A Plausible Paradox? The Potential for Media Accountability in Vietnam through Traditional and Innovative Instruments

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Abstract

At face value, it seems implausible for Vietnam’s state-controlled media to operate within the Western paradigm of media accountability. The media’s political constraints, coupled with low-quality offerings in journalism higher education, appear to severely limit its ability to be transparent, self-regulating and fostering high reader participation. Some researchers purport that media accountability and self-regulation simply cannot exist in such tightly-controlled media environments. This research proposal draws on studies across transitioning media environments to ask whether there’s potential for media accountability in Vietnam through traditional and innovative instruments. A survey, focus groups, interviews and document analysis is proposed across Vietnamese media professionals, media researchers and media-related documentation to answer this question. This proposal extends on studies that have taken media accountability and self-regulation instruments outside of a Western context for the first time, but still, such studies are yet to take place in an Asian context and specifically in Vietnam.

Keywords

Vietnam, Asia, media accountability, self-regulation, traditional media accountability instruments, innovative media accountability instruments, media transparency, transitioning media environments
Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction .................................................................................................5

2.0 Object of Study ...............................................................................................8
  2.1 Vietnam’s Economic and Political Contexts ..............................................9
  2.2 Vietnam’s Media Landscape.................................................................11
  2.3 Vietnam’s Media Accountability Instruments .......................................15
  2.4 Vietnamese Media Professionals’ Perceptions of Media Accountability .................................................................15

3.0 State of the Art of the Topic ..........................................................................17
  3.1 Theoretical Framework ...........................................................................19
    3.1.1 Principles of Media Accountability with a focus on Transparency,
          Self Regulation and Reader Participation ........................................21
    3.1.2 Media Accountability Instruments ..................................................24
    3.1.3 The Audience for Media Accountability ........................................29
    3.1.4 The Context for Media Accountability ............................................30
    3.1.5 Media Accountability in a Transitioning or Developing Media
          Landscape ..........................................................................................32
    3.1.6 Media Accountability within the Media Systems Model
          Framework ..........................................................................................33
  3.2 Literature Review .....................................................................................34
    3.2.1 Media Accountability in the Asian Context .....................................35
    3.2.2 Media Accountability in Transitional Media Landscapes ...............38
    3.2.3 Media Accountability in the Vietnamese Context ..........................39
      3.2.3.1 Political Context .......................................................................39
      3.2.3.2 Market Context .........................................................................42
      3.2.3.3 Public Context ..........................................................................43
      3.2.3.4 Professional Context ..................................................................44

4.0 Research Problem, Questions, Objectives and Limitations .......................45
  4.1 Research Problem .....................................................................................45
  4.2 Research Questions ...................................................................................46
  4.3 Research Objectives ..................................................................................47
  4.4 Research Limitations ...............................................................................48

5.0 Methodology .................................................................................................49
5.1 Population Definitions .................................................................51
  5.1.1 Vietnamese Researchers in Media and Communication Disciplines ..............................................................................51
  5.1.2 Media-Related Documentation or Reports published in Vietnam from Government and Non-Government Organisation Sources.51
  5.1.3 Vietnamese Media Professionals ...........................................51
5.2 Sampling Strategies ........................................................................52
  5.2.1 Vietnamese Researchers in Media and Communication Disciplines ..............................................................................52
  5.2.2 Media-Related Documentation and Reports published in Vietnam from Government and Non-Government Organisation Sources.53
  5.2.3 Vietnamese Media Professionals (Semi-Structured Interviews).54
  5.2.4 Vietnamese Media Professionals (Survey) ..............................55
5.3 Data Collection and Analysis ..........................................................56
  5.3.1 Focus Groups with Vietnamese Researchers in Media and Communication Disciplines ..............................................................56
  5.3.2 Analysis of Media-Related Documentation and Reports published in Vietnam from Government and Non-Government Organisation Sources ..............................................................................57
  5.3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews with Vietnamese Media Professionals .................................................................................................57
  5.3.4 Survey of Vietnamese Media Professionals ............................58
5.4 Period of Data Collection ...............................................................59
5.5 Anticipated Ethical Issues ...............................................................59
6.0 Preliminary PhD Dissertation Structure ..........................................60
7.0 References ......................................................................................63
8.0 Research Timeline ........................................................................66
Appendix 1: Preliminary focus group moderator script/questions ...............68
Appendix 2: Preliminary document analysis template ................................69
Appendix 3: Preliminary semi-structured interview guide ........................70
Appendix 4: Preliminary survey ..........................................................71
1.0 Introduction

At face value, it seems implausible for Vietnam’s state-owned media to remain accountable to its audiences. A condemning report in 2013 by media watchdog group Reporters Without Borders paints a picture of a media system bound by the shackles of a one-party political system with no let-up in sight (Reporters Without Borders, 2013). It’s a country that also performs poorly on the watchdog group's online World Press Freedom Ranking, which in 2016 placed Vietnam at 175 out of the 180 countries listed – only higher than China, Syria, Turkmenistan, North Korea and Eritrea (https://rsf.org/en). On paper, Vietnam’s media landscape looks diverse, with 850 media outlets listed in operation across the country in 2015 (Freedom House, 2015). But when you dig a little deeper, a common thread exists across Vietnam’s media landscape. The media remain in state control, either through direct ownership by the Communist Party of Vietnam or through its institutions and army (Freedom House, 2015). This situation conflicts with Vietnam’s ideology of a free media as documented in its constitution (Reporters Without Borders, 2013). It’s also in contrast with Vietnam’s marketisation strategies for economic growth and development. This strategy for economic reform in 1986, known as Doi Moi, called for a loosening of the chains with the press needed as a tool to curb corruption (Cain, 2013). But despite the government’s push to open up the country’s markets, control of the media has remained at its helm.

But how does this impact on media accountability? Previous academic studies highlight the many challenges for state-owned media to employ media accountability, which is “the voluntary or involuntary processes by which the media answer directly or indirectly to the society and those immediately affected for the quality and/or consequences of publication” (McQuail, 2010, p. 185). In fact, some researchers purport that self-regulation, which is one of the key principles of media accountability, simply cannot exist in such tightly-controlled media environments (Fengler, Eberwein, Mazzoleni, Porlezza & Russ-Mohl, 2014). In turn, this implies barriers for the media within these contexts to effectively employ media accountability instruments, which are “any information institution, both offline and online, performed by both media professionals and media users, which intends to monitor, comment on and criticise journalism and seeks to expose and debate
problems of journalism” (Fengler, Eberwein & Leppik-Bork, 2011, p. 20). Classification schemes for media accountability instruments were established over a decade ago, such as the work of widely-recognised academic Bertrand (2000) as well as newer groupings in light of the digital age through the work of Fengler et al. (2011). Some of the instruments in the classification model by Bertrand (2000) include internal mechanisms such as codes of ethics, media ombudspersons and disciplinary committees, as well as external tools including press councils, media observatories, and letters to the editor. The work of Bertrand (2000) is extended by Fengler et al. (2011) with the listing of additional instruments in the digital age, such as online editorial blogs, websites monitoring news content and media critical activities on social media such as Twitter and Facebook. The study by Fengler et al. (2014) will be drawn upon heavily across this research proposal. It was the “first large-scale research project to study the impact of the different media accountability and media self-regulation instruments” (Fengler et al., 2014, p. 280). The research project, which was called Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe (MediaAcT), involved a comparative study beginning in 2010 on media accountability instruments in Europe and beyond (http://www.mediaact.eu/). The four-year European Union funded research project involved studies across 12 countries of Austria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Switzerland, Tunisia and the United Kingdom. It also included representation in Jordan as well as an associated partner in Spain, which was led by Professor Salvador Alsius of the Journalism Research Group at Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF) in Barcelona, Spain.

While the MediaAcT research project stretched studies of media accountability beyond a Western context, Vietnam remains yet to be explored in this area. The MediaAcT research consortium note that media accountability instruments in Africa, Asia and Latin America “have almost never been studied apart from a few descriptive volumes or websites that list which instruments and organisations exist in the field” (Fengler et al., 2011, p. 13). It raises the question as to why has Vietnam been left off the research agenda on this topic? Some conclusions considered in terms of the barriers or challenges that may face this type of research are drawn from academic discourse highlighting the abundance of Western-centric concepts and models in the field of media accountability. Other potential challenges include the difficulty of
conducting research projects in Vietnam due to government restrictions (Kyouraku, 2010), unwillingness by media professionals in the country to be participants in research projects (Cain, 2013) as well as the potential of the research topic to critique the state-controlled media where criticism of state policy is considered an offence (Davis, 2016). The search across literature further revealed Vietnam is yet to be classified in the well-known media systems model by Hallin & Mancini (2004), a framework widely used for comparative research across media and communication studies. However, despite this prevalence of theoretical frameworks that are grounded in media studies in a Western context, some researchers have made headway in attempts to categorise and analyse the media outside of the West using these models. These studies will be drawn upon for this research proposal, particularly research on the state of media professionalisation in China (Zhao, 2012) and Thailand (McCargo, 2012) as well as the effectiveness of media accountability instruments in a media system in transition, with the case of Jordan (Hawatmeh & Pies, 2011).

Given the lack of research on media accountability specific to Vietnam, and particularly an absence of knowledge on the instruments designed to keep the media to account, the research proposed becomes obvious. Therefore, the research problem driving this study can clearly be defined as a lack of knowledge across media and communications research on the potential for media accountability in Vietnam through traditional and innovative instruments. The outcomes of this research will be of value to the knowledge base that currently exists in terms of media accountability instruments in countries with developing and transitional media systems outside of the West. In turn, this research proposal has identified four elements as its object of study:

1. Vietnam’s economic and political contexts
2. Vietnam’s media landscape
3. Vietnam’s media accountability instruments
4. Vietnamese media professionals’ perceptions of media accountability.

The methodology proposed will target populations of Vietnamese researchers in media and communication disciplines; media-related documentation and reports published in Vietnam from government and non-government organisation sources;
and Vietnamese media professionals, which include journalists and editors. The research instruments proposed include focus groups, document analysis, semi-structured interviews and a survey. The period of data collection has been designed to capture a chronological overview of the potential for media accountability instruments following Vietnam’s economic transition in 1986 through to where it stands in practice today. The proposed study will be completed in the three-year time frame allocated and an overview of the PhD schedule is included as part of this proposal in section 8.0 Research Timeline.

Despite the familiarity with the Vietnamese media landscape, across both professional and academic perspectives, some of the limitations of conducting research in Vietnam will be addressed by taking into account previous experience working as Chief Editor for one of the country’s first international universities, RMIT University. This position fostered a preliminary understanding of the Vietnamese media landscape as well as assisted in establishing key contacts that will be leveraged for the proposed study. A secondary supervision at RMIT University in Vietnam for the study is being considered to add to the credibility of the research when conducting fieldwork. In addition, previous research on the media in Vietnam has been delved into through research masters study at UPF with a focus on media accountability; the political construction of motherhood and war hero identities; as well as an examination of the intercultural communication challenges between the country’s north and south.

2.0 Object of Study

The object of study for this research proposal includes 1) Vietnam’s economic and political contexts; 2) Vietnam’s media landscape; 3) Vietnam’s media accountability instruments; and 4) Vietnamese media professionals’ perceptions of media accountability. To set the scene across these four aspects, data has been drawn from reports published between 2009 and 2015 by international media watchdog groups, media industry groups, international government agencies as well as diplomatic missions operating in Vietnam. This includes documentation from Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House, two independent media watchdog groups; the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), a United States independent media surveillance agency; the United Nations Development Program in Vietnam
(UNDPV); and the Swedish Embassy in Vietnam. What’s noticeably absent across these reports is data driven by the country’s media profession itself, which may be indicative of either this type of information being publicly inaccessible or perhaps inexistence. While this gap is inopportune for the purposes of informing this research proposal, the reports available remain credible given the findings are drawn from quantitative and qualitative techniques conducted in Vietnam with journalists, editors, media managers as well as media users. Given these findings have been generated by organisations outside of Vietnam, it may mean these reports are also independent of the Vietnamese government and potentially free of any bias. It should also be highlighted that these reports are non-academic, with all relevant academic findings for this research proposal referred to in section 3.2 Literature Review.

2.1 Vietnam’s Economic and Political Contexts

First in focus as part of the object of study is an overview of Vietnam’s economic and political contexts. These contexts influence the viability of media accountability and self-regulation in a country’s media system as evidenced by the models of media systems of Hallin & Mancini (2004). This is also confirmed by Fengler et al. (2011) who purport that a country’s political and economic history shapes its practices of media accountability. Of critical importance to this proposed study is the significant shift that took place across Vietnam’s economic landscape following the introduction of Doi Moi in 1986, an economic reform program with the aim to increase marketisation and growth. A 2009 report on media and corruption in Vietnam by the UNDPV revealed that since the launch of the reforms, the state has struggled to contain corruption due to legal and regulatory loopholes being abused by civil servants and state officials (McKinley, 2009). In turn, the use of Vietnam’s media as an anti-corruption tool was identified by the state in its efforts to be seen as fighting corruption and operating transparently. This stance is confirmed in a 2015 report by Freedom House, which reveals that journalists are permitted to report on corruption at local levels as long as it serves the interests of the state’s national anti-corruption platform (Freedom House, 2015). However, this approach by the state to use the media in its push for marketisation is in contradiction to the market in which the media itself operates. The Vietnamese government owns or controls all of the country’s media outlets and while some independent outlets do exist, they remain
prohibited and are considered to be ‘underground’ (Reporters Without Borders, 2013).

One perspective to be considered within Vietnam’s political context for media accountability is its legal framework. The laws established by the state that claim to enable freedom of the press are described as vague and contradictory across many of the reports. One example is the government’s commitment to press freedom in its constitution. The 2013 report on Vietnamese media by Reporters Without Borders details Article 69 of the constitution: “Citizens are entitled to freedom of speech and freedom of the press; they have the right to receive information and the right of assembly, association and demonstration in accordance with the law” (Reporters Without Borders, 2013). However, when the country’s media laws are examined alongside the constitution, this position in terms of freedom of the press appears to be a contradiction. Vietnam’s media laws were recently updated in early April 2016 and to date, publicly available observation on the impact of the changes has been limited to a news article for online US business and financial news website Forbes. The foreign journalist who wrote the story describes the updated laws as including an “expansion of the prohibited acts for the media from four to more than a dozen” (Davis, 2016). Some of the acts include a prohibition on the publishing of state secrets or information essential to national security as well as less specific directives, such as being against “publishing false, or distorted information about the Socialist Republic of Vietnam” or “provoking violence or propagating depraved lifestyles; describing obscene or criminal acts; publishing information that violates the country’s traditions and values” (Davis, 2016). The journalist says when the law was debated in the national assembly, some legislators argued that it was impractically ambiguous. The updates to the media law also called for journalists to hand over the identity of their sources if ordered to do so by “high-level judicial authority”. However, the changes also make it illegal “to threaten journalists or harm their prestige or dignity, to destroy, or confiscate their property, or otherwise prevent them from carrying out legal journalistic activities” (Davis, 2016). Significantly, he reports that the new media laws stipulate that print and broadcast media will not be subject to censorship before publication. These updates to the country’s media laws, which will come into effect at the start of 2017, will be factored into the work of this proposed research in terms of the practical application and impact on the potential for media accountability.
In terms of the current laws being enacted, the 2013 report on Vietnamese media by Reporters Without Borders states that when journalists or bloggers are reprimanded by the state, it’s rarely done using the media laws. Instead, the country’s criminal codes are put into practice “in which crimes are defined in such a deliberately vague way that it is easy to apply them to the journalists and bloggers who stray too far from the party line” (Reporters Without Borders, 2013, p. 19). The report purports that Articles 79 and 88 in Chapter 11 of the criminal codes are usually employed: Article 79 is focused on “activities aimed at overthrowing the people’s administration” and Article 88 relates to “propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam” (Reporters Without Borders, 2013, p. 19). In addition to the use of the country’s criminal code to crack down on the media profession, the state has also published decrees pertaining to conduct by the country’s journalists. In July 2013, Decree 72 was announced with an order that made it illegal to use blogs and social networks to share news-related information from 1 September 2013. The 2013 report on Vietnamese media by Reporters Without Borders reports criticism of Decree 72 by foreign diplomats and human rights organisations, which was replied to by Nguyen Thanh Huyen, the head of the Information Ministry’s online information section as: “We never ban people from sharing information or linking news from websites. It was totally misunderstood (...) This is a normal decree which doesn’t go against any human right commitments” (Reporters Without Borders, 2013, p. 22). The report from the watchdog group infers that Decree 72 reiterates existing provisions, such as a ban on bloggers posting content that is of threat to the state, as well as it imposing more control over online news and information.

2.2 Vietnam’s Media Landscape

An awareness of Vietnam’s media landscape as it stands today is critical to inform this research proposal. An overview of the country’s media consumption as well as its ownership and structure will help to identify the prevailing media types and the number of practitioners that should be in focus for this research proposal’s methodology. The 2013 report on media use in Vietnam by the BBG indicates people living in Vietnam are avid news consumers. The survey conducted by the group in 2013 was representative of over 57 thousand Vietnamese adults. The findings of the report also revealed nine in 10 (89.8%) of respondents saying they access news at
least daily, while 93.9% do so at least once a week. Almost all adults (97.1%) say they used TV at least weekly to get news. Just over one quarter of Vietnamese people overall use radio, the internet and print media for news. Radio use is more comparable in rural areas and cities, while urban Vietnamese are more likely to get news weekly online or via newspapers and magazines. More than one in four Vietnamese people (26.3%) say they have used the internet in the past week, with users of the internet strongly related to age and education level. Most 15 to 24 year olds (58%) and college educated Vietnamese people (76.4%) go online weekly. The results also show that internet users in Vietnam use the web primarily for news and information gathering (BBG, 2013).

Freedom House provides the most recent data on media organisation ownership in Vietnam through its 2015 report. It reveals that almost all of Vietnam’s 850 media outlets are owned or controlled by the state directly, or through government institutions and the army. A breakdown of these media organisations operating in Vietnam can be found in the earlier report in 2013 by Reporters Without Borders. This report describes the country’s media outlets as containing more than 850 newspapers and magazines, 66 television and radio stations, 80 online newspapers and thousands of news websites. A 2009 report on media and corruption in Vietnam by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) states that at the time of the report, Vietnam had approximately 15,000 registered media practitioners.

New technologies have had an impact on the country’s media landscape, according to a 2006 report on the media in Vietnam by the Swedish Embassy in Hanoi. When compared to a similar report the embassy published on media development in 2003, the 2006 report described how the number of actors across electronic media had tripled over three years. The report suggests the reasons behind this shift include online news being seen to be more fact-based and less biased than print media (Elmqvist & Luwarso, 2006). The findings report new technology has also made the news faster and easier to access by media users, as well as increased the opportunity for two-way communication across news items. It also highlights that the move to online had enabled more opportunity for public feedback and debate across topics covered by the media. The 2013 report on Vietnamese media by Reporters Without Borders also confirms the prevalence of the internet as a new outlet for free
expression but the media watchdog group highlighted a constant crackdown on such use by the state. The findings reveal that nearly half of the population access the internet, with a large proportion using internet cafes and public providers. This increase in internet use has given rise for the public to discuss and debate public issues, a situation that the 2015 Freedom House report describes as generating “permanent tension between the state’s goals of promoting new technology and restricting online criticism” (Freedom House, 2015). The report revealed that the Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in use by news website operators continue to be either wholly or partially state-owned. The largest is Vietnam Data Communications, which is controlled by the state-owned Vietnam Posts and Telecommunications Group, making up nearly a third of all internet users ISPs.

The influence of blogs as ‘unofficial’ or ‘underground’ news sources in the country was highlighted in the 2013 report on media use in Vietnam by the BBG. Results reveal that weekly internet users, representing 14.7% of the sample, had been online in the past week to read a blog. This number rises to about one in five among the youngest (19.3%) and best-educated (19.4%) groups across the sample. The BBG report purports that the results may be subject to underreporting in light of government efforts to halt bloggers who are critical of the state in their posts. The 2013 report by Reporters Without Borders also reveals “independent news websites have come to be seen as the most attractive alternative for Vietnamese readers tired of the communist ideology that the party wants to drum into them” (Reporters Without Borders, 2013, p. 14). The report revealed that this comes down to the state-owned media not filling its role as a watchdog and allowing a space for public debate. Such sites, which are often censored and targeted in cyber attacks, are described as being varied in both format and content (Reporters Without Borders, 2013). They are a mix of individual and collective platforms with some well-known contributors who use either pseudonyms or their real names. However, the risk of being prosecuted for such behaviour is high, with the Vietnamese government prosecuting 48 bloggers and human rights activists in 2012, imposing a total of 166 years in jail sentences and 63 years of probation. At the time of the 2013 report on Vietnamese media by Reporters Without Borders, Vietnam was the world’s second biggest prison for bloggers and netizens, following China. However relative to population size, Reporters Without Borders describe the situation as much worse in Vietnam.
The 2009 report on media and corruption in Vietnam by the UNDPV reveals private ownership of editorial departments is not a likely option for consideration by the government. But it did highlight that non-state investment in advertising and other non-news media entities or departments was allowed, with this approach being phased in to help ease the reliance on the state for funding. These findings highlight the potential for greater editorial freedom for the media, given its increased financial independence. However, in terms of reporting on issues that may be sensitive to the government, such as corruption, the UNDPV report reveals the country’s media still had to work within limits. Presented in the report is the arrest and consequent sentencing in October 2008 of two high profile anti-corruption reporters, the withdrawal of several other journalists’ media credentials in August, and the replacement of the editors-in-chief of leading print publications Thanh Nien and Tuoi Tre in late 2008.

In terms of the structural organisation of state-owned media, the 2013 report on Vietnamese media by Reporters Without Borders reveals that all media organisations are registered with a branch of the Communist Party of Vietnam, whether it be municipal, provincial or central. Some media organisations are connected to affiliate party ‘organs’, such as the union of students, the union of workers and young communist organisations. These are the only government entities that are allowed to operate news publications (Reporters Without Borders, 2013). In addition, the report states that all newspaper editors, TV channel CEOs and radio station managers belong to a state unit, which the Reporters Without Borders report takes to imply that “they are in service of the state” (Reporters Without Borders, 2013, p. 8). Furthermore, every Tuesday, the editors of the media that answer directly to the state’s central organs - such as VTV, VOV, Nhan Dan, Cong An Dan Nhan, Lao Dong, Tien Phong, Thanh Nien and Phu Nu - and the heads of the provincial departments of propaganda and education attend a briefing in Hanoi chaired by the heads of the state’s Central Department of Propaganda and Education.
2.3 Vietnam’s Media Accountability Instruments

Across the object of study, attention must be paid to the traditional media accountability instruments (Bertrand, 2000) and innovative media accountability instruments (Fengler et al., 2014; Fengler et al., 2011) currently in existence in Vietnam. However, the reports sourced for this research proposal only contain brief listings of instruments without expanding on their effectiveness or the broader concept of media accountability in the country. Some of the examples provided indicate the use of innovative instruments, such as readers’ forums, where state control is significantly reduced. The 2006 report on the media in Vietnam by the Swedish Embassy in Hanoi as well as the 2009 report on media and corruption in Vietnam by UNDP briefly touched on media accountability instruments. The Swedish Embassy in Hanoi report reveals that feedback from the media’s audience, the reader, had increased over the years both in terms of quality and quantity (Elmqvist & Luwarso, 2006). Several media accountability instruments are listed in the report, such as a readers’ forum in online newspapers, sections in printed newspapers for editorial letters as well as a section on a major television network’s website for viewer feedback. The 2009 report on media and corruption in Vietnam by the UNDPV infers that providing the public with a forum for debate is a way in which the media can contribute to an anti-corruption strategy. The report also notes several other media accountability instruments employed across the media, particularly by some of the country’s larger and more assertive news organisations, such as call-in radio programs, TV chat shows as well as newspaper pages for reader letters. However, the report highlights that this type of media user feedback is sometimes monitored and censored (McKinley, 2009).

2.4 Vietnamese Media Professionals’ Perceptions of Media Accountability

The object of study for this research proposal includes the perception of media accountability instruments across Vietnamese media professionals, such as journalists and editors. These perceptions can be grounded in the level of journalism education and ethical awareness, with Fengler et al. (2014) prescribing that investment in journalism education is investment in a responsible press. The following overview on education and ethics in Vietnam helps to set the scene in terms of the potential of
media professionals’ perceptions of media accountability. The 2009 report on media and corruption in Vietnam by the UNDPV recommends an upskilling of journalists as well as a lift in ethical standards if there’s to be more and higher-quality news coverage on corruption. The benefits of improvements in corruption through journalism education are linked to a belief that if quality rises, then fears of inaccurate reporting of corruption by innocent officials as well as general opposition to media coverage of corruption, may decline. The report also reveals that the perception of low-quality journalism education in Vietnam also resides across media professionals working within the industry. It highlights how reporters and editors are frustrated at the low-quality of current education offerings in addition to the lack of opportunities to raise skill levels or use new skills once they have been developed. Vietnam’s journalism schools are described as producing graduates with idealism around the profession but not with the right skills. Furthermore, the programs on offer are often targeted to students looking to pursue careers in either the media or public relations industries, meaning graduates enter journalism without a deep grounding in the profession. To make up for the limited journalism educational offerings in the country, the report states that many large news organisations provide training for their reporters, sign up for foreign-funded training workshops, or facilitate overseas journalism training for key staff (Elmqvist & Luwarso, 2006).

The lack of adequate journalism education in Vietnam is connected with a poor ethical grounding across the profession, according to the 2006 report on the media in Vietnam by the Swedish Embassy in Hanoi. The report cites commentary from prominent Vietnamese journalists in the journal *Asia Pacific Media Educator* as describing the country’s journalism graduates as lacking general background knowledge on politics, economics, cultural and social issues. The report infers that the lack of depth in journalism training contributes to a lack of ethics. It’s similar finding across the 2009 report on media and corruption in Vietnam by the UNDPV, which describes Vietnam’s education system as producing graduates who are not comfortable contradicting authority or questioning the actions or motives of the state. This report also reveals that corruption across the media itself is also a problem, which can be linked to low ethical standards across the profession as well as inadequate salaries. Such corruption can take place with individual journalists either
accepting a ‘red envelope’ during a press conference or making money from someone who wants a certain story written or allowing conflicts of interests to arise.

3.0 State of the Art of the Topic

A comprehensive search across academic literature on traditional and innovative media accountability instruments in Vietnam reveals a knowledge gap in terms of existing research. While this finding may be considered encouraging in terms of this research proposal taking on a new direction in media and communication studies, it also raises a significant question as to why media accountability instruments in Vietnam hasn’t been a research topic tackled previously? Media accountability, and specifically the tools to foster such accountability, is certainly not a ground-breaking topic in the realm of media and communication studies today. Classifications for media accountability instruments were established over a decade ago, such as the work of widely-recognised academic Bertrand (2000) as well as newer groupings in light of the digital age through the work of Fengler et al. (2014). Therefore, the question still remains: why is there a lack of research in terms of media accountability instruments in a country such as Vietnam?

Some conclusions in terms of barriers or challenges facing this type of research are drawn from academic discourse that highlights the abundance of Western-centric concepts and models in the field of media accountability and media accountability instruments. The search across literature further revealed Vietnam is yet to be classified in the well-known media systems model by Hallin & Mancini (2004), a framework often used for comparative research across media and communication studies. However, despite this prevalence of theoretical frameworks that are grounded in studies on Western media, some researchers have made headway in attempts to categorise and analyse the media outside of the Western context using these models. These studies will be drawn upon for this research proposal, particularly research on the state of media professionalisation in China (Zhao, 2012) and Thailand (McCargo, 2012) as well as the effectiveness of media accountability instruments in Jordan, a country in transition (Hawatmeh & Pies, 2011). The latter study, on media accountability in Jordan, is drawn from the work of the MediaAcT research consortium (http://www.mediaact.eu/).
The work of MediaAcT research consortium in going beyond the Western context is significant for this research proposal. As such, it will serve as a foundation for the main concepts and principles of the theoretical framework. Researchers across the consortium drew on the scholarly-recognised framework of Hallin & Mancini’s (2004) media systems model as a starting point for their comparative study. Despite this model being established for media within a Western context, the MediaAcT researchers extended these concepts with Eastern European (Estonia, Poland and Romania) as well as Arab (Jordan and Tunisia) perspectives. As a result, the work by the MediaAcT research consortium, particularly the findings from the study of Jordan, a country in transition, is highly relevant to set the theoretical groundings for this research proposal. It should also be noted that the MediaAcT research consortium were among the first to conduct this type of research in these areas, with the group purporting that little or almost no research existed previously on media accountability in the Arab world, as well as in Mediterranean countries and Eastern Europe (Fengler et al., 2011, p. 13). The consortium also pointed out that media accountability instruments in Africa, Asia and Latin America “have almost never been studied apart from a few descriptive volumes or websites that list which instruments and organisations exist in the field” (Fengler et al., 2011, p. 13). Five years on and for the purposes of this research proposal, a comprehensive search by the researcher across academic literature reveals a gap continues to remain in terms of research on media accountability instruments in Vietnam.

In turn, what does exist across the literature examined is a broad overview of media-related issues in Vietnam. These findings are helpful to paint a picture of the country’s media landscape as well as inform the approach for this research proposal. Existing research includes a snapshot of Vietnam’s media landscape across a wider perspective, such as shifts across the country’s media as a result of its economic transformations (Gainsborough, 2010; Heng, 2001; Beresford, 2008) as well as studies on self-censorship in the media and the media’s role in reporting on corruption (Cain, 2013; McKinley, 2007). As already highlighted, there’s very little in terms of a study specific to media accountability and self-regulation in Vietnam, except for brief listings of media accountability instruments in reports by international government agencies and diplomatic missions operating in Vietnam, which are the non-academic reports covered in section 2.3 Vietnam’s Media Accountability Instruments.
As previously indicated, the reason behind this lack of research specific to Vietnam may be considered due to the proliferation of Western-centric models of media accountability instruments and media systems. What will become clear across this research proposal is how a study on media accountability instruments in Vietnam will make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge already generated by other researchers such as Fengler et al. (2014) in extending the examination of media accountability instruments beyond a Western context. Therefore, to position the state of the art for this study, this section is structured first through a theoretical framework comprised of the key foundations and principles relating to media accountability. Second, a literature review will reveal research already undertaken to date related to this field in Vietnam, as well as in other relevant contexts such as research on media accountability in the Asian region and transitioning media landscapes.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The foundations and principles grounding the work of other studies across media accountability instruments is opportune for this research proposal, given these studies involved identifying traditional and innovative media accountability instruments in transitioning media landscapes where state-owned media prevails, such as Jordan and Tunisia (Hawatmeh & Pies, 2011). This is not to suggest that Vietnam’s media system and its media accountability instruments can automatically be grouped with the results of former relevant studies such as those that took place in an Arab context. Instead, this existing work serves as a valid approach to the identification of key principles and foundations for studies on media accountability and its instruments employed. In turn, the theoretical framework will examine:

- principles of media accountability with a focus on transparency, self-regulation and reader participation
- media accountability instruments
- the audience for media accountability
- the context for media accountability
- media accountability in a transitioning or developing media landscapes
- media accountability within the media systems model framework.
But first, it would be remiss to put forward a research proposal on media accountability instruments without a brief examination of the key principles of media ethics, from which media accountability is grounded. Bertrand (2000) describes media ethics as a “body of principles and rules, fashioned by the profession, preferably in cooperation with media users, in order that media can better serve most, if not all, groups within the population” (p. 4). Alsius, Alcalá, Figueras Maz, Rodriguez Martínez, Mauri, Salgado, Singla, & Tulloch (2010) prescribe four fundamental ethical principles across the media profession of truth, justice, freedom and responsibility. Truth is one of the oldest and most established ethical principles in human interrelations but it may not have the same unequivocal meaning across the journalistic sphere (Alsius et al., 2010). In this sense, Alsius et al. (2010) says it’s important to note the difference between truth and credibility, where “truthfulness is an ethical value” and “credibility is a professional value, which has some commercial dimensions” (p. 65). When examining the practical application of truth in the media profession, Lambeth (1992) highlights the challenges facing journalists who are not always well-versed across some of the specialist language in modern and complex societies. This limitation may result in forfeiting “the opportunity to report more than the surface of the news” (Lambeth, 1992, p. 25). The second ethical principle of justice focuses on the equal treatment of all objects of a news story, independent of social structure, nationality, sexual orientation, political ideologies and other potential discriminations. Alsius et al. (2010) prescribe justice can be performed by the media when compensatory mechanisms are established to create “less topical” and more “profound type of information” (p. 108) for these mentioned collectives. This approach, coupled with impartiality and equality, fosters justice in media practice (Alsius et al., 2010). Lambeth (1992) says justice is reflected in the journalist’s consideration of fairness and that justice is “more than individual reporters observing a few simple rules, and that the ethos of the newsroom and sensitive management of reporters by editors play major roles in creating a climate conducive to high ethical standards” (p. 28). The third ethical principle of freedom is centred on the free communication of ideas by the media and avoidance of any influence by power structures, commercial interests and economic gains. Alsius et al. (2010) describe these influences as the “enemies of journalists” (p. 136) in their quest for independence. Alsius et al. (2010) purport that “the media are obliged to resist the desire to influence which power manifests” (p. 137) as well as avoid the “temptation
of gifts, bonuses and any kind of extra that are aimed at persuading certain coverage by the journalist” (p. 137). Lambeth (1992) also highlights that freedom has a meaning of autonomy or independence but suggests that this stance is often threatened by “subtle, insidious risks the journalist confronts day-to-day” (p. 30). Such challenges include journalists needing to adhere to newsroom policies that may be in contrast to public needs or becoming so close and dependent on certain sources that critical perspective can be lost (Lambeth, 1992). Alsius et al. (2010) agree, saying commercial and economic influences also open up ethical issues for both the individual as well as the media organisation itself. Bertrand (2000) looks at the ethical principle of freedom from the perspective of the purpose of the media and purports that freedom shouldn’t be the only factor. He says “freedom is necessary but not sufficient…the goal for media is to serve all citizens well (Bertrand, 2000, p. 3). Finally, the ethical principle of responsibility is the remaining pillar of media ethics according to Alsius et al. (2010) and it’s a consideration that must be part of the consciousness of all journalists. Alsius et al. (2010) defines responsibility as “the general compliance of all ethical principles as well as that general attitude shown by media and journalists according to which a process of reflection as well as appropriate behaviour and applied conscience are brought into play” (p. 172). Lambeth (1992) also wraps up the ethical principles of the media profession through the notion of responsibility, which is referred to as ‘stewardship’, highlighting that “journalists – reporters, editors, publishers, media owners – are in a unique position to help keep the wells of public discourse unpoisoned, if not wholly clean” (p. 32). Finally, in terms of how these principles are applied in practice, Fengler et al. (2014) suggest these four areas of focus, in some form or another, appear in most European media organisations’ codes of ethics.

3.1.1 Principles of Media Accountability with a focus on Transparency, Self-Regulation and Reader Participation

The preceding overview on the principles of media ethics provides an apt entry into a discussion on media accountability principles, given these four principles serve as the ethical foundation for which media accountability resides. Definitions of media accountability across academic discourse include “the voluntary or involuntary processes by which the media answer directly or indirectly to the society and those
immediately affected for the quality and/or consequences of publication” (McQuail, 2010, p. 185) as well as “a quality assessment tool, a quality trade mark and as journalistic value on its own” and “a positive force against popularisation of the news, commercialisation of the media sector and other indicators of professional deterioration” (Groenhart, 2012, p.180). Von Krogh (2012) defines media accountability as “the interactive forces by which media organisations may be expected or obliged to render an account of (and sometimes a correction and/or excuse for) their activities to their stakeholders” (p. 9). Bardoel & d’Haenens (2004) describe how media accountability has arisen from a shift from media responsibility: moving away from “general and abstract thinking in terms of responsibility more to practical and concrete interpretation of these concepts” (p. 171). The researchers highlight how the emphasis on accountability has moved from one with a negative connotation (liability) to a more positive approach (answerability) (Bardoel & d’Haenens, 2004). McQuail (2010) also draws on the difference between accountability and responsibility, referring to accountability as the processes by which the media are held to account while responsibility is more about obligations and expectations. And also similar to Bardoel & d’Haenens (2004), McQuail (2010) points to a shift of an emphasis on harm that may arise from media action to being more about answerability and non-confrontational debate and negotiation.

Transparency can explained across academic discourse in terms of its practical application, such as the public dissemination of corporate information including editorial principles, organisational structure and financial performance. Lauk & Denton (2011) connect media robustness and media-critical debate with transparency, describing it as “not a voluntary kindness of the news organisations, but the openness forced by laws, professional conventions and norms, citizens’ pressure groups and civil society initiatives” (p. 211). And when put into practice, the principle of transparency becomes a collection of tools and instruments for the media to employ. Transparency can be understood as the way that media organisations make information publicly available, such as details on the processes and actors involved in making the news. Specific instruments that enforce transparency include newsrooms sharing details on media ownership, profiles of journalists, newsroom blogs, ombudspersons as well as links to sources (Fengler et al., 2014; Fengler et al., 2011). Meier (2008) says transparency fosters authenticity and accountability across the
media, emphasising the opportunity for such transparency through either traditional or digital approaches. The researcher says traditional mechanisms for transparency include an ombudsperson, code of ethics and reader corrections, while digital refers to blogs, instant online upload of conferences and conversations from the newsroom as well as newscasts by editors and journalists explaining editorial decisions. Ziomek (2005) describes transparency as “a means of strengthening media credibility and helping newsrooms prepare for the future in ways that will better serve citizens and society” (p. 4). The researcher says this is achieved through practical processes in the newsroom, where “facts, situations, events, and opinions are sorted, sifted, made sense of, and presented. They [journalists] listen closely and responsively to their audiences and acknowledge that audience perspective in their work” (Ziomek, 2005, p. 4).

The second principle of media accountability is self-regulation, which can broadly be described as the ways in which the media keeps its commitment to the audience, the creation of norms and standards across the profession as well as an individual (self) acceptance of practices as a media professional. Academic discourse highlights the way self-regulation has stemmed from a shift of responsibility to accountability with the arrival of a series of measures by the media designed to keep itself to account. Puppis (2010) describes self-regulation as regulation of the media by non-state actors, as opposed to statutory regulation (mandated by the government) and co-regulation (self-regulation with government overview). The researcher says self-regulation is essential for the media and communication industry because while “legitimate justifications for regulation exist, there’s consensus at least in Western democracies that the media should be devoid of governmental influence” (p. 139). Therefore, self-regulation by the media is seen as the way forward for balancing media regulation with freedom (Puppis, 2010). Bardoel & d’Haenens (2004) prescribe that increased competition and commercialisation add to the urgency of a responsible and accountable media and that it’s up to those involved in the media sphere to take action, such as media companies and organisations, citizens, supervisory boards and commissions. The researchers describe self-regulation by the media as one of the mechanisms to foster such accountability. Fengler et al. (2014) define media self-regulation as “the regulation of the media industry or sector by media professionals themselves, for example by establishing codes of conduct and organisations like press
councils to monitor and impose sanctions for the violation of such codes of conduct” (p. 21).

The final principle of media accountability in focus for the purpose of this research proposal is reader participation, which is about the direct contact by the media with its users as well as enabling shared participation in news creation. Bertrand (2000) describes the reader, which he refers to as a media user, as one of the key participants in the media accountability process, along with media owners and professionals. The researcher notes that the media user is often “too often forgotten in the debate about ethics” and media users believe “they are powerless against the media, unless they sue” (p. 109). But in reality, there’s a need for cooperation between media professionals and media users, which Bertrand (2000) describes as being indispensable given that while “professionals know best how to improve the media and are motivated to do so, they’re too few and vulnerable to confront external forces alone” (p. 110). As a result, the media need the support of the media user mass (Bertrand, 2000). Lauk & Denton (2011) also assert the importance of the media engaging its readers to ensure quality content. But the researchers say such success “largely depends on both a particular journalism culture and the maturity of civic culture” (p. 210). And for this to take shape, Lauk & Denton (2011) prescribe that a “degree of competence in media literacy among the public is also vital” (p. 210).

3.1.2 Media Accountability Instruments

Bertrand (2000) describes media accountability instruments as “any non-state means of making the media responsible towards the public” (p. 107). Fengler et al. (2011) define media accountability instruments as “any information institution, both offline and online, performed by both media professionals and media users, which intends to monitor, comment on and criticise journalism and seeks to expose and debate problems of journalism” (p. 20). Academic discourse reveals media accountability instruments were first established in the United States (Bertrand, 2000). The reasoning for the groundings of such instruments in a Western media context is “because the media are more commercialised there than anywhere else” (p. 110). Bertrand (2000) says that interest in media accountability instruments didn’t get
moving until the 1960s, when local press councils were established along with the first ombudsperson appointed at a daily newspaper. In the years following, journalism reviews were created as well as a national news council in the 1970s (Bertrand, 2000). Fengler et al. (2014) reports that the use of media accountability instruments began to take shape in the 1970s, particularly at an individual news outlet level with the engagement of ombudspersons and organisational codes of ethics.

For the purposes of this proposed study, the models of classification of media accountability instruments to be drawn upon include those of Bertrand (2000) as well as the five-tier model by Shoemaker & Reese (1996) and its adaption by Fengler et al. (2014). Bertrand’s media accountability instrument classification model in 2000 stemmed from a study on codes of ethics in 17 European countries, as well as an analysis of press councils, ombudspersons and journalism reviews (Bertrand, 2000). The researcher, who acknowledged his classification model was one that would continue to expand over the years, grounded his model in actions of training, evaluation, monitoring and feedback. According to Bertrand (2000), “training is the long-term solution to most problems of quality: the education of citizens in the use of media and a college education for professionals” (p. 111). Evaluation refers to using both positive and negative criticism to improve the media while monitoring is defined as the extended observation of the media over a period of time (Bertrand, 2000). Feedback, according to Bertrand (2000), is about listening to the grievances of media users to stay better informed. The researcher says that some media accountability instruments can cover all four actions of training, evaluation, monitoring and feedback (Bertrand, 2000). Table 1 presents the classification of a selection of the 110 media accountability instruments developed by Bertrand (2000), grouped into internal, external and cooperative instruments. The researcher says instruments can also be placed across one or more of these categories. These categories are a secondary grouping formed by Bertrand (2000), who says that the most obvious classification is by using an “intrinsic nature of documents (printed or broadcast), people (individuals or groups) and processes (long or short)” (p. 9). However for the purposes of this research proposal, the classification model drawn upon is one that defines media accountability instruments as internal, external or cooperative. The reasoning behind this approach is because it enables a better comparison with the second model of media accountability instrument classification in focus, that of
Shoemaker & Reese (1996) and its adaption by Fengler et al. (2014). Definitions of the groupings in the Bertrand (2000) model are as follows:

- Internal: instruments for self-regulation and quality control.
- External: instruments that can be applied to the media without its acceptance, serving to benefit to public as a whole rather than individuals.
- Cooperative: instruments bringing together the media, media professionals as well as the public in efforts to foster quality.

### Table 1: Classification of Media Accountability Instruments by Internal, External and Cooperative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Media Accountability Instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Code of ethics, ombudsperson, correction box, media reporter, in-house critic, disciplinary committee, media page/program, internal memo, ethical audit, ethics coach, opinion survey, company of journalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td>Journalism review, alternative media, critical book/report, public statements, media related NGO or foundation, media observatory, non-profit research, higher education, media at school, consumer group, association of militant citizens, company of users, public broadcasting, regulatory agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>Letters to the editor, public access, paid-for-opinion page, accuracy and fairness questionnaire, consulting with users, liaison committee, local press council, national/regional press council, continuous education, movie or TV series</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Bertrand (2000)

The classification model by Bertrand (2000) is expanded on by Fengler et al. (2011) as part of the work of the MediaAcT research consortium. The researchers purport that a decade on, “Bertrand’s list of media accountability instruments requires considerable extension since the internet and particularly the social web” (p. 8). Fengler et al. (2011) work with two different types of groupings for media accountability instruments: the first groups instruments as either established/traditional or innovative, and the second groups by the actor involved, whether it be a journalist, the profession, the media organisation, the media user or the global institution of journalism. Due to the addition of innovative instruments to the work of Bertrand (2000), both models will be presented as part of this research proposal to ensure a comprehensive understanding of where and how these new instruments are classified. Table 2 shows the breakdown of media accountability instruments according to established/traditional and innovative categories (Fengler et al., 2011).
Table 2: Classification of Media Accountability Instruments by Established/Traditional and Innovative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Media Accountability Instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Established/Traditional</td>
<td>Press councils, ombudspersons, media journalism in trade journals, media criticism in the mass media, letters to the editor, correction boxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative</td>
<td>Editorial webblogs, websites monitoring news content, webcasts of internal critique sessions or team meetings, online ombudspersons, media critical activities on Twitter and Facebook</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Fengler et al. (2011)

The inclusion of innovative media accountability instruments in the classification system by Fengler et al. (2011) is critical for this research proposal. The researchers purport that “the internet and especially the Web 2.0 offer a mass of new venues for citizens to become actively engaged in the debate about the quality of media content” (p. 15). Lauk & Denton (2011) also assert that the virtual world has helped to increase the opportunity for media/audience communication, with the most popular forms being “user comments to articles as well as online discussion platforms” (p. 210).

Bardoel & d’Haenens (2004) say that the arrival of new media has introduced a power shift, from the sender to the receiver. The researchers argue that “any internet user can put together and disseminate their own news agenda, without the involvement of professional journalists or news agencies” (p. 172). Figure 1 shows the model developed by Fengler et al. (2011) highlighting the shift of media accountability in the digital age. Fengler et al. (2011) state that “the inclusion of the audience into the media accountability process via the internet is particularly important with regard to media systems operating under tight political constraints. In many transformation and developing countries, the “government heavily restricts the media profession, which cannot thus be expected to be an effective self-critic” (Fengler et al., 2011). This view is also held by Lauk & Denton (2011) who purport that “within the regimes with limited freedom of the press and speech, the internet may serve as the only way to establish transparency and to transmit information about the issues of media business, about violations of professional ethics or harassment of journalists” (p. 211). But it must be noted that while the emergence of innovative media accountability instruments has potential for countries with heavily-controlled media systems, it’s not as clear-cut as it may seem. Fengler et al. (2011) says that “in these countries, we have to expect that regimes ‘co-opt’ the concept of media accountability either as another means of control or to misleadingly promote it as their way to developing an
independent media” (p. 18). The study on the media landscape in Jordan will be expanded on later in this research proposal to further illustrate this point.

**Figure 1: Media Accountability in the Digital Age**

The results of previous research in mapping media accountability across Europe and beyond not only informed the expansion of media accountability instrument classification with innovative instruments but it also led to an adaption of a model of media accountability instruments by Shoemaker & Reese (1996). Figure 2 provides an overview of this model that’s structured according to the influences across the field of media accountability and the corresponding media accountability instruments. Definitions of the groups of the Shoemaker & Reese (1996) model adapted by Fengler et al. (2014) are as follows:

- **Journalist** (individual level): the indirect influence that the journalist’s personal characteristics, such as professional roles and attitudes, have on content.
- **Professional** (media routine level): the norms and routines that are carried out by media practitioners in their everyday work.
- **Newsroom/media organisation** (organisational level): the influence that the work setting has on content.
- **Extramedia level**: external factors such as economic and cultural forces.
• Transnational level (ideological): the impact of internationalisation across the field of media and communication.

Figure 2: Classification of Media Accountability Instruments by Influence

Source: Adapted from Fengler et al. (2014)

3.1.3 The Audience for Media Accountability

This research proposal draws on the classification by McQuail to identify the audiences for media accountability. McQuail (2010) describes the existence of relationships between the media and other parties as being either internal and external. The researcher says that internal accountability “involves a chain of control within the media, such that specific acts of publication (e.g. news items or television programmes) can be made the responsibility of the media organisation and its owners” (p. 187). Whereas, external audiences are those affected by, or with an interest in, publication (McQuail, 2010). The researcher puts forward a list of the accountability relationships between the media and external audiences that includes:

• readers (the media’s own audiences)
• clients, such as advertisers, sponsors or backers
• content suppliers, such as sources and producers of entertainment, sports and culture news
• owners and shareholders of media organisations
• government regulators and law-makers
• social institutions that may be impacted by media or are reliant on the media
• public opinion, referring to society ‘as a whole’
• pressure and interested groups impacted by publication (McQuail, 2010).

With the introduction of new technologies, Livingstone (2003) extends the media audience from being mass to interactive. Livingstone (2003) purports that “new media technologies hold the possibility of expansion of interactive forms of media, and the resulting potential for transforming a once-mass audience into engaged and participatory users of information and communication technologies” (p. 27).

3.1.4 The Context for Media Accountability

Another key element to garnering an understanding of media accountability is to examine the media’s political, market, public and professional contexts. This research proposal draws on the model by Bardoel & d’Haenens (2004) that structures the different contexts for the media in terms of social responsibilities. Fengler et al. (2014) says the model by Bardoel & d'Haenens (2004) is valuable because “it enables discussion about media accountability practices in authoritarian regimes, where the media is strongly controlled by the state” (p. 23). Bardoel & d'Haenens’ (2004) model is also useful when examining a media system that’s undergoing transition to determine any significant shift in political accountability to any of the other accountability frames (Fengler et al., 2014). Table 3 presents the model by Bardoel & d'Haenens (2004) and its classification of media accountability contexts into four modes of accountability including market (demand and supply), politics (law and regulation), profession (self-regulation) and public (discussion, dialogue).
Table 3: Organisation of Social Responsibility of Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Competition, companies</td>
<td>Demand and supply</td>
<td>Buying power, money</td>
<td>Market share, market research</td>
<td>Economic growth, flexibility, but: bias towards ‘mainstream’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Hierarchy, bureaucracy</td>
<td>Law and regulation</td>
<td>Authority, force</td>
<td>Budget, annual review, contract/charter</td>
<td>Social justice, but: slow, steering or ‘content’ problematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Voluntarism, association, pressure groups</td>
<td>Discussion, dialogue</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Openness, feedback: hearings, ombudsperson</td>
<td>Shaping of public opinion, social capital, but: voluntarism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Bardoel & d’Haenens, 2004

McQuail (2010) also prescribes media accountability resides across four similar frames. The researcher describes the frame of law and regulation as the “public policies, laws and regulations that affect media structure and operations” (p. 189). McQuail (2010) says this frame has a purpose of ensuring free and communication interchange across society with aims to “advance the public good as well as to limit potential harm to legitimate private and public interests” (p. 189). In terms of the market frame, McQuail (2010) refers to it as not always having a significant role in public accountability but in practice “is an important means for balancing the interests of media organisations and producers and those of their clients and audiences (consumers)” (p. 189). In turn, the frame of public responsibility refers to “the fact that the media organisations are also social institutions that fulfil, with varying degrees of voluntaryness and explicit commitment, certain important tasks that go beyond their immediate goals of making profits and giving employment” (McQuail, 2010, p. 190). Finally, the professional responsibility frame is described as arising “out of the self-respect and ethical development of professionals working in the media (e.g. journalists, advertisers, public relations), who set the standards of good performance” (p. 191). Groenhart (2012) too, purports the use of different frames
from where media accountability is conceived. The researcher describes the regulatory frame as “capturing the context of libel law and governmental media policy” whereas the market frame is the “commercial forces that influence journalistic decision-making” (p. 191). Groenhart (2012) says the professional frame is about peer orientation of journalists and the self-regulatory mechanisms across the profession. The public responsibility frame is described by the researcher as the public service focus in professional decision-making (Groenhart, 2012). Von Krogh (2012) adapts the frames established by Bardoe & d'Haenens (2004), McQuail (2010) and Groenhart (2012) by viewing the four perspectives of market, political, public and professional accountability through interactive forces of media technology and media systems. The researcher justifies this approach due to the way media technology (such as new ways of consuming media) and media systems (drawing on the models by Hallin & Mancini (2004)) are critical external factors that shape the way media accountability operates. Figure 3 presents the model adapted by von Krogh (2012) to include media technology and media systems perspectives across the different frames of media accountability.

**Figure 3: Media Accountability Frames with Interactive Forces of Media Technology and Media Systems**

Source: Adapted from von Krogh (2012)

3.1.5 Media Accountability in a Transitioning or Developing Media Landscape

Academic discourse across journalism in transitioning or developing media landscapes points to the need for the profession to be re-defined. Part of this process,
according to Pies (2014) is for journalists to redefine the rules and relationships across the profession, which includes understanding the shift in terms of relationships with political actors as well as entering into discussions with their counterparts across the field and developing professional standards and expectations. Pies (2014) identifies media accountability as a process to support the understanding of the scope of the changes in transitioning or developing media landscapes. The researcher says by using media accountability as a foundation, the shifts from within the profession as well as those outside of it are clearer to evaluate (Pies, 2014). In addition, Pies (2014) describes the approaches that journalists must take in transitioning to political shifts as falling across three stages: first, journalists must develop new strategies to survive the transition as well as to make it a successful change; second, the expectations of the public in terms of the role of journalism in the transition must be understood; and third, the economic ramifications from moving through a transition, in terms of the removal of state funding, must also be considered. The researcher draws on the model of Bardoel & d’Haenens (2004) to illustrate the way accountability shifts across the different frames of market, politics, professional and public. Pies (2014) says that in authoritarian states, where the media is strongly controlled by the government, those in power may still consider media censorship as an appropriate means of holding the media profession accountable (to the state). Pies (2014) purports this approach is in contrast to liberal democracies where the market frame may be considered the appropriate shift.

3.1.6 Media Accountability within the Media Systems Model Framework

The extension by von Krogh (2012) of the Bardoel & d’Haenens (2004) model as highlighted in section 3.1.4 The Context for Media Accountability leads into the final section of the theoretical framework drawn upon for this research proposal. Von Krogh (2012) references the media systems model of Hallin & Mancini (2004) in terms of using it as one of the lenses when examining the different context frames for media accountability. The Hallin & Mancini (2004) model defines a region’s media landscape through an examination of the connections between the media and the region’s social, cultural and political attributes. The original study by Hallin & Mancini (2004) examined media landscapes across 18 democratic countries: nine in North Europe, five in South Europe and four Atlantic. The outcome was the
development of a classification table that connects the political, social and cultural dimensions of a country with three media systems models: Mediterranean or Polarised Pluralist; North/Central Europe or Democratic Corporatist; and North Atlantic or Liberal Model. Each model is defined by four dimensions: 1) the newspaper industry, 2) political parallelism, 3) professionalisation, and 4) role of the state in the media system. The model of media systems by Hallin & Mancini (2004) has made a significant contribution to the field of media systems research by enabling a systematic method to compare and contrast social, cultural and political impacts on a country’s media landscape. The pair’s work was extended in 2012 with a study of systems beyond the Western context. This research proposal draws on this additional study and narrows in on the dimension of professionalisation and its links to media accountability, as will be seen in the literature review as part of section 3.2.1 Media Professionalisation in the Asian Context in the literature review. The model by Hallin & Mancini (2004) was also used in studies by Fengler et al. (2014) as a “template for the comparative analysis” across the 14 countries examined in terms of the employment of media accountability instruments” (p. 12). Fengler et al. (2014) acknowledged that the model by Hallin & Mancini (2004) does not specifically cover media accountability instruments and media self-regulation but some media accountability instruments, such as press councils, serve as indicators of the professionalisation dimension. The significance of the dimension of journalist professionalisation to ensue media accountability is overt in the workings of Bertrand (2000). Within the media accountability instrument classification of process, Bertrand emphasises the importance of professionalisation in terms of hiring people with a university degree, running media ethics courses for journalism students, ensuring continuing professional education for working journalists as well as in-house awareness programs to increase attention by media workers on citizen needs.

3.2 Literature Review

As highlighted throughout this research proposal, an extensive search across academic databases did not reveal any academic studies specific to media accountability instruments in Vietnam. Some brief listings of media accountability instruments were found in non-academic reports by international government agencies and diplomatic missions operating in Vietnam, which were included in section 2.3 Vietnam’s Media
Accountability Instruments of this research proposal. Therefore, the search across literature was extended to research on Vietnamese media in terms of the four different media accountability frames of political, market, public and professional (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004; McQuail, 2010; Groenhart, 2012; von Krogh, 2012). It should be recognised that all relevant research findings, even those that may be considered outdated, have been included as part of the literature review to demonstrate the exhaustive attempt at the retrieval of literature on research undertaken across Vietnam’s media landscape to date. The bulk of the literature reviewed was the work of researchers external to Vietnam, which indicates either inaccessibility to such research conducted by researchers in Vietnam or its potential inexistence. As highlighted in the theoretical framework, the prevalence of constructs on media systems and media accountability grounded in Western media was also presented as a potential reason for the lack of research specific to Vietnam. However, some researchers have made attempts to take such models beyond a Western context and these studies are included in the literature review, namely the work of researchers studying media systems in an Asian context as well as studies on media accountability instruments in transitioning countries. An overview of studies on media professionalisation in China (Zhao, 2012) and Thailand (McCargo, 2012) as well as the effectiveness of media accountability instruments in Jordan (Hawatmeh & Pies, 2011) will also be presented, given the potential crossover with the Vietnamese media landscape.

Therefore, presented in this literature review is an overview of studies on 1) media accountability in the Asian context; 2) media accountability in transitioning media landscapes; and 3) media accountability frames in the Vietnamese context, with a focus on political, market, public and professional frames.

3.2.1 Media Accountability in the Asian Context

The literature in focus to support this research proposal is drawn from the work of Hallin & Mancini (2012) and the researchers’ efforts to take their models of media systems beyond a Western context. The original study by the pair focused on countries across Western Europe and Northern America that “by global standards had similar histories as advanced capitalist democracies” (Hallin & Mancini, 2012, p. 1).
The researchers were aware of the seemingly contradictory approach in using this model beyond Western cases for the study in 2012, but stated that the aim of the exercise was to subject the established media systems model to “critical scrutiny” as well as “produce useful insights that can point toward the formation of a new theory” (p. 3). Therefore the cases presented as part of this literature review are from researchers that were already embedded in the objects of study at the time: media systems in China and Thailand. These studies have been selected for this research proposal based on each country’s location in the Asian region as well as similarities to Vietnam in terms of political structure, such as the communist structures of government in China and Vietnam, as well as potential commonalities across high levels of political parallelism with Thailand and Vietnam. The area of focus across each study is the professionalisation dimension of the Hallin & Mancini (2004) model, the aspect serving most closely as an indicator of media accountability (Fengler et al., 2014).

The study in China was conducted by Yuezhi Zhao, a Simon Fraser University researcher on politics, communication and the media in China. As part of the review using the media systems model, Zhao (2012) defines the relationship between the state and the media in China as being one of a strategic nature. The researcher says “the state retains strategic control over the media system and its ideological orientation, but no longer monopolises production and distribution, especially in entertainment, lifestyle and business areas” (p. 153). In terms of the dimension of professionalisation, Zhao (2012) lists the employment of several media accountability instruments such as the introduction of journalistic professional ethics and codes of conduct by the country’s journalist association in 1991. Other mechanisms described by Zhao (2012) highlight an indication of the media being accountable to the state, such as the introduction of a nationwide compulsory training program for journalists in 2003 as well as the implementation of state-issued journalist licences in 2005. On reflection of these instruments, Zhao (2012) says “if one defines professionalisation according to North American ideals of political neutrality, “objectivity,” and autonomy from political parties and governments, then Chinese journalism utterly lacks professionalisation” (p. 163). However, Zhao (2012) explains how this disconnection with the Western paradigm of professionalisation doesn’t necessarily mean a version of professionalisation in China doesn’t exist. Zhao (2012) says that
“like journalism in many parts of the non-Western world, Chinese journalism has a strong advocacy and social reform tradition” (p. 163). Zhao (2012) describes how the concept of “serving the people” in the Chinese context exists as a form of professionalisation, similar to the “public service” approach in the Western context (p. 163). The study in Vietnam put forward in this research proposal will add to this body of knowledge in terms of the professionalisation of journalists in countries under a communist government. It will also contribute to building on the dimension of professionalisation beyond a Western context.

The study in Thailand was conducted by Duncan McCargo, a University of Leeds researcher on Thai media and politics. Within a broad Asian context, McCargo (2012) first notes that there’s a strong characterisation of political parallelism. As examples, the researcher describes the close ties between major newspapers and political parties in Malaysia as well as the direct or indirect control of the media by the state in Vietnam and China. Specific to Thailand, McCargo (2012) says “Thai language newspapers exist in a parallel world to that of Thai politicians and political parties” (p. 207). Narrowing in on the dimension of professionalism within the Hallin & Mancini (2004) media systems model, the researcher prefers to draw on the concept of partisanship as opposed to professionalisation. The researcher takes this approach under the assumption that “partisanship is the Asian (or global) norm and that professionalism is an ideal type that is quite difficult to locate in practice” (p. 209). McCargo (2012) describes how partisanship is the dominant approach across newsrooms in Thailand, purporting that journalists in senior roles are entitled to give their own opinions, which in turn, are “strongly impacted by the personal – and sometimes financial – connections they enjoy with a range of power holders” (p. 211). McCargo (2012) connects this finding with aspects of the Polarised Pluralist media system model in Southern Europe by Hallin & Mancini (2004), particularly with the characterisation of the Italian press as it stood decades ago.

These observations by McCargo (2012) help to inform this research proposal in terms of potential behaviour by Vietnamese journalists. The study proposed will explore whether partisanship is indeed the ‘Asian norm’, in contrast to the Western paradigm of professionalism.
3.2.2 Media Accountability in Transitional Media Landscapes

The study in Jordan was conducted by George Hawatmeh, a media practitioner based in Jordan, and Judith Pies, a researcher at the Erich Brost Institut for International Journalism. Hawatmeh & Pies (2011) describe the media landscape in Jordan as having undergone significant shifts as a result of political and economic changes as well as due to the rise of mass media technologies. The main finding of the study, as reported by Hawatmeh & Pies (2011) saw that “the process of the development of media accountability instruments has been more of a demand by the regime than by the journalists themselves, and the effort is geared to serve the regime’s purposes, thus limiting the instruments’ efficacy and potential” (p. 101). Established media accountability instruments identified by Hawatmeh & Pies (2011) include a code of ethics developed by the country’s journalist association, ombuds committees as well as letters to the editor. Innovative media accountability instruments include websites dedicated to examining the media scene in Jordan. One of the key conclusions as a result of the study by Hawatmeh & Pies (2011), and of relevance to this research proposal, is the question of who is holding the news media accountable in Jordan and for what purpose? Hawatmeh & Pies (2011) purport that “the historically cosy relationship between the state and the media is under threat from the manoeuvring between the need for more freedom and the tighter controls the regime wants to impose, especially on online news websites” (p. 112). Hawatmeh & Pies (2011) say that the accountability instruments that exist do so under the regime, which is in contradiction to the concept of self-regulation. Some of these examples in Jordan resonate with examples of the impact of new technology in Vietnam as per section 2.2 Vietnam’s Media Landscape and the challenges for Vietnamese government in balancing its goals of promoting technology and restricting criticism online.

Given the state control of the media in Vietnam as highlighted earlier in the literature review, the case study of media accountability in a transitional context is highly relevant for this proposed study and helps to inform the undertakings of this research proposal, including its methodology.
3.2.3 Media Accountability in the Vietnamese Context

3.2.3.1 Political Context

A study on media accountability in Vietnam must take into account the country’s political context, particularly the level of impact on the media as a result of the transition that took place in Vietnam following Doi Moi, the country’s reform program in 1986. Despite the transition, the country’s media system structure retained its Leninist prototype (Heng, 2001). This structure gave the state:

- “Proprietorship of all forms of mass media thus excluding private ownership. This makes the press reliant on the party for licensing facilities and financial matters, for example, access to printing presses, editorial premises, and operating funds;
- Decisive role in staffing, particularly the senior positions;
- Guidance in the form of regular directives that cover ideological, political, and organisational matters;
- Operating custodial institutions to enforce point” (Heng, 2001, p. 214).

The structure imposed by the state on the media appears in contrast to a country in transition, particularly one that’s pushing for new markets and foreign investment with the establishment of Doi Moi. Researchers such as Gainsborough (2010) suggest that despite these years of reform involving extensive engagement with a wide range of neoliberal actors, the “state in Vietnam remains little unchanged in terms of its underlying political philosophy and many of its practices” (p. 157). These findings called for Gainsborough (2010) to question the Western dominant ideology of neoliberalism given the minimal impact it has seen on developing countries such as Vietnam. Tay & George (1996) suggest that the idea of the media serving as an independent check on the government, as per the Western media paradigm, does not prevail across Asian governments. Tay & George (1996) put forward that in much of Asia, as in other developing regions, the justification for the media “is instead to increase national unity and identity in nation building” (p. 10). Tay & George (1996) go further to purport that this stance by governments in the Asian context may appear “like a case of governments not wanting to have their darker corners illuminated by
the foreign media and of local media wanting to protect their markets” (p. 20). But they also emphasise that it’s important to understand that these ideological justifications are specific to media in Asia and policy makers cannot be blinkered by the agendas and perspectives that are embedded in Western ideologies. In other words, Tay & George (1996) stress that the media in Asia must differ to the Western paradigm due to the diversity of its cultural values and agendas. Nearly 20 years later, literature remains consistent in that the dominant media ideologies from the West have not had the predicted influence on Vietnam as they may have had in other countries in the region. Nguyen (2014) says that the difference between Vietnam and other recently industrialised countries “lies in its entrenched bureaucratic interests and party ideology, which pre-date the reform era and continue to dominate the post-reform political process” (p. 90). As illustrated, the literature that currently exists in terms of Vietnam’s political ideologies and the flow-through to the media is captured at a macro level. It highlights a need to delve deeper into research on the country’s political beliefs and the influences this may have on media accountability instruments.

While the literature so far shows that Vietnam’s political ideologies have remained firm despite the period of transition, other researchers reveal some glimpses of change in the years following such as societal interests being more diverse as well as attracting more attention by the government (Gainsborough, 2010). Despite the media still being state-controlled, the Gainsborough (2010) says more perspectives are now represented as well as the media having the potential to influence politicians to respond to a perceived public mood (p. 167). Gainsborough (2010) refers to this occurrence as “the emergence of a hybrid state form not uninfluenced by neoliberal ideas and practice but where indigenous thinking and modes of operation remain dominant” (p. 172). But still, Gainsborough (2010) asserts that the state’s self-image has undergone very little change particularly in terms of the relationship it asserts as appropriate between itself and its citizens. It’s an argument also supported by Beresford (2008) who says that despite the state making the “decisive step to abandon the central planning model of socialism and adopt a market-oriented socialist economy under state guidelines, socialism appears as far away as ever two decades on” (p. 221). But other researchers remain more hopeful, such as Cain (2013) and McKinley (2007). While pragmatic about the constraints in terms of the state’s control over the media, the researchers are also optimistic on the media’s own drive
for accountability and professionalism. Cain (2013), who conducted ten months of field research within the country’s capital of Hanoi and its commercial hub Ho Chi Minh City, asserts that “the media do not always act in tandem with Party interests. They instead attempt to exploit the growing space between the regime’s political censorship of the media and the need to use the media as tools of economic development and of curbing corruption” (p. 3). McKinley (2007) is even more upbeat, attesting to Vietnam’s history of defying established paradigms and “if any country can break the paradigm that discredits state media as a force against corruption, Vietnam may be the country to do it” (p. 2). The line of study for both of these researchers, which includes a focus on censorship and corruption reporting, falls the closest in terms of existing academic research on media accountability in Vietnam. However it only touches the surface when it comes to assessing the viability of media accountability instruments and strengthens the validity of the object of study for this research proposal.

The work of McKinley (2007) also explores the connection between Vietnam’s politics and the media in terms of the country’s press laws, which are laws established by those in power that claim to enable freedom of the press. According to Heng (2001), laws pertaining to press freedom were first introduced in the country in 1957, followed by the Press Law in 1990 and its amendments in 1999. The changes in the late 1990s included an expansion on the section of freedom of speech and press freedom “to include clauses that specifically forbid any individual or organisation from obstructing the press in its legitimate work of news gathering” (Heng, 2001, p. 220). But in line with views from McKinley (2007), Heng (2001) notes the contradictory nature of the country’s press laws by describing how “for each clause that appears to strengthen provisions for the freedom of information, other clauses proscribe that very principle by obliging the press to follow the leadership of the party and propagate its ideological line and policies” (p. 219). The researcher expands on this premise by highlighting how debates in the country’s National Assembly on elements of the Press Law can be considered as “a debate over mere technicalities just for the sake of being seen to be debating and providing political dressing for a very debilitated form of press freedom” (p. 220). Other literature demonstrates how this position by the government is often connected to its political ideologies. When examining the establishment of controls such as press laws in a general Asian context,
Tay & George (1996) observe that there’s a tendency for higher level of controls than in the West, particularly around starting up and running media. The researchers describe the Asian model “as being ‘consensual’ as opposed to ‘conflictual’, respectful of good government rather than adversarial and more self-restrained in sensitive racial, ethnic and religious matters” (p. 22). Tay & George (1996) also say that media in communist and other authoritarian systems start out with “firmly ideological missions, although, like the political structures and societies they serve, they are now best described as being in transition” (p. 22). As highlighted, research on the country’s press laws focuses on the challenges in putting these seemingly contradictory regulations in practice. As revealed in section 2.0 Object of Study, the country’s Press Law has recently been revised and will come into effect in 2017. The recency of these changes adds to the value of this research proposal in terms of an opportunity for new research around the impact of these changes on the country’s media accountability instruments.

3.2.3.2 Market Context

Literature on Vietnam’s market context and its impact on the media post the reforms in 1986 helps to inform this research proposal. The major driving force of Doi Moi was economic growth and market expansion after years of the state imposing a disastrous economy (Heng, 2001). The researcher says the state was at a point where it was “no longer in a financial position to continue with the high-subsidy, low-productivity situation that it caused” (Heng, 2001, 215). It resulted in an economic climate where authority and control needed to be relaxed to make way for the market to grow and expand. As a result, Vietnam saw significant growth in its economy as well as the introduction of new business interests and some decentralisation to regions outside of the central government in the north (Gainsborough, 2010). In the years following Doi Moi, researchers note some positive outcomes of the country’s economic transition. Beresford (2008) describes the decade of the 1990s as one that saw high GDP growth rates, a reduction in poverty, increased openness across the government as well as recognition of cultural diversity. However the researcher also noted some of the negative outcomes including an increase in crime, challenges in terms of availability across public health and a spike in levels of inequality. Beresford (2008) noted that “most people in 2006 were better off than they had ever been and
the expectation is that things will improve further” (p. 222). However, research on the action by the Vietnamese government in terms of the media at this time was in contrast to the theme of the government being ‘market’ facilitating’ (Beresford, 2008). The researcher says that “Vietnamese policy statements have consistently expressed an intention to implement “state guidance” of the market, primarily through domination of the “commanding heights” by state enterprises (Beresford, 2008, p. 223). In terms of the implications for the media, Heng (2001) says it brought change to the industry such as no longer being able to rely on the state for salaries and free newsprint. Heng (2001) says that prior to Doi Moi, editors never had to worry about circulation rates and revenue. But perhaps more significantly in terms of the media’s adaption to working within the country’s new marketisation frame was the expectation that Vietnamese media would tackle corruption as a means of being highly visible to international markets in terms of fighting corruption. Cain (2013) says in resulted in “passionate debates occurring in the press over political corruption in the police force and the state, various environmental projects, the overall direction of the Party, and Vietnamese society” (p. 7). But at the same time, he concurs the media remained aware of the boundaries. On reporting of corruption, McKinley (2007) says “few editor-in-chiefs favour this type of coverage because it’s not safe…they may be dismissed by the state if their coverage is “inappropriate”, many practice self-censorship” (p. 11).

The literature reviewed highlights the challenges faced by Vietnam’s media in its market context. The study put forward as part of this research proposal will add to the existing knowledge in terms of the impact of the economic transition on media accountability. Areas such as the development of the media market, size, level, competition as well as salary and working conditions of journalist will be explored in-depth.

3.2.3.3 Public Context

Literature in terms of the public context relating to media accountability in Vietnam remains limited to date, particularly in terms of media legitimacy, trust of the government as well as perception by journalists of their audiences. It’s a topic briefly covered by both Gainsborough (2010) and Heng (2001) who examine the public
sphere both pre and post the economic reforms respectively. As might be expected, the state’s relationship with the public was formally managed via party controlled organisations prior to the reforms (Gainsborough, 2010). The state controlled “what media people were permitted to read or listen to” and “generally, the tentacles of the security apparatus were far-reaching” (Gainsborough, 2010, p. 164). However, research also highlights that not all of society was “flat” during this period, with Gainsborough (2010) purporting that members of society used money, patronage and connections to “operate outside of the central plan” (p. 165). While it’s not explicit in the text, themes across the literature indicate trust of the government may not have been particularly strong prior to the reforms due to members of society willing to operate outside of the government’s mandate when and where possible. It connects with research by Heng (2001) post the reforms who says that the need for the media to expose corruption and inappropriate official behaviour was stemmed by the state, who needed to boost the regime’s flagging legitimacy with a Vietnamese public weary of official incompetence and corruption” (p. 215).

The public is one of the key audiences to which the media remain accountable and the literature available has shown there’s limited research on this topic in Vietnam to date. It’s clear the study proposed will make a vast contribution to this knowledge base particularly in terms of the public’s sense of media legitimacy and trust in the government.

3.2.3.4 Professional Context

Literature on the media professional context in terms of media accountability is also limited, once again highlighting the relevance of this research proposal. The study by McKinley (2007) on self-censorship touched on the higher education opportunities available in Vietnam. McKinley (2007) reports journalism skills for the country’s practitioners remain low. While writing skills are considered reasonable, she purports graduates have “limited knowledge of politics and economics, and are ill-equipped to build contacts, deal with ethical issues, or identify news stories” (p. 15). And despite a professional code of ethics issued by the Vietnam Journalist Association, McKinley (2007) says many practicing journalists are unaware of its existence and do not know the contents.
4.0 Research Problem, Questions, Objectives and Limitations

4.1 Research Problem

As illustrated extensively throughout this research proposal, media accountability isn’t a new topic in media and communication studies but it’s still one yet to be explored in-depth outside of a Western context, particularly in regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America (Fengler et al., 2011). Highlighted in the literature review were some related related studies in an Asian context, such as the application of Hallin & Mancini’s (2012) model of media systems in China and Thailand. However, media accountability instruments were not a specific focus of these studies and only captured briefly as part of applying the professionalisation dimension of the model to the Chinese and Thai media landscapes. Another relevant study highlighted in the literature review and one of instrumental value to this research proposal is the study on media accountability instruments in Eastern Europe and the Arab world (Fengler et al., 2011). The topic of media accountability in transitioning media landscapes was drawn upon with a study in Jordan. These studies are useful to inform this research proposal as they are the closest to research on media accountability instruments in an Asian or transitioning media context. In turn, the research problem driving this research proposal can clearly be defined as a lack of knowledge across academic scholarship on the potential for media accountability in Vietnam through traditional and innovative instruments. There’s currently no academic research on whether such instruments exist in Vietnam, or even academic research on the potential for the effective existence of such instruments. The relevancy of this as a research problem, in addition to contributing to media and communications scholarship, is further justified on review of the recommendations of other similar studies (Fengler et al., 2014, p. 278), which include:

- The need for policy-makers and development agencies to push forward at the EU level as well as at the national level the area of media accountability in countries in transition.
- The need for Western actors to support countries in transition in the establishment of a sound system of media self-regulation, in order to diminish state influence on the media.
• The need for scholars to be mindful of the role they can play in the creation of a ‘culture of media accountability’.

As such, the identified objects of study across Vietnam for this research proposal will be of value to the knowledge base that currently exists in terms of media accountability instruments in countries with developing and transitional media systems outside of a Western context. It may be considered ambitious for the findings from the proposed research to have an impact across Vietnam’s media policy-makers, therefore the most likely outcome will be at the educational and professional level, feeding into the educational systems for the country's journalists as well as the country's professional journalists association.

4.2 Research Questions

The constructs identified in the theoretical framework help to inform the development of research questions to address the defined research problem of a lack of knowledge across academic scholarship on the potential for media accountability in Vietnam through traditional and innovative instruments. The research questions are also justified in that they remain unanswered in the search across existing literature and academic research. Research questions, as opposed to hypotheses, were established for this research proposal due to the exploratory nature of the proposed study. The five questions, which have been adapted from previous studies on media accountability instruments such as Fengler et al. (2014) and von Krogh (2012), are as follows:

• RQ1: Which traditional or innovative media accountability instruments exist in Vietnam?
• RQ2: How has the potential for media accountability in Vietnam evolved since the country’s economic transition in 1986 was introduced?
• RQ3: Which context factors (political, market, professional, public) influence the emergence, visibility, efficiency and impact of traditional and innovative media accountability instruments in Vietnam?
• RQ4: How do journalists in Vietnam perceive, practice and evaluate traditional and innovative media accountability instruments?
• RQ5: Which factors enable or disable media accountability activity among journalists in Vietnam?

4.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research proposal are based on contributing to: 1) media and communication scholarship and 2) journalism education. First, given the lack of research on this topic in Vietnam, contribution to academic journals on the research findings features prominently across the objectives. Second, the opportunity to provide useful resources for media professionals in Vietnam as a result of the research is also desired in terms of research project outcomes. Ideally, practical tools such as guidelines or models of best practice of media accountability will be developed as part of the research findings and incorporated into journalism education curriculum across the country’s higher education institutions. As indicated in the literature review, the options available for quality journalism higher education appear limited. The country’s professional journalist associations also appear to be underused and having little impact across the profession. In turn, proposed objectives for this research proposal are as follows:

• Objective 1: Develop a map of media accountability instruments in Vietnam and contribute this knowledge to media and communication scholarship.
• Objective 2: Identify the path for media accountability in Vietnam following its transition in 1986 through to today, and contribute this knowledge to the growing body of media and communication scholarship on media accountability across transitioning and developing countries.
• Objective 3: Identify the context factors enabling and disabling media accountability instruments in Vietnam and contribute this knowledge to media and communication scholarship.
• Objective 4: Develop guidelines/a model for Vietnam’s journalist association on best practice across effective media accountability instruments.
• Objective 5: Identify areas for guidelines/a model of best practice across media accountability instruments to be incorporated into curriculum across Vietnam’s higher education institutions’ journalism programs.
4.4 Research Limitations

A question raised earlier in this research proposal was on why Vietnam had not previously been an object of study for the examination and classification of media accountability instruments? From an academic sense, a potential reason considered was the proliferation of Western-centric models, principles and foundations relating to media accountability. However, other reasons for the lack of previous research may be from a practical viewpoint, such as some of the challenges in conducting research in Vietnam. Many researchers have highlighted the complexities of undertaking research projects in Vietnam, such as Kyouraku (2010) who says “there are many difficulties with interviewing people in Vietnam, because the Vietnamese government practically restricts free research activities” (p. 11). Barriers are also explicit specific to research across the country’s media profession, such as the case of Cain (2013) and his interviewees (journalists) seeking anonymity or being reluctant to be interviewed. Another challenge is the politically sensitive nature of the proposed research topic and its potential to critique state-controlled news organisations in a country where criticism of state policy is considered an offence (Davis, 2016). Some of these challenges will be addressed as part of this study by applying for secondary supervision at an international university operating in Vietnam. The importance of engaging with researchers locally is imperative to the success of this research project, as opposed to being seen as a ‘solution’ directed by the West for the country’s media landscape. Local researchers and research assistants will also support the smooth delivery of this research project's methodology, assisting with the nuances of conducting research in Vietnam. RMIT University, an Australian university with operations in Vietnam, has been identified as a potential source of research secondary supervision and preliminary discussions with the higher degree research team at RMIT are already underway. Any potential challenges in terms of language (the researcher has limited written and spoken Vietnamese language skills) will be addressed by engaging a Vietnam-based research assistant to provide support with translation and interpretation. Research grants and funding opportunities, such as through the Australian embassy in Vietnam or international development agencies operating in the country, will be sourced to cover the costs associated with resourcing research support.
5.0 Methodology

The methodology for this research proposal is focused on 1) Vietnam’s economic and political contexts; 2) Vietnam’s media landscape; 3) Vietnam’s media accountability instruments; and 4) Vietnamese media professionals’ perceptions of media accountability. In turn, the populations of interest are identified as follows:

- Vietnamese researchers in media and communication disciplines.
- Media-related documentation and reports published in Vietnam from government and non-government organisation sources.
- Vietnamese media professionals, such as journalists and editors.

The research instruments to be employed across these populations include focus groups, document analysis, semi-structured interviews and a survey. Table 4 presents the overarching approach in terms of the research instruments, populations and corresponding research question to be addressed. It should be noted that some of the research questions will be answered by more than one instrument.

Table 4: Overview of Research Instruments, Populations and Corresponding Research Questions

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<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Research Question to be Addressed</th>
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| Focus groups                | Vietnamese researchers in media and communication disciplines | • RQ1: Which traditional or innovative media accountability instruments exist in Vietnam?  
• RQ2: How has the potential for media accountability in Vietnam evolved since the country’s economic transition in 1986 was introduced? |
| Document analysis           | Media-related documentation and reports published in Vietnam from government and non-government organisation sources | • RQ2: How has the potential for media accountability in Vietnam evolved since the country’s economic transition in 1986 was introduced? |
| Semi-structured interviews  | Vietnamese media professionals                      | • RQ2: How has the potential for media accountability in Vietnam evolved since the country’s economic transition in 1986 was introduced?  
• RQ3: Which context factors (political, market, professional, public) influence the emergence, visibility, efficiency and impact of traditional and innovative media accountability instruments in Vietnam?  
• RQ5: Which factors enable or disable media accountability activity among journalists in Vietnam? |
The use of focus groups with Vietnamese researchers as part of this research proposal will enable theoretical and disciplinary constructs of media accountability to be discussed and explored. This approach to ground the focus groups in academic scholarship is described by Barbour (2013) as a method of capturing form and process rather than output. The researcher says focus groups structured in this way are “prized for their capacity to illuminate empirically a theoretical construct” (p. 313). In addition, document analysis will be drawn upon to expand on the commentary collected during the focus groups. Coffey (2013) says there are “many research questions and settings that arguably cannot be investigated adequately without reference to the production and use of documentary materials” (p. 368). The researcher purports that the use of document analysis as part of a qualitative study enables the use of documents to act as vehicles for understanding social and organisational practices and behaviour. Semi-structured interviews with media professionals will further substantiate the potential for media accountability instruments in Vietnam. Tracy (2013) says interviews “provide opportunities for mutual discovery, understanding, reflection, and explanation via a path that is organic, adaptive, and often times energising” (p. 132). Finally, a survey instrument will be employed as “a mechanism to understand individuals’ views, attitudes, and behaviours in a variety of areas” (Cowles & Nelson, 2015, p. 13).

As can be seen, this research proposal takes on a mixed-method approach. It’s deemed necessary for the proposed object of study given its complexity and exploratory nature. Researchers on research methodology analysis purport that “mixed-method research that combines quantitative and qualitative techniques is essential for many complex research projects whose goals require analysts to draw on the orientations and characteristic strengths of both traditions” (Goertz and Mahoney, 2012, p. 4). Furthermore, the methodology identified for this research proposal is also validated given similar approaches taken by scholars in studies on media accountability, such as Fengler et al. (2011), Fengler et al. (2014) and von Krogh (2012).
5.1 Population Definitions

5.1.1 Vietnamese Researchers in Media and Communication Disciplines

The population of Vietnamese researchers across media and communication disciplines will be drawn from staff based at universities and other research institutions operating in Vietnam. In focus will be researchers at academic bodies that offer journalism or media-related studies or researchers at research centres across the related academic disciplines.

5.1.2 Media-Related Documentation or Reports published in Vietnam from Government and Non-Government Organisation Sources

This population includes documentation published across relevant government departments and non-government organisations pertaining to the media landscape. It will focus on documentation and reports to help provide a chronological representation of the shifts across Vietnam’s media landscape since the country’s economic transformations in 1986.

5.1.3 Vietnamese Media Professionals

This population includes journalists and editors. It follows a similar approach to classifying the Vietnamese media population as that of Cain (2013), who conducted interviews with 29 journalists in Vietnam as part of his field study on reporting of corruption in the media. It should be noted that of the 29 media professionals interviewed by Cain (2013), 27 wished to remain anonymous. It’s an approach common when conducting research in Vietnam and also seen across the work of McKinley (2007) and Gainsborough (2010), where the sources used remained anonymous. The classification of ‘journalist’ for the purposes of this study is taken from Fengler et al. (2014), as someone who:

1. Works for a journalistic news outlet (and not for PR publications, motion pictures, etc).
2. Undertakes journalistic activity (in contrast to the mainly technical or organisational fields of occupation in the media industry).

3. Is occupied full-time or almost full-time, i.e. earn 50% or more of their income from journalism (in contrast to part-time or honorary occupations).

This definition is deemed appropriate for journalists in Vietnam, given it was also applied to define journalists in transitioning and developing contexts outside of a Western scope in the study by Fengler et al. (2014).

5.2 Sampling Strategies

The sampling strategies to be employed across the populations include snowball sampling, theoretical-construct sampling, stratified sampling and random sampling. Table 5 presents the overarching approach in terms of the research instruments, populations and corresponding sampling strategy.

Table 5: Overview of Research Instruments, Population and Corresponding Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Sampling strategy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>Vietnamese researchers in media and communication disciplines</td>
<td>Snowball sampling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Document analysis</td>
<td>Media-related documentation and reports published in Vietnam from government and non-government organisation sources</td>
<td>Theoretical-construct sampling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Vietnamese media professionals</td>
<td>Stratified sampling Random sampling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Vietnamese media professionals</td>
<td>Stratified sampling Random sampling</td>
</tr>
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</table>

5.2.1 Vietnamese Researchers in Media and Communication Disciplines

Snowball sampling, which is defined by Tracy (2013) as “a method for reaching difficult-to-access or hidden populations” (p. 136), will be employed across this population. This means that the sampling selection will rely heavily on the researcher’s engagement with an educational institution operating in Vietnam, as identified in section 4.4 Research Limitations. RMIT University, an Australian university with operations in Vietnam, has been identified as a potential source of research secondary supervision. In turn, academic staff at RMIT in Vietnam who fit
this study’s criteria will be drawn upon to refer/facilitate access to academics/researchers in this field at other educational institutions in Vietnam. It’s expected the sample selection will predominantly include academics/researchers who have an in-depth knowledge of the changing face of the Vietnamese media landscape post the country’s political transformation in 1986. The sample is also likely to comprise of Vietnamese nationals however people with nationalities outside of Vietnam but with strong knowledge and experience across Vietnamese media will also be considered. While engagement with RMIT University in Vietnam is considered a critical step to form the sample required, preliminary desktop research has identified academics/researchers at the following institutions for potential inclusion as part of the study:

- The Faculty of Journalism and Communication at Vietnam National University, Hanoi (http://www.ush.vnu.edu.vn/)
- The Faculty of Journalism and Communication at Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City (http://en.hcmussh.edu.vn/)
- The Academy of Journalism and Communications at Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (http://english.hcma.gov.vn/)
- The Communications, Media and Culture postgraduate centre at University of Stirling (Vietnam) (https://www.stir.ac.uk/)

5.2.2 Media-Related Documentation and Reports published in Vietnam from Government and Non-Government Organisation Sources

Theoretical-construct sampling is the approach selected for this population. This sampling strategy is apt due to it enabling the collection of data that aligns with established “theoretical characteristics or conceptual frameworks” (Tracy, 2013, p. 146). As identified in Table 1, a study across this population will help to answer the research question on the evolution of Vietnamese media as a result of the country’s economic shifts. In turn, the conceptual framework to be drawn upon to support the theoretical-construct sample method will be the media systems model by Hallin & Mancini (2004). However, a clear definition of this sample will only be possible following focus groups with Vietnamese academics/researchers, who will be asked for direction on the most relevant documentation and reports for analysis. But despite
the inability to develop a strict-sampling plan for this population at this stage, preliminary desktop research has identified documentation and reports from the following government and non-government organisation sources may be relevant for the proposed study:

- The Ministry of Information and Communications: The government ministry in Vietnam responsible for state administration of newspapers, publishing, posts, telecommunications and internet, broadcasting, radio frequency, information technology, electronics, radio, television and national media infrastructure (http://www.mic.gov.vn/).
- The National Assembly: Vietnam’s legislative body and the highest body of state power. Nearly 500 members are elected to the National Assembly for five-year terms, with the body meeting twice a year. The National Assembly debate state legislation such as the country’s media laws (http://dbqh.na.gov.vn/)
- The Vietnam Journalists Association (VJA): The country’s professional body for journalists with approximately 15,000 registered media practitioners, as at 2009. The Vietnam Journalists Association appears to be affiliated with the state however its structure is unclear and will be investigated further during the study. The headquarters of the VJA is in Hanoi, the country’s capital (http://vja.org.vn/vi/).
- The Independent Journalist Association of Vietnam (IJAVN): A smaller professional body with around 64 registered members, as at 2014. Based in Ho Chi Minh City, the IJAVN appears to be independent of the state (http://www.ijavn.org/).

5.2.3 Vietnamese Media Professionals (Semi-Structured Interviews)

Stratified sampling will be the technique employed across the population of Vietnamese media professionals for the semi-structured interviews. Stratified sampling is effective when there are subgroups within a population, with these groups divided into homogenous groups and then random sampling used to select individuals within each of these groups (Cowles & Nelson, 2015, p. 21). The subgroups identified across the population of Vietnamese media professionals include 1) employment by
different media type (print, radio, television and online) as well as 2) employment by journalistic hierarchy (management or operational level). This strategy follows the approach taken by Fengler et al. (2014) in their study on media accountability. At this point, there’s no publicly available data in Vietnam on the breakdown of journalists into the subgroups by media type or journalist hierarchy. Therefore, a collaboration with the country’s media professional organisations including the Vietnam Journalists Association and the Independent Journalist Association of Vietnam will be critical to the engagement with journalists and the development of samples for the semi-structured interviews. In addition to the support by both of the associations in finding members willing to be interviewed, it may also involve negotiation by the locally engaged educational institution, RMIT University, to support the organisation of interviews with media professionals directly. Based on previous research by Cain (2013) and McKinley (2007) that involved interviews with Vietnamese media professionals, it’s expected the sample will include around 30 people.

5.2.4 Vietnamese Media Professionals (Survey)

Both stratified and random sampling will be used across the population of Vietnamese media professionals for the survey, using the same breakdown of the media professional population by media type and journalist hierarchy as the semi-structured interviews. Due to a lack of data on the breakdown across the media profession, quotas can’t be provided for this research proposal in terms of the number of media professionals from across each media type and each journalist hierarchy to be surveyed. However, data on the total population of media professionals is available (despite it being outdated), with approximately 15,000 media professionals registered with the Vietnam Journalists Association in 2009 and another 64 media professionals registered with the Independent Journalist Association of Vietnam in 2014. In turn, the total sample population can be established broadly at this point. This calculation will employ the same method applied by the Fengler et al. (2014) study, which included an estimated standard error of 0.05. Therefore, given the media expert population in Vietnam is roughly 15,064 as at 2009, the sample size determined for the survey is 74 media professionals. However, within the work by Fengler et al. (2014), a minimum sample size of 100 was set. Therefore, the approximate figure of the survey sample in Vietnam is 100 media professionals. This figure will also be
confirmed during the focus groups with Vietnamese researchers across media and communication disciplines to get an understanding of any previous experience across this group in terms of surveying the country’s media professionals and the sample size obtained.

It should be noted that conducting a survey with media professionals in Vietnam might be ambitious given the sensitivities around members of the sample providing comment on state policy, as highlighted in various sections throughout this research proposal. Therefore, the survey will remain anonymous and confidential. The Fengler et al. (2014) study encountered the same challenges when examining the country of Tunisia, where the country’s political situation at the time of the survey resulted in the researchers conducting face-to-face interviews instead. However, until the likelihood of a similar situation in Vietnam is confirmed through further research, this research proposal progresses the approach of undertaking a survey.

5.3 Data Collection and Analysis

5.3.1 Focus Groups with Vietnamese Researchers in Media and Communication Disciplines

Data collection for the focus groups will involve planning elements such as the format, length, number of participants, payment/compensation, strategic groupings, facilities, accessibility considerations, assignment of focus group responsibilities, employment of a screening questions, use of a moderator script/questions and confirmation of attendance (Tracy, 2013, p. 171). Throughout the three-year PhD research period, the proposed timing of the focus group process is from month five in year one through to month one in year two, as can be seen in section 8.0 Timeline. In terms of data analysis of the focus groups, the approach prescribed by Barbour (2013) will be employed, which includes conversation analysis, non-verbal communication cues, content and thematic analysis. A preliminary focus group moderator script/questions has been formulated for the purpose of this research proposal and is included as Appendix 1, bearing in mind it will be refined throughout the course of the research. It should be noted that the focus group methodology proposed may encounter some challenges in terms of cultural communication issues, such as
participants being unwilling to freely speak in front of others. The consideration of the Vietnamese cultural attribute of ‘losing face’ (Pham Thi Hong, 2014), which is a sense of having projected positive qualities, roles or rights threatened, must be factored into the focus groups findings.

5.3.2 Analysis of Media-Related Documentation and Reports published in Vietnam from Government and Non-Government Organisation Sources

Data collection techniques employed for the analysis of media-related documentation and reports published in Vietnam by government and non-government sources will include an examination of relevant literary, textual or visual devices which enable the presentation of “information to be shared and ‘stories’ to be presented” (Coffey, 2013). Throughout the three-year PhD research period, the proposed timing of the process for the document analysis is month one in year two through to month nine in year two, as can be seen in section 8.0 Timeline. The analytical strategies that will be employed across the data collected will include technical, linguistic and conceptual components as well as an analysis of the content contained within each device. A preliminary document analysis template has been formulated for the purpose of this research proposal and is included as Appendix 2, once again bearing in mind it will be refined throughout the course of the research.

5.3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews with Vietnamese Media Professionals

The collection of data as part of the semi-structured interviews with Vietnamese media professionals will take place either face-to-face or online through Skype. In both cases, a third party in the form of an interpreter may also be required to participate in the interviews. Throughout the three-year PhD research period, the proposed timing of the process for the interviews is month one in year two through to month 12 in year two, as can be seen in section 8.0 Timeline. Analysis of the interviews will take an extensive and intensive approach, through comparison and contrast, refinement of concepts and data coding. As outlined by Tracy (2013), “coding is the active process of identifying data as belonging to, or representing, some type of phenomenon” (p. 189). The data analysis method for the interviews will first use open coding to deduct and condense data and will be followed by axial coding to
determine connections and develop more abstract codes. Memos and jottings will also be in practice as part of the analysis procedure. A preliminary semi-structured interview guide has been formulated for the purpose of this research proposal and is included as Appendix 3, however it will be refined throughout the course of the research.

### 5.3.4 Survey of Vietnamese Media Professionals

Data collection of the survey will involve electronic distribution using an online survey tool such as SurveyMonkey or questback. It will be sent to an email database of media professionals meeting the sample quotas according to media type and journalist hierarchy. This database will be established over the course of the research and is also heavily reliant on collaboration with both the Vietnam Journalists Association and the Independent Journalist Association of Vietnam. As per the survey conducted by Fengler et al. (2014), the English version of the survey will be translated into Vietnamese using a qualified translator. It will then be back-translated into the original language to ensure no deviation from the original wording. Pre-testing of the survey will also be employed. Throughout the three-year PhD research period, the proposed timing of the entire process for the survey is month eight in year two through to month nine in year three, as can be seen in section 8.0 Timeline. Analysis of the survey will largely be in the form of descriptive statistics however some inferential statistical methodology may also be employed. A preliminary survey outline has been formulated for the purposes of this research proposal and is included as Appendix 4, however it will be refined throughout the course of the research.

### 5.4 Period of Data Collection

There are two periods in focus for this research proposal’s subject of study, which are as follows:

- **Historical:** The first period of data collection aims to establish a chronological overview and deep understanding of the evolution of media accountability in Vietnam since the country’s economic transition was introduced in 1986. The populations and methodology in focus for this type of data collection includes:
1) focus groups with Vietnamese researchers in media and communication
disciplines; 2) analysis of media-related documentation and reports published
in Vietnam from government and non-government organisation sources; and
3) semi-structured interviews with Vietnamese media professionals.

- Current: The second period of data collection aims to present a snapshot of
where media accountability instruments are placed within Vietnam’s current
media landscape. The populations and methodology in focus for this type of
data collection include 1) semi-structured interviews with Vietnamese media
professionals and 2) the survey of Vietnamese media professionals.

5.5 Anticipated Ethical Issues

Tracy (2003) says while “procedural ethics provides universal edicts for all research,
situational ethics refers to ethical issues that arise in specific contexts or sample
populations.” (p. 243). Of the guiding questions on situational ethics shared by the
researcher, several relate to this research proposal:

- “Should I return to my research site to share my results even if these results
might offend or harm some parties? What if I no longer feel welcome there?

- “Which audiences – participants, readers, or other researchers – deserve to be
most taken care of in this situation?” (p. 244).

The research proposal in section 4.4 Research Limitations has already addressed some
of the sensitivities of politically-related research in Vietnam as well as the constraints
for individuals to freely conduct independent research. These questions once again
highlight the considerations the researcher must factor in when contacting members of
the proposed research populations. It should also be noted that it’s not only about
being ethically aware but also mindful of cultural considerations.
6.0 Preliminary PhD Dissertation Structure

This research proposal includes a preliminary structure of the contents of the full PhD dissertation, which is provided in Table 6. It must be noted that this is only a tentative outline and revisions are expected to be made throughout the course of the study.

Table 6: Preliminary PhD Dissertation Structure

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Section</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1.1 Background 1.2 Purpose of the Study</td>
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| 2.0 | Object of Study                              | 2.1 Vietnam’s Economic and Political Contexts 2.2 Vietnam’s Media Landscape  
2.3 Vietnam’s Media Accountability Instruments 2.4 Vietnamese Media Professionals’ Perceptions of Media Accountability |
| 3.0 | Research Problem, Questions, Objectives and Limitations | 3.1 Research Problem 3.2 Research Questions 3.3 Research Objectives 3.4 Research Limitations |
| 4.0 | Key Concepts and Terms                       | 4.1 Principles of Media Accountability with a focus on Transparency, Self-Regulation and Reader Participation  
4.2 Media Accountability Instruments 4.3 The Audience for Media Accountability 4.4 The Context for Media Accountability  
4.5 Media Accountability in a Transitioning or Developing Media Landscape 4.6 Media Accountability within the Media System Model Framework |
| 5.0 | Literature Review                            | 5.1 Media Accountability in an Asian Context 5.2 Media Accountability in a Transition or Developing Media Landscape  
5.3 Media Accountability in the Vietnamese Context 5.3.1 Political Context 5.3.2 Market Context 5.3.3 Public Context 5.3.4 Professional Context |
| 6.0 | Methodology                                  | 6.1 Population Definitions 6.1.1 Vietnamese Researchers in Media and Communication Disciplines  
6.1.2 Media-Related Documentation and Reports Published in Vietnam from Government and Non-Government Organisation Sources 6.1.3 Vietnamese Media Professionals  
6.2 Sampling Strategies 6.2.1 Vietnamese Researchers in Media |
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<td>6.4 Period of Data Collection</td>
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<td>6.5 Ethical Issues</td>
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<td>7.0</td>
<td>Results</td>
<td>7.1 Existence of traditional or innovative media accountability instruments in Vietnam</td>
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<td>7.2 The evolution of the potential for media accountability in Vietnam since its economic transition in 1986</td>
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<td>7.3 Context factors (political, market, professional, public) influencing the emergence, visibility, efficiency and impact of traditional and innovative media accountability instruments in Vietnam</td>
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<td>7.4 Perception, practice and evaluation by journalists in Vietnam of traditional and innovative media accountability instruments</td>
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<td>8.1 The development of a map of media accountability instruments in Vietnam and its contribution to knowledge across media and communication scholarship</td>
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7.0 References


Heng, R. H. K., (2001). Media Negotiating the State: In the Name of the Law in Anticipation. *Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 16 (2)*, 213-237.


### Research Timeline

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#### PhD Research Proposal
- Feedback from reviewers during defense incorporated into proposal
- Final version of proposal approved by supervisor

#### Collaboration with RMIT University in Vietnam
- Potential supervisors identified
- Proposal forwarded to potential supervisors
- Secondary supervisor from RMIT University confirmed

#### Funding Schemes
- Identify potential funding schemes
- Funding scheme applications

#### Locally-engaged Research Assistant (dependant on funding applications)
- Call for support from RMIT University in Vietnam in terms of identifying suitable research assistant
- Employ research assistant

#### Methodology

**Focus Groups**
- Confirm population identification of Vietnamese researchers in media and communication disciplines
- Focus group design (format, length, facilities, accessibility, etc)
- Data collection
- Draft of journal article 1 on focus group data results
- Review of journal article by supervisor and secondary supervisor
- Submission of journal article

**Document Analysis**
- Confirm population identification of media-related documentation and reports published in Vietnam from government and non-government organisation sources
- Theoretical-construct sampling
- Document analysis design
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Draft of journal article 2 on document analysis data results
- Review of journal article
- Submission of journal article

**Semi-Structured Interviews**
- Confirm population identification of Vietnamese media professionals
- Stratified sampling followed by random sampling
- Interview design
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Draft of journal article 3 on interview data results

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**Notes:**
- The table above outlines the research timeline for a PhD proposal, including key milestones and activities for each month from January to December 2023.
- Feedback from reviewers during defense has been incorporated into the final proposal, which has been approved by the supervisor.
- Potential supervisors have been identified, and the proposal has been forwarded to them.
- Secondary supervisors from RMIT University have been confirmed.
- Funding schemes are being identified, and applications are being prepared.
- A call for a research assistant has been made, and one has been employed.
- Methodology for focus groups, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews is outlined, including data collection, analysis, and article submission processes.
## 8.0 Research Timeline

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Post Research Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback from reviewers during defense incorporated into proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Final version of proposal approved by supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration with RMIT University in Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Potential supervisors identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proposal forwarded to potential supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary supervisors from RMIT University confirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Funding Schemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identify potential funding schemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Funding scheme applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Locally-engaged Research Assistant (dependent on funding applications)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Call of support from RMIT University in Vietnam in terms of identifying suitable research assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engage research assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Confirm population identification of Vietnamese researchers in media and communication disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group design (format, length, facilities, accessibility, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Draft of journal article 1 on focus group data results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Review of journal article by supervisor and secondary supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Submission of journal article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Confirm population identification of media-related documentation and reports published in Vietnam from government and non-government organisation sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Theoretical-construct sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Document analysis design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Draft of journal article 2 on document analysis data results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Review of journal article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Submission of journal article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-Structured Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Confirm population identification of Vietnamese media professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stratified sampling followed by random sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interview design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Draft of journal article 3 on interview data results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Methodology

**Focus Groups**

- Confirm population identification of Vietnamese researchers in media and communication disciplines
- Focus group design (format, length, facilities, accessibility, etc.)
- Data collection
- Draft of journal article 1 on focus group data results
- Review of journal article by supervisor and secondary supervisor
- Submission of journal article

**Document Analysis**

- Confirm population identification of media-related documentation and reports published in Vietnam from government and non-government organisation sources
- Theoretical-construct sampling
- Document analysis design
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Draft of journal article 2 on document analysis data results
- Review of journal article
- Submission of journal article

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

- Confirm population identification of Vietnamese media professionals
- Stratified sampling followed by random sampling
- Interview design
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Draft of journal article 3 on interview data results
Appendix 1: Preliminary Focus Group Discussion Guide

Following is a preliminary discussion guide for the proposed focus groups with Vietnamese researchers in media and communications disciplines. The focus groups are designed to help answer:

- RQ1: Which traditional or innovative media accountability instruments exist in Vietnam?
- RQ2: How has the potential for media accountability in Vietnam evolved since the country’s economic transition in 1986 was introduced?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Discussion guide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political context</td>
<td>Formal intervention with the media, such as through media law, regulation and media policy arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market context</td>
<td>Media markets, such as size and level of competition, level of state ownership, advertising revenue, relations between media organisations and advertisers as well as salaries and working conditions of journalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional context</td>
<td>Institutional arrangements developed for the profession that foster accountability, transparency and responsiveness, education quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media accountability instruments in Vietnam</td>
<td>Existence of media accountability instruments in Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public context</td>
<td>Discussion on how journalists’ perceive their audience and vice versa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of technology</td>
<td>Impact of technology on the media landscape and on media accountability instruments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Preliminary Document Analysis Template

Following is a preliminary document analysis template for the proposed analysis of media-related documentation and reports published in Vietnam from government and non-government organisation sources. The document analysis aims to help answer:

- **RQ2**: How has the potential for media accountability in Vietnam evolved since the country’s economic transition in 1986 was introduced?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Document source</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-government organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Document date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Type of document</td>
<td>Internal report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Document location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Document author (or creator)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Author (or creator) position</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Funding source for document</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Information sources for document</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Document audience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Method of document distribution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Document audience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Document information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.1 Purpose of the document</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2 Key messages of the document</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3 Impact of the document on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.4 Information gaps/questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unanswered in the document</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Preliminary Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Following is a preliminary semi-structured interview guide for the proposed interviews with media professionals (journalists and editors) and researchers in media and communications related disciplines. The interviews are designed to help answer:

- **RQ2**: How has the potential for media accountability in Vietnam evolved since the country’s economic transition in 1986 was introduced?
- **RQ3**: Which context factors (political, market, professional, public) influence the emergence, visibility, efficiency and impact of traditional and innovative media accountability instruments in Vietnam?
- **RQ5**: Which factors enable or disable media accountability activity among journalists in Vietnam?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Question themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Perception of the biggest changes across the profession since the country’s transition in 1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Perception of the impact of laws, regulations and external media policy across daily journalistic practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Description of working conditions and salaries, feelings towards external market influences such as advertisers/commercial interests, thoughts on ‘official’ versus ‘unofficial’ (underground) media organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Perception on training and education opportunities across the profession,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Perception on the employment of internal accountability mechanisms such as codes of ethics and internal policies, knowledge and engagement with the country’s journalist associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Perception of audience (media users)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Perception of the impact of technology on the media landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Perception of the different types of media accountability instruments, both traditional and innovative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Engagement/experience with media accountability instruments, both traditional and innovative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Perception of media accountability across the profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Problems or challenges for the profession and the implementation of media accountability instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Thoughts on the future for media accountability in Vietnam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: Preliminary Survey Questions

Following are preliminary survey questions for the survey with media professionals (journalists and editors). The survey is designed to help answer:

- RQ4: How do journalists in Vietnam perceive, practice and evaluate traditional and innovative media accountability instruments?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options for answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>About the individual</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Which area(s) of media do you work? | • Daily newspaper  
• Weekly newspaper  
• Magazine  
• Radio  
• Public Television  
• Online news  
• Other |
| What is your employment status? | • Employed full-time  
• Employed part-time  
• Freelance |
| How many years of professional experience in media do you have? | • Less than 1 year  
• 1-5 years  
• 6-10 years  
• 11-15 years  
• 16-20 years  
• More than 20 years |
| What is your job title? | • Editor  
• Journalist  
• Trainee journalist  
• Freelance |
| What is your gender? | • Male  
• Female  
• Other |
| **Training/education** | |
| What formal training have you had in journalism? | • No formal training  
• In-house training in a news outlet  
• Vocational diploma/Certificate in journalism  
• Journalism school  
• University degree in journalism  
• Journalism-related postgraduate degree |
| Where did your formal training take place? | • Vietnam  
• Outside of Vietnam. List where. |
| Did your training/education include instruction on journalism ethics? | • Yes  
• No  
• Do not recall |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>About the workplace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Which areas do you cover in your work as a journalist or editor?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Regional/local/community news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• General news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Arts/Leisure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other – please specify:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your workplace have a code of ethics?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To whom do you feel responsible as a journalist?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please rank on a scale from 1 (I don’t feel any responsibility towards) to 5 (I feel high responsibility towards)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My conscience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My colleagues in the newsroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Journalistic standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My target audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The public in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Our advertisers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Religious authorities/groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other – please specify:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which of these media accountability instruments have you heard about?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Company editorial guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ombudsperson/Readers’ editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In-house media blog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Legal department/media lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• User comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Laws regulating the media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional codes of ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Press council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Regulatory authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Journalism trade journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Media criticism in the news media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Online media criticism by journalist bloggers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Print or broadcast satire/comedy about the media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Blogs about the media, written by members of the public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Viewers’ associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Criticism on social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Journalism education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Academic analysis of journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• NGOs/Foundations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other(s) – please specify and rank as appropriate:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Which of these media accountability instruments have you used? | • Company editorial guidelines  
• Ombudsperson/Readers’ editor  
• In-house media blog  
• Legal department/media lawyer  
• User comments  
• Laws regulating the media  
• Professional codes of ethics  
• Press council  
• Regulatory authority  
• Journalism trade journals  
• Media criticism in the news media  
• Online media criticism by journalist bloggers  
• Print or broadcast satire/comedy about the media  
• Blogs about the media, written by members of the public  
• Viewers’ associations  
• Criticism on social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.)  
• Journalism education  
• Academic analysis of journalism  
• NGOs/Foundations  
• Other(s) – please specify and rank as appropriate: |
| How often do you use these media accountability instruments? | • Company editorial guidelines  
• Ombudsperson/Readers’ editor  
• In-house media blog  
• Legal department/media lawyer  
• User comments  
• Laws regulating the media  
• Professional codes of ethics  
• Press council  
• Regulatory authority  
• Journalism trade journals  
• Media criticism in the news media  
• Online media criticism by journalist bloggers  
• Print or broadcast satire/comedy about the media  
• Blogs about the media, written by members of the public  
• Viewers’ associations  
• Criticism on social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.)  
• Journalism education  
• Academic analysis of journalism  
• NGOs/Foundations  
• Other(s) – please specify and rank as appropriate: |

*Please rank from 1 (never), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), 4 (often), 5 (frequently)*
| Which of these instruments does the news publication use where you work? | Company editorial guidelines  
Ombudsperson/Readers’ editor  
In-house media blog  
Legal department/media lawyer  
User comments  
Laws regulating the media  
Professional codes of ethics  
Press council  
Regulatory authority  
Journalism trade journals  
Media criticism in the news media  
Online media criticism by journalist bloggers  
Print or broadcast satire/comedy about the media  
Blogs about the media, written by members of the public  
Viewers’ associations  
Criticism on social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.)  
Journalism education  
Academic analysis of journalism  
NGOs/Foundations  
Other(s) – please specify and rank as appropriate: |
|---|---|
| How do you value criticism from these instruments? | Company editorial guidelines  
Ombudsperson/Readers’ editor  
In-house media blog  
Legal department/media lawyer  
User comments  
Laws regulating the media  
Professional codes of ethics  
Press council  
Regulatory authority  
Journalism trade journals  
Media criticism in the news media  
Online media criticism by journalist bloggers  
Print or broadcast satire/comedy about the media  
Blogs about the media, written by members of the public  
Viewers’ associations  
Criticism on social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.)  
Journalism education  
Academic analysis of journalism  
NGOs/Foundations  
Other(s) – please specify and rank as appropriate: |

Please rate on a scale from 1 (no impact at all) to 5 (very high impact)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you perceive users comments on news posted online?</td>
<td>• Rating scale as indicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Please rate on a scale from 1 (no use at all) to 5 (very high use)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know about the Vietnam Journalists Association?</td>
<td>• Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know about the Independent Journalist Association of Vietnam?</td>
<td>• Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you a member of the Vietnam Journalists Association?</td>
<td>• Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I was, but am no longer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you a member of the Independent Journalist Association of Vietnam?</td>
<td>• Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I was, but am no longer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know about the Vietnam Journalists Association’s code of ethics?</td>
<td>• Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know about the Independent Journalist Association of Vietnam’s code of ethics?</td>
<td>• Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>