

## COMMENTARY

# Communication and journalism education in Vietnam

## Strategies for future development

**Commentary:** Higher education in Vietnam is undergoing profound reforms, marked by several pivotal transformations. These include the enhancement of university autonomy in governance, the elevation of academic quality to meet international standards with rigorous quality assurance mechanisms, the adoption of learner-centered pedagogical approaches, the advancement of high-technology disciplines alongside liberal arts education, and the expansion of international collaboration in both teaching and research. Within this broader educational context, journalism and communication education is positioned for significant growth. A strategic emphasis among Vietnamese universities is placed on digital transformation, multimedia literacy, and interdisciplinary competencies. Concurrently, there is a strong focus on fostering critical thinking, creativity, and autonomous learning, which are essential qualities for media professionals operating in an increasingly dynamic and complex media environment. In parallel, it is imperative that curricula continue to uphold the foundational values of the profession through dedicated coursework in ideology, politics, ethics, and media law. This integrated approach aims to prepare graduates not only to navigate technological advancements but also to uphold journalistic integrity and social responsibility in the digital age.

**Keywords:** communication, curricular, higher education, journalism, Vietnam

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### Introduction

FOR decades, the Communist Party of Vietnam has consistently affirmed the vital role of intellectuals in the country's development. In alignment with this vision, the state has actively supported universities in training high-quality human resources by reforming governance mechanisms, revising policies, and increasing investment in education (Vietnam Communist Party, 2023). More than ever, higher education in Vietnam is entrusted with the mission of supplying a competitive and qualified workforce across all sectors to meet the nation's development goals.

In this context, Vietnam's higher education system has undergone substantial reforms. Key changes include the enhancement of university autonomy, improvements in academic quality aligned with international standards and quality assurance frameworks, the adoption of learner-centred pedagogical approaches, the promotion of high-technology and liberal arts disciplines, and the strengthening of international collaboration in teaching and research. These reforms have contributed to raising the global standing of Vietnamese universities (Tuyet, 2022). Moreover, they have proven effective in cultivating a new generation of learners who are more professional, innovative, and creative. The introduction of the Vietnam National Qualifications Framework in 2016 further emphasised the development of leadership capacity and self-directed learning among students (Vietnam Government, 2016), thereby influencing the teaching and learning strategies employed throughout the higher education sector.

Within this broader reform landscape, journalism and communication education stands at a pivotal juncture, with considerable potential for growth. In Vietnam, journalism occupies a distinctive position, functioning both as a means of public communication and as a strategic ideological tool of the Party and the State. Recognising its significance, government leaders have emphasised continued support for journalism education to produce a workforce capable of upholding the values of professionalism, humanism, and modernisation in the media sector (*Vietnam Communist Party News*, 2023).

Beyond the political mandate, Vietnam's rapidly expanding economy presents another critical driver for the development of journalism and communication education. As one of the most dynamic emerging markets in Southeast and East Asia, Vietnam has experienced dramatic economic transformation. According to the World Bank, since the introduction of the *Đổi Mới* (Renovation) policy in 1986, coupled with favorable global trends, Vietnam has transitioned from one of the world's poorest nations to a middle-income economy within a single generation. Between 2002 and 2022, GDP per capita increased 3.6 times, reaching nearly USD 3,700 (World Bank, 2023). This economic growth has created an urgent and widespread demand for skilled human resources across all sectors—including the media and communication industries.

Despite these opportunities, journalism and communication education in Vietnam continues to face several critical challenges. First, while Vietnam is recognised as a regional leader in digital infrastructure—with fixed broadband speeds ranking 41st globally and 4G mobile broadband coverage reaching 99.8 percent in 2023, surpassing even many high-income countries (Nhân Nguyễn, 2024)—the rapid pace of technological change places increasing demands on journalism education. According to the annual social media trends report by Meltwater and We Are Social, by early 2025 Vietnam recorded 127 million mobile connections (126 percent of the population), 79.8 million internet users

(78.8 percent), and 76.2 million social media users (75.2 percent). These figures underscore the dramatic shift in audience behavior from print and traditional media to digital platforms. This transformation has prompted news organisations to adopt emerging digital technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing, and big data analytics. This evolution requires universities to continuously modernise their curricula and incorporate more technology-intensive training. The challenge lies not only in keeping pace with innovation but also in equipping students with the digital competencies, critical thinking, and adaptability required for contemporary journalism practice.

Second, the financial autonomy of media organisations poses a structural challenge. While the Vietnamese government maintains strict oversight over the state-owned press system, budgetary support is limited to a small number of key outlets responsible for major political messaging. The majority of news organisations are expected to be financially self-sustaining. This pressure has led to heavier workloads for journalists, without proportional increases in compensation. Consequently, the attractiveness of journalism as a career has declined, especially when compared to more lucrative sectors.

Third, there is a significant gap in research capacity in journalism and communication. The field suffers from a shortage of qualified researchers, which hinders its ability to respond to the rapidly changing media landscape. Many graduates in journalism and communication opt for careers in industry rather than academia, resulting in a weak pipeline of future scholars and educators. Although several universities have expressed interest in launching new programmes in media and communication, they are constrained by a lack of faculty and research expertise. Additionally, the research methodologies employed in Vietnamese journalism and communication studies have long been outdated. While recent improvements have emerged through international collaborations and the return of overseas-trained scholars, the pace of reform remains slow. These scholars are beginning to introduce more rigorous and internationally recognised research frameworks, which are essential for aligning Vietnamese journalism education with global standards.

### **Promising areas of breakthroughs**

Information and communications are fields with high recruitment demand in the current period because of their wide application in economic and social activities. Graduates can work at news organisations, creative media businesses, event organisers, public relations firms, and as internal communication executives in companies, or work freelance as vloggers, film producers, screenwriters, designers, webmasters, etc. According to the Vietnam's Education Ministry, multimedia is among the top fields which have a high demand for university-level graduates in the industrial revolution 4.0 (Linh An, 2023). The trend of globalisation

and integration are also creating high demand for media human resources who are able to work for transnational firms.

These market demands have led to the number of young students applying for journalism and communication programmes in universities across the country increasing unceasingly. According to 2021 statistics of the Department of Higher Education, the number of candidates registering for their first choice in the field of journalism and information is more than 20,000, three times of the target number. It took the third rank among the professions most chosen by the candidates (Tâm, 2021). In order to meet the demand of the society, many universities have participated in training human resources for the field of journalism and communications. Before the 2000s, there were only three universities that had journalism education programmes, two in Ha Noi and one in Ho Chi Minh City. Nowadays, there are ten universities that have journalism programmes and more than fifteen universities across the country teaching communication majors including multimedia, communication technology, international communication and public relations, advertising. Public relations and multimedia are the two most popular programmes which attract thousands of students every year.

Besides the increase in quantity of journalism and communication schools, the quality of education is improved. Students graduating from journalism and communications programmes are creative, active and becoming the key workforce for this industry. However, together with the fast changing nature of the technology, new knowledge and skills needed to be updated, for instance virtual reality or the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in communication and content production.

In the research field, there have been a number of studies conducted every year with topics focusing on policy communication, media business, news organisation management in the 4.0 industry revolution, media culture, media audience, etc. There are some specific research areas that could be very promising in the near future, including the rise of AI in journalism and media production and its multi-sided impacts, media consumptions and the media market which is forming strongly in Vietnam, journalism and media content and their effects in covering sustainable development issues as equality, climate change, poverty, education, and the forming and orientation of public opinion.

### **Development strategies**

In response to rapid technological advancements, journalism and communication programmes in Vietnam have undergone significant curricular innovation. A prevailing strategic orientation among universities has been to emphasise digital transformation, the cultivation of multimedia competencies, and the integration of interdisciplinary knowledge. At the same time, programmes are fostering critical thinking, creativity, and autonomous learning among students. These priorities are designed to prepare graduates to adapt to and thrive in an

ever-evolving media landscape. Concurrently, journalism and communication curricula must continue to embed the profession's foundational values through coursework related to political theory, ideological frameworks, professional ethics, and legal regulations.

More concretely, the acceleration of digital transformation and the proliferation of new media platforms necessitate that educational programmes equip students with comprehensive and integrated media skills. In the contemporary digital environment, the ability to work within a single medium is no longer sufficient. Journalists and media professionals must be capable of creating diverse and adaptable content suited for multiple platforms, including traditional outlets, social media, and emerging digital formats. Additionally, students must demonstrate proficiency in information and communication technologies (ICT), including foundational knowledge of artificial intelligence (AI), data analytics, computational thinking, and digital storytelling techniques, in order to effectively engage in contemporary media production and distribution.

An equally critical curricular imperative is the promotion of interdisciplinary learning. Knowledge from fields such as economics, cultural studies, environmental science, and the arts provides essential context for media professionals aiming to produce content that resonates with diverse audiences. In addition to core subjects in journalism, multimedia, and public relations, academic programmes should offer a range of interdisciplinary elective modules to deepen students' understanding of global issues and expand their creative capacities. Moreover, the visual dimensions of media have become increasingly sophisticated in a screen-dominated world. As a result, design, aesthetics, and visual effects are no longer optional skills but central to effective communication. Media practitioners today must not only convey compelling messages but also do so through visually engaging and professionally executed formats.

The Vietnamese government also expects higher education to develop learners who are autonomous, self-regulated, and capable of initiating and managing their own professional projects (Vietnam Government, 2016). In alignment with this directive, journalism and communication curricula should integrate modules on media entrepreneurship, project management, leadership, and collaborative teamwork. Moreover, foreign language proficiency, particularly in English, should be prioritised to enable graduates to operate in international contexts. Beyond technical competence, professionalism remains a critical dimension of media education. Institutions should instill professional work ethics and conduct in students from the outset of their academic journey, thereby preparing them for the high standards of the contemporary media industry.

Alongside curricular reform, many Vietnamese universities have established international cooperation programmes with foreign institutions specialising in communication, advertising, and multimedia. These joint programmes often adopt

a 2+2 or 3+1 model, whereby students complete part of their academic training in Vietnam and the remainder abroad. Such partnerships offer students exposure to international academic environments, while also facilitating curriculum benchmarking and innovation within Vietnamese institutions. These collaborations additionally provide faculty members with opportunities to improve their pedagogical and research capacities, thereby enhancing the overall quality of education.

Parallel to these developments in teaching and learning, Vietnamese universities have begun to invest more seriously in research activities within the field of journalism and communication. In recent years, networks of foreign-trained scholars and local academics have collaborated to bolster research capacity and foster a vibrant academic community. Research groups are increasingly being formed to study the transformation of media ecosystems and to explore the social, political, and economic implications of digital media. Driven by institutional pressures to publish in international journals and improve university rankings, universities are adopting more robust policies to support academic research. As a result, research methodology and theory courses are now being incorporated into undergraduate and graduate curricula, equipping students with contemporary, interdisciplinary research tools. These initiatives are expected to cultivate a more research-oriented culture and generate original contributions to the global body of knowledge in journalism and communication studies.

In summary, the ongoing innovations in curriculum design, international collaboration, and research development reflect a dynamic shift in Vietnam's journalism and communication education landscape. These efforts collectively aim to produce graduates who are not only skilled content creators but also critical thinkers, responsible citizens, and adaptive professionals in a digitally mediated global environment.

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