and reports reflecting the law construction and improvement, especially Law on Anti-corruption, Criminal Code, Law on Denunciations, Law on Thrift Practice and Anti-wastefulness, Law on Access to Information, Law on Cybersecurity... In the 5 years from 2016 to 2021, Nhan Dan Newspaper

has published more than 500 news, articles, photos related to anti-corruption and negative work; Vietnam News Agency has produced and broadcasted over 20.000 news articles, more than 5.000 photos; The Voice of Vietnam has conducted nearly 2.000 special programs, more than 8.000 news, articles and reportage; Vietnam Television has thousands of propaganda news, images and reports.

In addition, the mass media also provided full and comprehensive information on the activities of the Central Steering Committee for Anti-Corruption in inspecting and supervising the inspection of cases; initiating, investigating, prosecuting, and trialing serious and complicated corruption, economic cases that drew public attention. The most recent cases are related to Viet A Technologies Joint Stock Company, the case occurred at the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the cases occurred at FLC Group, Tan Hoang Minh Group and Advanced International Joint Stock Company. The mass media not only contributes to anti-corruption and negativity through its products, but it also plays an important role in promoting, forming, and developing people’s awareness of

anti-corruption and negativity. People increasingly put their beliefs in the Party and State's "non-stop" anti-corruption determination.

Second, the mass media detects corruption and negative cases.

By receiving people's reflections and denunciations through the "readers" column; letters from readers; or professional investigation, the media has verified to find authentic documents and evidence about the corruption cases to transfer to these the public and authorities. More than 70% of negative and corrupt cases were discovered by the press, such as the case of "million-dollar gambler" Bui Tien Dung and the big negative at PMU18; project on computerization of administrative activities (Project 112); insurance fraud occurred at Petrolimex Insurance Joint Stock Company (PJICO); Bai Chay bridge construction project; Vinashin case; Duong Chi Dung, Pham Cong Danh cases... or prominently, two corruption cases of Trinh Xuan Thanh and Phan Van Anh Vu:

About Trinh Xuan Thanh's case: When pictures of a Lexus 570 worth 5.7 billion with Trinh Xuan Thanh's blue-colored plate number running on Can Tho streets were posted all over social media, then immediately a series of articles on Vietnamnet, Vnexpress, Tuoi Tre online... all used the content of the Vice President's blue-colored plate as the title appeared on May 31st, 2016. Especially, on June 3rd, 2016, *Thanh Nien newspaper* published an article "Private car with blue-colored plate and "legacy" of Hau Giang Vice President". This article not only provides information about a vehicle with an illegal blue-colored plate but also presents unusual developments related to the working process. This "legacy" includes: *Firstly*, while Trinh Xuan Thanh was Chairman of the Board of Directors, Vietnam Oil and Gas Construction Joint Stock Corporation (PVC) lost more than 3,200 billion VND; *Secondly*, while PVC was in a serious loss and was on the verge of losing its capital, Mr. Thanh suddenly left the leadership position and was continuously appointed and moved to other important positions. In May 2015, Mr. Thanh

was rotated as Vice Chairman of the Hau Giang Provincial People's Committee for the 2011–2016 term.

Based on media feedback, the Office of the Party Central Committee issued Documentary No. 1200-CV/VPTW on June 9th, 2016, informing agencies of General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong's direction to urgently examine, consider, and conclude the contents mentioned in the *Thanh Nien Newspaper*. On September 6th-8th, 2016, at the 6th meeting of the Central Inspection Commission, the Central Inspection Commission requested the Secretariat to expel Mr. Trinh Xuan Thanh from the Party. On September 16th, 2016, the Investigation Police Agency charged Mr. Trinh Xuan Thanh with intentionally violating the State's economic management regulations, resulting in serious consequences according to Article 165 of the Penal Code.

About Phan Van Anh Tu's corruption case: This is considered a major corruption case, causing significant damage to the State. The press investigated the violations done by Phan Van Anh Vu (Vu Aluminum) during the implementation of the Da Phuoc international urban area project led by Mr. Vu's Sunrise Bay Co. Ltd. A series of eight articles by journalist Duong Hang Nga published in the *Journal of Transport and Communications (GTVT)* from April 8th, 2017 to May 14th, 2017 provide the beginning for exposing violations in the Da Phuoc urban area. These articles include: Part 1. *Who is sponsoring the Da Phuoc international urban area project so that it can "freely" violate?* reflects Danang's public opinion on the illegal exploitation and utilization of minerals in the urban area (April 8, 2017). Part 2. *Violations in Da Phuoc urban area: "Boss" Phan Van Anh Vu thinks the Law... is as small as a cooking pot lid?!* (April 11th, 2017) reflects that the urban area has not yet undertaken an environmental impact assessment but is still under construction; additionally, even though the project has been suspended, sales transactions are still taking place. Part 3. *"Violations in Da Phuoc urban area: Illegal leveling and dubious transfer of project"* (April 17th, 2017). Part 4. *"Da Phuoc Da Nang*

urban area project (*The Sunrise Bay*) “passes” the Prime Minister? (April 23rd, 2017) The Sunrise Bay Co. Ltd has not reported to the Prime Minister to cancel the golf course planning of the project “Da Phuoc golf course urban complex. Part 5. “*Da Phuoc Da Nang urban area project: Disregarding the law on national defense and security?*” (April 27th, 2017) analysis of a series of violations of the law on defense – security. Part 6. “*The press simultaneously “exploited” the Da Phuoc urban area project in Da Nang*” (May 4th, 2017) raised concerns about having a “back” force to “pave the way” with a series of urban area violations. Part 8. “*Potential dangers of traffic accidents in Da Phuoc urban area: “Custom rules the law?”*” (May 14th, 2017).

Understanding the information reflected through the mass media, on April 10th, 2017, Permanent Deputy Prime Minister Truong Hoa Binh requested the Ministry of Public Security to urgently intervene to investigate, verify and clarify the contents of the above-mentioned Journal of Transport and Communications (GTVT). After the investigation process, the Investigation Police Agency of the Ministry of Public Security announced the decision to prosecute Mr. Phan Van Anh Vu for abuse of position and power while on duty on February 7th, 2018. On January 13th, 2020, the first-instance trial panel of the Hanoi People’s Court issued a judgment for defendant Phan Van Anh Vu with a total sentence of 25 years in prison for the crimes of “*violating the regulation of management and usage of State property, causing loss and waste*” and “*violating regulations of land management*”.

Third, propagate and praise collectives and individuals with outstanding achievements in anti-corruption; criticize and condemn acts that use anti-corruption to discredit organizations and individuals

Apart from reflecting on and providing information about the results of anti-corruption efforts, this is also considered a topic of interest and implementation by media agencies. For example, the articles “Lessons set an example”, “Protection of people fighting against corruption and negativity” (*Nhan*

Dan Newspaper); article “*Revealing 2,745 fake wounded soldiers records, two old farmers in Bac Ninh have not been rewarded yet*” (*Vietnam News Agency*); the documentary film “*Mr. Luc highway*”, “*An old man who spent 30 years to fight against corruption*” (*Vietnam Television Station*) ...; Online newspaper VOV. VN published an article “*Anti-corruption, a Ward Party Committee Secretary has been dismissed*”. The agencies also propagated the example of former Major Trinh Van Khoa who denounced the “witchcraft” case of a drug case document at the Police Security of Do Son District, Hai Phong City; etc...

Besides these outstanding results, the activities of the mass media in anti-corruption also have some limitations such as:

First, the mass media has not fully and promptly reflected the phenomena and negative corruption and waste cases that local residents have discovered and provided information about, such as the planning and compensation case in Thu Thiem; The major case of “*Viet A test kit*” Furthermore, while there are many articles about land, construction, traffic, and projects, some other fields, such as culture, physical training, and sports, appear to be lacking in the process of supervision and criticism of the mass media.

Second, mass media sometimes performs the anti-corruption progress inaccurately, some journalists “abuse the name” of social criticism to reflect a lack of fairness, a lack of scientific basis, one-sided analysis, and orienting public opinion towards personal gains, making it difficult for law enforcement agencies. At the same time, the media can also be damaging to the rights and interests of individuals, agencies, and organizations.

Third, many cases were discovered and raised by the media but were not pursued by the proper authorities, affecting the trust of whistle-blowers and those providing information to the media.

3. Some solutions to promote the effectiveness of mass media in anti-corruption in Vietnam today

First, build a team of journalists, journalists with pure enthusiasm, vision and talent. The capacity and professional responsibility of reporters/journalists is the

determining factor in the media's effectiveness in anti-corruption efforts. As a result, it is necessary to design training programs associated with professional practical skills, equipping general knowledge about politics, economy, and society, and building a comprehensive ethical awareness system of journalists in the process of training journalism students at universities. Furthermore, it is necessary to focus on retraining existing journalistic resources in the direction of catching up with the trend of the new media context, improving journalistic quality and ethics in the workplace.

Second, strengthen the legal mechanism to protect reporters and mass media agencies that report on corruption. The Project report "Research and communication of hindering behaviors to journalism operations" by the Institute for Research on Development Communication (RED Communication), shows that hindering behaviors are very diverse, including 12 types of behaviors such as: Avoiding providing information; disturbing; affecting, bribing to threaten, captivating people; assault causing injury; retaliation ... [14], particularly acts of intimidation, terrorism, and retaliation directed not only at reporters but also at their families. Approximately 40 cases of reporters were hindered during work every year. These hindering behaviors make journalists/reporters afraid of pursuing and exposing violations to the public. Therefore, a complete legal basis is required to protect journalists and mass media organizations in the fight against corruption and negativity. It is necessary to verify in the law provisions how journalists who participate in anti-corruption and negativity campaigns are protected. Only by this solution can strictly deal with and prevent acts of hindering and assaulting lawfully practicing journalists.

Third, ensure that the right of access to information for press agencies is implemented. Currently, Vietnam's legal basis recognizes the right of press agencies to access information very clearly and fully, as evidenced by the Law on Press, the Law on Access to Information ... However, the implementation of these rights in practice is disrupted by state agencies. In the group

of behaviors that hinder the press, the act of avoiding providing the information is the most common, accounting for 11 to 12%, in 2016 up to 96% of respondents had ever been hindered, much higher than 88% in the 2011 survey, nearly 36% had been hindered 5 times or more [14]. According to the evaluation report on the implementation of the Law on Access to Information (the second time) in Vietnam, the regulation on providing information has not been found, and the focal point providing information lists of nearly 60% of Central state agencies, 80% of provincial Departments of Justice, more than 90% of Provincial People's Committee Offices, and 93% of other state agencies in 8 provinces [4]. As a result, an independent monitoring mechanism in the implementation of the responsibility for accessing information from state agencies is required. Implement severe punishments for individuals and state agencies who violate the Law on Access to Information.

Fourth, it is necessary to strengthen the coordination between mass media organizations and the appropriate authorities in the fight against corruption and negativity. Anti-corruption and negativity agencies must strengthen their coordination with press agencies in order to provide and exchange information on fields, areas, organizations, and individuals displaying signs of corruption and negativity while carrying out their functions and tasks to report, advise, propose, and handle; strengthen coordination in the development of special topics and reports on corruption and negative cases, both to handle strictly and to draw lessons from experience, to overcome loopholes and inadequacies in institutions and laws.

4. Conclusion

It is obvious that the media and press agencies are crucial allies of the people in the fight against corruption. According to the results of the survey "Corruption from the Perspective of the People, Businesses and Cadres, Civil Servant and Public Employees," conducted jointly by the Government Inspectorate and the World Bank in 2012, the mass media revealed that is one of the most active and effective

institutions in detecting and investigating corruption in Vietnam [10]. However, in order to maximize and take advantage of the strengths of the mass media in anti-corruption work, besides having to synchronize

the implementation of the above solutions, Vietnam needs to mobilize the participation of the whole political system and join hands with the mass media to perform this role.

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