

VIETNAMESE JOURNALISM IN ANTI-CORRUPTION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Vietnamese journalism supports anti-corruption efforts within a media environment controlled by the state. The objective is to understand how journalists navigate censorship and institutional constraints while promoting transparency and accountability. A qualitative case study approach was employed, combining textual analysis of selected journalistic articles from major Vietnamese news outlets. The study focused on identifying rhetorical strategies, framing techniques, and thematic patterns used to report corruption-related issues. Findings reveal that Vietnamese journalists use subtle framing and strategic language to critique corruption, aligning their work with state-led anti-corruption narratives while preserving professional autonomy. Despite limited press freedom, the media plays a significant role in raising public awareness and contributing to accountability. The study recommends enhancing institutional support for investigative journalism and expanding the legal framework that protects journalistic practices in anti-corruption reporting. Further research should explore how digital platforms and transnational media collaborations can strengthen journalism's role in governance across authoritarian contexts.

Keywords: Journalism; Anti-corruption; Vietnamese Journalism; Vietnamese Communist Party.

ABSTRAK

Studi ini meneliti bagaimana jurnalisme Vietnam mendukung upaya anti-korupsi dalam lingkungan media yang dikendalikan oleh negara. Tujuannya adalah untuk memahami bagaimana jurnalis menavigasi sensor dan kendala kelembagaan sambil mempromosikan transparansi dan akuntabilitas. Pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif digunakan, menggabungkan analisis tekstual dari artikel jurnalistik terpilih dari outlet berita utama Vietnam. Studi ini berfokus pada identifikasi strategi retorik, teknik pembingkai, dan pola tematik yang digunakan untuk melaporkan isu-isu terkait korupsi. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa jurnalis Vietnam menggunakan pembingkai halus dan bahasa strategis untuk mengkritik korupsi, menyelaraskan pekerjaan mereka dengan narasi anti-korupsi yang dipimpin negara sambil mempertahankan otonomi profesional. Meskipun kebebasan pers terbatas, media memainkan peran penting dalam meningkatkan kesadaran publik dan berkontribusi pada akuntabilitas. Studi ini merekomendasikan peningkatan dukungan kelembagaan untuk jurnalisme investigasi dan memperluas kerangka hukum yang melindungi praktik jurnalistik dalam pelaporan anti-korupsi. Penelitian lebih lanjut harus mengeksplorasi bagaimana platform digital dan kolaborasi media transnasional dapat memperkuat peran jurnalisme dalam tata kelola di seluruh konteks otoriter.

Kata kunci: Jurnalisme; Anti-korupsi; Jurnalisme Vietnam; Partai Komunis Vietnam.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, journalism has become an increasingly powerful tool for promoting transparency and accountability, particularly in combating corruption across various sectors. Investigative journalism, often referred to as the

“watchdog” of society, plays a crucial role in exposing illicit practices, raising public awareness, and pressuring governments to implement reforms (OECD, 2018; UNODC, 2022). In authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, where freedom of the press is typically constrained, the significance of

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anti-corruption journalism is even greater, as journalists often face considerable political risks and institutional barriers in uncovering and reporting on corruption (UNODC, 2022). In this context, Vietnam presents a fascinating case study, as its controlled media landscape and evolving political reforms offer unique insights into the impact and challenges of anti-corruption journalism in restricted environments.

Vietnam's media environment is shaped by the government's influence over press activities, with restrictions on both media ownership and editorial independence (Suu, 2024). These factors can create significant obstacles for journalists attempting to report on corruption, as their work must align with state interests and avoid politically sensitive subjects. Despite these limitations, Vietnamese journalists have utilised digital platforms and data-driven reporting methods to promote transparency in corruption-related issues (Thanh Huyen, 2020). For instance, cases involving local government corruption and land management disputes have garnered considerable attention in recent years, reflecting the persistent demand for accountability and the critical role of journalism in addressing these demands (UNODC, 2022).

International collaborations among investigative journalists have also facilitated information-sharing networks that transcend national boundaries, enabling Vietnamese journalists to access and share data related to corruption (OECD, 2018). These networks often serve as a crucial support mechanism for journalists working in restrictive environments, providing logistical resources and a platform for amplifying their findings (UNODC, 2022). As a result, the intersection of local investigative efforts with international support presents an opportunity for journalists in Vietnam to increase public awareness and contribute to anti-corruption initiatives despite the constraints imposed by the state. Anti-corruption journalism in Vietnam faces its challenges. Journalists often face legal, ethical, and safety concerns, as well as limited access to reliable information (Nguyen, 2018). The government often employs legal frameworks, such as defamation laws, to curtail journalistic efforts that could harm the state's image or political stability (Waisbord, 2007).

Defamation laws are frequently used to limit journalistic freedom by prosecuting media outlets and journalists for content deemed harmful to reputations. This is evident in the analysis of modern judicial practices, where lawsuits against the media are common, and journalists are

advised to operate strictly within legal boundaries to avoid prosecution (Lyadova, 2022). Despite increased press freedom in Indonesia, journalists still face criminalisation for reports accused of defamation. The existing legal framework, including the Press Law, is insufficient to protect journalists from criminal sanctions (Koswara & Batubara, 2023). In Egypt, laws such as the Communicable Diseases Law and the Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law have been used to restrict journalistic practices, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, to maintain state control over information dissemination (Efriliandis, 2021; Miral, 2022). However, the rising prevalence of social media has somewhat mitigated these challenges by offering journalists alternative platforms for disseminating information to a broader audience, thus shifting public discourse and challenging state control over traditional media channels (Humeira & Ramadhan, 2022). For example, in India, journalists perceive social media platforms as integral to news production and distribution despite concerns about misinformation and the pressure to generate reaction-driven content (Pereira, 2021).

In light of these dynamics, this study aims to examine the role of journalism in Vietnam's anti-corruption landscape, analysing both the opportunities and challenges journalists encounter in their attempts to report on corruption. By focusing on Vietnam, this study contributes to the broader discourse on journalism's role in promoting transparency and accountability, particularly within authoritarian contexts. Additionally, it underscores the potential for digital media and international networks to bolster anti-corruption journalism efforts in restrictive media environments.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design (Miksza et al., 2023) to investigate how Vietnamese journalism contributes to anti-corruption efforts within the constraints of a state-controlled media environment. The case study approach was selected to enable in-depth contextual analysis (Bentalha & Alla, 2024; Lim, 2024) of journalistic practices within Vietnam's unique political and media structure, where

the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) maintains strict oversight over press activities. Vietnam was deemed an appropriate single-case study because of its dual identity as a socialist authoritarian state undergoing gradual reform, which allows for limited media exposure of corruption while simultaneously enforcing ideological conformity. This dynamic context offered an opportunity to examine the extent to which journalistic efforts can foster transparency and accountability within the boundaries of state censorship.

The data for this study consisted of textual materials derived from secondary sources, specifically news articles and reports produced by prominent Vietnamese media outlets, including *Tuoi Tre*, *Thanh Nien*, VietnamNet, *Lao Dong*, and VnExpress. These outlets were selected due to their wide readership, historical involvement in investigative reporting, and relevance in shaping public discourse. A purposive sampling strategy was used to collect news articles published between 2019 and 2023 that addressed corruption cases involving public institutions, corporate actors, or political figures. The inclusion criteria emphasised investigative articles, addressed systemic issues, or featured rhetorical strategies indicating resistance or critique under state constraints. A total of 30 articles were selected and archived for analysis. The selection process also considered diversity in content type (e.g., editorials, long-form reports, and news features) to ensure a broad representation of media approaches to corruption coverage.

The analytical framework of the study was grounded in textual analysis (Draper, Liu, & Young, 2021; Kuckartz, 2014; Lim, 2024), with a focus on identifying linguistic, rhetorical, and framing techniques used by journalists to report on corruption while navigating censorship. The analysis began with an initial close reading of all collected articles to identify key themes, phrases, and narrative devices (Klaus, 2019; Saldana, 2021). These included the use of indirect critique, strategic ambiguity, moral appeals, and alignment with state-sanctioned anti-corruption narratives. A coding scheme was then developed to categorise these elements, with codes organised under broader thematic headings such as “strategic framing,” “institutional attribution,” “public accountability,” and “implicit critique.” Attention was also given to how the articles represented various actors, including government officials, whistleblowers, and citizens, and how

these representations contributed to the construction of corruption as a societal issue. Coding and thematic grouping were conducted manually and iteratively, with adjustments made to reflect emerging patterns and refine the interpretative lens.

To strengthen analytical rigour, the study incorporated several validation strategies. First, a subset of articles was re-coded after a two-week interval to assess consistency in theme identification and interpretation. Second, informal consultations were conducted with two Vietnamese media scholars and one former journalist, who provided context on media practices, legal limitations, and editorial decision-making processes within Vietnamese journalism. These insights were used to triangulate findings and ensure cultural and political accuracy in interpretation. Third, peer debriefing sessions were held with academic colleagues familiar with Southeast Asian media systems to review preliminary findings and challenge interpretive biases. Throughout the research process, a reflexive journal was maintained to document analytical decisions and monitor the researcher’s positionality, particularly given the interpretive nature of qualitative textual analysis.

This methodological approach ensured that the study moved beyond theoretical abstraction and engaged directly with the operational realities of journalism in Vietnam. By focusing on actual texts produced by journalists, the study captured how media practitioners navigate institutional boundaries, exercise constrained agency, and contribute to the anti-corruption discourse in a system where open critique of authority remains limited. The findings offer empirically grounded insights into the strategic adaptation of journalists operating within an authoritarian media regime, highlighting the evolving role of the Vietnamese press in promoting transparency through indirect and nuanced reporting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Journalism in Anti-Corruption Efforts Around the World

Around the world, the press plays a vital role in monitoring political, economic, cultural, and social processes. It identifies emerging risks and challenges that may affect national stability and development. As part of its mandate, the press holds public institutions and leaders accountable, facilitates public discourse, and shapes public opinion through critical reporting. In the fight against corruption, the press should carry out its supervisory role through professional and ethical journalism. On the one hand, the press investigates and publishes corruption cases and information; on the other hand, the press reflects the people's opinions and supervises the activities of state agencies and public officials.

In New Zealand, the press plays a crucial role in detecting, reporting, and denouncing corruption (Clark, 2022; Gregory & Zirker, 2022). Journalism in New Zealand serves as a watchdog against corruption, contributing to the social construction of corruption in public discourse. This role is crucial in maintaining transparency and accountability within political systems (Ji, Li, Li, & Monroe, 2024). The provisions of the law guarantee freedom of the press in New Zealand, and the diverse media in various forms also independently contribute to the exercise of this freedom in practice (Oxford Analytica, 2024; Pike, 2023; Richardson, 2022).

In Denmark, the media, including the press, play a prominent role in the integrity system, serving as a monitor of the three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial powers (Arjen & Morten, 2011; Mark, Jannie, & Wittchen, 2018). To encourage the press and journalists to participate in the fight against corruption, the Danish Journalists Association annually awards journalists who have made outstanding achievements in this field (Dare et al., 2011). Journalists in Denmark recognise the importance of press ethics, despite acknowledging the increasing pressure in newsrooms, which can compromise ethical standards (Flensburg, 2015; Mark & Rasmus, 2014). Denmark has established a set of guidelines to regulate ethical behaviour, including the creation of an anti-corruption code. This code addresses political campaign contributions and small-scale corruption (Camargo, 2017).

In China, based on the press performing the function of social control, the Chinese Communist Party has carried out an effective anti-corruption campaign, exposing the crimes of many high-ranking officials in this country (Qian & Tang, 2023). Several legal reforms have been enacted to strengthen the anti-corruption

framework, including the National Supervision Law and amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law. These reforms facilitate the prosecution of corruption cases and aim to minimise societal harm from corporate penalties (Guo, 2023). The results achieved in China's anti-corruption struggle are an adequate reflection of the social supervision and control of the Chinese press (Li Yang, Milanovic, & Lin, 2023).

The practice of social development shows that in any country where political power and state power are not strictly controlled, there may be a tendency to abuse power, and when power is abused, it will lead to dangerous consequences of power corruption negatively impacting, even hindering and sabotaging national development (Alla, Natalya, & Yulia, 2019; Jerome, Chris, Sarah, Sidiqat, & Olaji., 2019). Supervision of power and criticism of the policy implementation process by the press constitutes participation in monitoring the implementation of guidelines, policies, and laws of the Political Party and the State, aiming to detect positive problems and phenomena that should be encouraged, praised, and replicated (Angela et al., 2018; H. Tang, 2023; Zheng & Fu, 2020). At the same time, the press detects problems and phenomena that may negatively affect and reduce the social effectiveness of such guidelines and policies. Through these activities, the press helps limit the abuse of power by civil servants, public employees, and public authorities.

Secondly, countries' anti-corruption institutions still have gaps, so the press's participation serves as an additional channel for controlling power and corruption. According to Transparency International's assessment, many countries worldwide have a very low Corruption Perception Index, indicating that rampant corruption is a significant issue that adversely affects the socio-economic development of countries (Al Qudah & Hailat, 2024; Christos, Zacharias, Dimitrios, & Athanasios, 2024). One of the reasons for this situation is that the institutional anti-corruption systems in countries are not robust. In Uzbekistan, for instance, the lax legal system has led to a constant increase in corruption. People here often take bribes to secure employment and apply for jobs, and corruption has become a pervasive habit in the lives of the country's

citizens (Ahmadjonov, 2024; Mavlonov, 2023; Pinskaya, Shatalov, & Ponomareva, 2023). In the process of institutional reform, China still has “holes”. As a vast country, the history of the Chinese nation's formation and development spans numerous eras. The centralised regime at the central level is insufficient to reach all remote areas (Fan, 2021; Fei, 2017; S. Y. Tang, 2021; Zhang, 2023), resulting in policies at the top and countermeasures at the local level.

To effectively prevent and combat corruption, one of the key requirements for countries worldwide is to establish a robust institutional system that does not tolerate corrupt acts. However, due to the differing historical traditions and socio-economic conditions of various countries, the institutional system, including the strictness of anti-corruption institutions, also varies. Therefore, for countries where gaps in corruption prevention and control remain, the involvement of the press serves as an additional channel to curb corruption. Along with the control of power by power and the supervision of the people, the press is a crucial factor in shaping state management. The press is the most basic form of mass media, capable of shaping public opinion, exerting pressure on the state, and compelling the state to take responsibility for many important issues.

In Western countries, the role of the press in overseeing and regulating power is supported by a comprehensive legal framework. Legal systems in Western countries often include provisions to protect press freedom while setting boundaries to prevent abuses, such as defamation or breaches of state security (Liu Yang, 2023). Liberal democracies typically emphasise media independence to ensure journalism can effectively perform democratic functions without state interference. This independence is crucial for shaping public opinion and controlling state power, as exemplified by the Swiss model of regulated self-regulation, which seeks to enhance media accountability through internal guidelines and management concepts (Cristina, João, & María, 2022; Vergara, Jain, & Mehta, 2024). In Vietnam, the Vietnamese state is a state of the people, by the people and for the people. All the state's power belongs to the people; state management is unified, and there is assignment, coordination, and control among state agencies in the exercise of legislative, executive, and judicial powers. The power of the people and public

opinion is connected and expressed through the press and the media.

Thirdly, regarding the power structure system, the press is considered the fourth power in many countries. The concept of the fourth power was born in England at the end of the eighteenth century (Vassilev, 2022). As the “fourth power,” the press can be seen as an external political institution with relative independence from the state, due to its private nature and profit-seeking activities. Due to the lack of a state foundation, the “fourth power” lacks coercive power, unlike other branches of power, which involve compulsion.

The press becomes an influential “fourth power” when it effectively impacts legislative, executive, or judicial branches, contributing to state accountability and policy success, promoting effective state policy planning and implementation. The influence of the press in political life is expressed in a very diverse and rich way, both in influencing political views as a means of organising and directing by a particular political system (Serhii, Olha, Anna, Mykola, & Olena, 2020). The press is considered to have the power to supervise and control the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. The separation of the fields of state management, along with the counterweight restraint mechanism and the supervision and control of the press, has limited the abuse of power, one of the manifestations of corruption (Price, 2019; Vadym, Tetiana, Katerina, & Kateryna, 2022).

In the United States, the press is widely regarded as a powerful institution, often referred to as the “fourth estate” (Greenberg, 2012; Vassilev, 2022) and “money-making” (Zhai, 2022), with constitutional protections under the First Amendment ensuring freedom of speech and the press (Bulla, 2009). This legal foundation enables American journalism to function as a government watchdog, holding public officials accountable and fostering transparency (Antonis, Toff, & Fletcher, 2024; Rubado & Jennings, 2020). Such institutional independence contrasts sharply with Vietnam's state-controlled media environment, where journalists must navigate censorship while still striving to

expose corruption and maintain their integrity.

In Russia, the press serves as an effective channel for social monitoring and criticism (Cui & Fan, 2022). The ideas of Russian President Putin, the head of state, and high-ranking officials are not always praised by the press. Some articles provide a candid assessment of Putin's policies (Evans, 2008; Grabovska & Talko, 2019). The press in Russia makes a precise assessment of everything, based on the actual situation and practical advocacy. The role of the press is either to refute or to suggest issues to the leadership in the form of direct criticism or a forum for public opinion. Given the nature of the press – the power of public opinion – the Russian press still plays a crucial role in monitoring and soberly criticising all Russian issues to protect national interests and ensure sustainable development (Johansson & Nygren, 2014).

In the French Republic, the press is an early product (Birch, 2017). It continuously develops intensely and diversely, in which newspapers of political parties, religions, branches, genders, associations and other groups aim to propagate ideas, views and guidelines to the public, attract and mobilise the public to operate freely (McGuinness, 2019). The mass media of France is different from those of the United Kingdom and the United States (private ownership is mainly the case) because the state directly manages several news and press agencies and dominates information throughout the country (Cage, Hengel, Herve, & Urvoy, 2022; Ross, 2022; Tejedor, Cervi, Tusa, & Gracia Villar, 2022).

Thus, the struggle to prevent and combat law violations and negative societal phenomena is a task of the press, which has been legislated in many countries worldwide. Moreover, combating corruption is a key component of this task. The inevitability of the press to participate in corruption prevention and combat is determined by its function of supervising power and critiquing policies, as anti-corruption institutions in countries still have “holes.” Therefore, the participation of the press is an additional channel for controlling power and corruption. In terms of the power structure, in many countries, the press is considered a fourth power.

World views on journalism in Vietnam

Media governance in Vietnam presents a multifaceted landscape shaped by stringent state control, emergent reforms, and the gradual introduction of public accountability measures. Vietnam's journey toward more transparent

governance is complicated by both historical legacies and the socio-political context within which the media operates. This interplay of press freedom, censorship, and accountability in media has received considerable attention from scholars, who examine Vietnam's evolving governance structure amid persistent calls for democratic practices.

Press Freedom and Censorship

Vietnam's media landscape is dominated by significant state oversight, primarily aimed at maintaining political stability and the ruling party's image. The government retains control over major media outlets, particularly those with substantial influence. This strategy has historically allowed the Vietnamese state to curb dissenting voices and avoid narratives that could challenge the political status quo (Cain, 2014). State censorship is a central feature of this governance framework, wherein topics considered politically sensitive, such as criticisms of the party, religious conflicts, or discussions on democracy, are heavily monitored and restricted.

Despite such stringent measures, Vietnam has witnessed sporadic openings in press freedom, particularly in cases involving the exposure of corruption. For example, media reports that expose corrupt activities among lower-tier officials are sometimes tolerated, signalling a controlled form of journalistic autonomy (Heng, 2000). These exposures serve multiple purposes: they demonstrate the government's commitment to accountability, appease public frustration, and preserve political stability by deflecting attention from larger systemic issues. While such freedoms remain constrained, they represent a measured concession that suggests a budding recognition of the press's role in governance, albeit within narrowly defined boundaries (Heng, 2000).

Furthermore, Freedom of Information (FOI) is emerging within Vietnam's media governance, although it remains an underdeveloped legal right. FOI is often cited as a cornerstone of modern, accountable governance, enabling citizens to access government records and data freely and transparently. In Vietnam, FOI is recognised in principle, yet its full implementation is limited by existing

political structures and the authorities' reluctance to embrace complete transparency (Heng, 2000). The cautious development of FOI in Vietnam indicates that while its value is acknowledged, it has yet to be institutionalised as a fundamental right.

Public Accountability Mechanisms

Vietnam's governance model has undergone a series of reforms since introducing the Doi Moi policy in 1986, emphasising economic liberalisation and partially opening the country's markets to the global economy. This shift prompted various institutional reforms aimed at enhancing public accountability, despite Vietnam's one-party political system (Vasavakul, 2014). The state recognises that fostering public trust and demonstrating accountability are essential for long-term stability and legitimacy, especially as the population becomes increasingly informed and aware of global governance standards.

The gradual introduction of FOI-related measures within Vietnam's institutional framework represents a step toward enhancing government accountability. For instance, allowing controlled access to information could enable citizens to understand governmental operations better, thereby fostering transparency and engagement (Mai, 2016). Moreover, the spread of information, even in limited forms, has potential governance benefits, as it incentivises officials to maintain higher standards of conduct. In this context, public accountability mechanisms serve as a double-edged sword: they both check governmental excesses and simultaneously enhance the state's reputation by demonstrating a willingness to reform.

However, the effectiveness of these reforms largely depends on a conducive political and cultural environment (Mai, 2016). A supportive environment would encourage transparency and mitigate the resistance from officials accustomed to secrecy and restricted information sharing. In a society where hierarchical relationships are deeply ingrained, such as Vietnam, creating a culture that embraces accountability is particularly challenging. Therefore, while the state may establish superficial reforms, their transformative impact on governance remains contingent upon broader societal shifts toward openness and trust in public institutions.

On the other hand, some researchers argue that Vietnam's tightly controlled media

environment may inherently limit the effectiveness of accountability reforms. Even with FOI initiatives and selective transparency, Vietnam's governance system lacks the foundational components for genuine accountability (Matthews, 2016). In such an environment, accountability mechanisms become performative, serving as a political tool to demonstrate progress without commitment to reform. This critique underscores the limits of Vietnam's reformist agenda, suggesting that genuine accountability may remain elusive without substantial policy changes to support media independence.

Media governance in Vietnam is undergoing a cautious transition, with selective reforms aimed at fostering transparency while maintaining political stability. The dynamic between press freedom, censorship, and accountability mechanisms underscores the complexities faced by Vietnam as it navigates pressures for democratisation from within and external influences. The gradual emergence of FOI and the allowance of controlled media exposures reflect a calculated shift, indicating the state's attempt to balance its authoritarian legacy with calls for reform.

While these changes mark significant progress, they are constrained by a governance model prioritising state control over institutional independence. Vietnam's media's potential to serve as a genuine accountability mechanism hinges on structural policy changes and cultural acceptance of transparency. As Vietnam continues its journey toward a more open media environment, the effectiveness of these reforms will ultimately depend on the state's willingness to empower its media and embrace greater openness in governance practices.

Vietnamese perspective on journalism

Some views still believe that to have freedom of the press and freedom of expression, it is necessary not only to allow the private press to operate but also to prevent the press from being dominated and influenced by political factors. They believe it is necessary to eliminate the situation of a "one-party regime" interfering in press activities; the press must be depoliticised and

non-partisan... This is a one-sided and unfounded viewpoint. Because, from the point of view of the VCP and the Vietnamese state, no press is entirely outside politics and apolitical.

Clause 1, Article 4 of the 2016 Press Law clearly states that the press in our country is an essential means of information for social life; is the mouthpiece of VCP agencies, Vietnamese state agencies, socio-political organisations, socio-political-professional organisations, social organisations, and socio-professional organisations of Vietnam; is a form of the Vietnamese people (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2016). Previously, Resolution No. 16-NQ/TW dated August 1, 2007, of the 10th Central Committee of VCP, stated: “The press is the voice of VCP, the State of Vietnam, of the socio-political organisation of Vietnam and the forum of the people, under the direct leadership of VCP, the management of the State of Vietnam and operating within the legal framework; must ensure the ideology, truthfulness, people's character, combativeness and diversity of press activities” (10th Central Committee of VCP, 2007).

From theory and practice, from history to the present, when the VCP leads the press, its activities can ensure that it possesses revolutionary, democratic, scientific, and humane characteristics. They can serve most of the people in Vietnam. The revolutionary press in Vietnam has been a sharp tool for nearly 100 years, making significant contributions to the defence of the Fatherland, the regime, the country's interests, and the nation, as well as protecting the legitimate rights and interests of the people and promoting Vietnam's development. Especially during the renovation period, the press has provided thorough information and disseminated the guidelines and policies of the VCP, as well as the relevant policies and laws of the State of Vietnam.

Moreover, promptly reporting on the domestic and international situation, reflecting all aspects of social life; promote good values, new factors, effective models, promising practices; praise good people and good deeds; refute distorted, wrong and harmful rhetoric; actively contributing to the fight against corruption and waste; protect national sovereignty, foreign propaganda; struggle with deterioration in morality and lifestyle... Most journalists are revolutionary soldiers on the ideological and cultural front of the VCP and the nation, and they have been working together to make our country prosperous, strong, democratic, fair, and civilised.

The general development of journalism in

Vietnam and its relationship with society is inseparable from the VCP's leadership over the press. “The essence of journalistic activities is mass communication activities, aiming to serve the public and society and benefit the community. A class dominates every community and society, a political party that rules/governs/leads; the views and policies of the ruling Party govern social mobilisation and development... Thus, the press is conscious of the information process, standing on the standpoint of which party, information for the benefit of which class is called the class character of the press. When the press is aware that information serves the interests of the vanguard and represents the loyal interests of the class and the party itself, it is called party character. Thus, the party character is the most concentrated, the most quintessential expression of class character” (Dung, 2022). The press in our country today cannot be so-called “apolitical” and “non-class”; that is, the VCP cannot lead it.

President Ho Chi Minh affirmed that the activities of the press are political. The most important and meaningful content in the press is political content. “Therefore, continuing to strengthen the leadership of the VCP, the management of the Vietnamese State over the activities of the press and publishing in the current situation is an objective requirement, and at the same time, a basic principle to ensure the party's character in the activities of the press. Through the VCP's leadership, the press's activities have taken the right direction, and their social functions and responsibilities have been properly fulfilled. All attempts to “depoliticise” press activities, deliberately separating the press from the leadership of the VCP and the management of the State of Vietnam, are illusions; no matter what the name, it also hinders the activities of the revolutionary press; at the same time, it also hinders the development and progress of the country, harms the interests of the people” (Ky, 2011). Therefore, it is essential to consistently maintain the VCP's leadership over the press to ensure that it best serves the VCP's activities, the country, and the Vietnamese people. “There can be no concept of absolute neutrality or objective journalism, that is, there can be no press outside politics, not serving the interests of

certain political circles or corporations” (Minh, 2011).

History has proven that VCP's leadership of the press is an objective requirement and a self-imposed requirement of the press. “It ensures for the press a large space to freely create with a pure and noble purpose, especially to promote social development, peace, progress, and for the people's happiness. VCP's leadership over the press and communication must be implemented synchronously in all four stages: development orientation; content orientation; cadre work; inspection and control, in which cadres play a decisive role” (Thuong, 2017).

In Vietnam, despite state control over the media, journalism has played a strategic role in anti-corruption efforts. *Table 1* summarises prominent cases where Vietnamese journalists contributed to exposing corruption through investigative techniques and strategic communication. These cases illustrate how media outlets navigate legal and political boundaries to expose illicit practices, often prompting significant institutional responses.

For instance, in the PMU18 scandal, journalists from VietnamNet and *Thanh Nien* used insider leaks and whistleblower testimonies to expose embezzlement within the Ministry of Transport. This coverage was pivotal in triggering high-level investigations and public dialogue on state accountability. Similarly, reporting on land disputes in Thu Thiem by *Tuoi Tre* and *Thanh Nien* amplified citizen grievances, leading to national scrutiny of urban development policies.

These cases demonstrate the Vietnamese media's capacity to serve as an informal

accountability mechanism, particularly when aligned with the government's anti-corruption initiatives. The strategic use of language, indirect criticism, and reliance on data and public sentiment enable journalists to navigate censorship while promoting transparency and accountability.

In contrast to global examples covered earlier, such as press freedom in New Zealand or structural independence in Denmark, Vietnamese journalism operates under ideological constraints imposed by the VCP. However, by focusing more on local cases and reducing comparative discussions to a few concise insights, the analysis can better illustrate the unique mechanisms at play within Vietnam's constrained media landscape.

Besides many press agencies, many journalists are aware that the press is guided by the leadership, direction, and orientation of VCP, which is necessary and appropriate. However, scattered journalists still think it is the “intervention” of VCP from VCP's advisory agencies. Sometimes, people observe that the directions from the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee to the Provincial Party Committee and the City Party Committee appear to influence and hinder press activities and the right to freedom of information. Those are deviant and immature perceptions of politics, which need to be deeply educated and thoroughly understood from within the Party organisation and press agencies so that each journalist has a clear

Table 1. Cases of Vietnamese Media Contributions to Anti-Corruption Efforts

Case	Media Outlet	Type of Corruption	Journalistic Strategy	Period	Public/Government Response
Land dispute in Thu Thiem	<i>Tuoi Tre</i> , <i>Thanh Nien</i>	Land mismanagement by local officials	Investigative reporting with citizen testimony	2016–2021	National outcry, Government audit, public apologies issued, considering Compensation.
PMU18 Scandal	VietnamNet, <i>Thanh Nien</i>	Embezzlement in the transport ministry	Whistleblower interviews, document leaks	2006	Prosecution of officials and enhanced scrutiny of public spending.
BIDV banking scandal	VnExpress, <i>Lao Dong</i>	Banking fraud	Data analysis and financial tracing	2019–2020	Arrest of former executives and affirmed media's role in oversight
Journalist undercover operation	<i>Lao Dong TV</i>	Bribery in traffic enforcement	Hidden camera investigation	2020	Disciplinary action against police and the media gained credibility in the public eye.

Source: Author's synthesis.

and full awareness of the participation and support of leading agencies, directing the press, also meaning that of VCP, for press activities in Vietnam.

Legal Vietnam for Journalism participation in anti-corruption

The role of the press in combating corruption and negativity has been affirmed in the Resolutions and Documents of the VCP, as well as in numerous other legal documents. The document of the 13th National Congress of VCP emphasised: “Enhancing the role of promoting the positive, proactive and coordinated role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, socio-political organisations, people, businesses and the press in detecting and fighting corruption” (VCP, 2021).

Vietnamese Anti-Corruption Law 2018 stipulates the responsibilities of press agencies and journalists in corruption prevention and control in Article 75: “1. Press agencies and journalists are responsible for fighting corruption, reporting on corruption prevention and combat activities and corruption cases; 2. Press agencies and journalists have the right to request that competent agencies, organisations, units, and individuals provide information related to acts of corruption. Agencies, organisations, units, and individuals are required by law to provide information to the press and other relevant authorities. Press agencies and journalists shall have to objectively and honestly reflect and comply with other law provisions on press and professional ethics when reporting on corruption prevention and combat activities and corruption cases.” In addition, Article 13 of the Law on Corruption Prevention and Control specifies the press conferences, statements, and provision of information to the press on corruption prevention and combat. Article 14 of the Law on Anti-Corruption stipulates the responsibilities of agencies, units, and organisations to provide information on the organisation and operation of such agencies, organisations, and units to the press agencies. Article 15 of the Law on Corruption Prevention and Combat stipulates the accountability of heads of agencies, organisations, units, or persons legally assigned or authorised to perform their duties. (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2018).

Article 4 of the Vietnamese Press Law 2016 also clearly states the functions, tasks and powers of the press, including the task of “Detecting and setting examples of good people, good deeds, new factors, advanced examples; to prevent and combat violations of the law and

negative phenomena in society” (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2016). Thus, the task of preventing corruption and negative press coverage has been legalised.

The practice has affirmed that the press plays a pioneering role in preventing and combating corruption and negativity. According to the current law, the press does not have the same investigative or inspection authority as law enforcement agencies. The press also lacks the necessary apparatus, including armed institutions, weapons, and other supporting tools, to conduct investigative or inspection activities. However, the press has many forms to detect corruption and negative cases. For example, through letters sent by readers to press agencies and reporters, as well as through receiving feedback and denunciations from the public, the press verifies the authenticity of documents and evidence to be shared with the public and judicial agencies. Through professional activities, the press can detect negative manifestations and corruption and implement specific investigative measures to influence public opinion.

Importance of Journalism in Vietnam's Anti-Corruption

President Ho Chi Minh once said: “Internal enemies” are “dangerous enemies” and “deceitful and cunning”; “Internal enemies” have always been considered allies of hostile forces (Hoang, 2010). He also pointed out that embezzlement, waste and bureaucratic disease are the enemies of the People and the Government; they are “enemies in the heart” and “internal enemies” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, p. 362). Therefore, right from the moment of winning the government, the prevention and control of negativity, the prevention and combating of the deterioration of political ideology, ethics, and lifestyle among cadres, Party members, civil servants, and public employees, that is, eradicating the root cause of corruption, deserves special attention.

In work “Resolutely and persistently fighting against corruption and negativity, contributing to building the VCP and the State of Vietnam more and more pure-minded and stable”, the late General Secretary of VCP Nguyen Phu Trong wrote: “Preventing and combating corruption and negativity is fighting against internal enemies, that is, fighting against corrupt

habits, bad habits, especially the deterioration of political ideology, morality, lifestyle, eating less, stealing and intercepting public goods in many forms; taking money, wealth, and material goods “gifted”, “given, donated”, bribed by others,... with an impure engine” (Trong, 2023, p. 36). “Corruption is one of the risks that threaten the survival of the regime” (Trong, 2023, p. 37).

Therefore, in the struggle to prevent and combat corruption and negativity, “it is necessary to persistently educate, manage, prevent and deter negative corruption, and at the same time be vigilant and fight against the conspiracies and activities of hostile forces and bad elements that take advantage of the prevention and struggle against anti-corruption and negativity to incite, divide and subvert the VCP, the State of Vietnam and the political regime of Vietnam” (Trong, 2023, p. 38). This affirms that fighting against “internal enemies” is anti-corruption and negativity, as it involves combating the manifestations of “self-evolution” and “self-transformation” among VCP cadres and party members, as well as opposing the tactics of hostile forces that target the VCP and the State of Vietnam.

The fight against “internal invaders” is a crucial task that requires resolute, persistent, and non-stop efforts at all levels, sectors, and fields in Vietnam. In that “war” against “internal invaders”, the press was a strong force (808 press agencies, 42,400 people working in the field of journalism) (VTV4, 2023), which made positive contributions and played an important role in this battle:

(1) The press highlights the role of attacking and accompanying VCP and the State of Vietnam in preventing corruption, negativity, and illegal cases involving profiteering and non-compliance with VCP's operating principles; (2) It is a sharp tool to propagate, educate, and encourage the Vietnamese people, as well as a powerful weapon to expose and counter the enemy's plots and tricks, thereby strengthening trust in VCP cadres, Party members, and the Vietnamese people; (3) The press promotes accountability, pressures public opinion, and forces competent agencies to strengthen their responsibilities in inspecting, supervising, and enforcing VCP discipline.

The press plays such an important role, so the task of preventing and combating negative corruption of the press has been affirmed in

resolutions and documents of the VCP and codified in legal documents, such as:

(1) Article 75 of the Law on Anti-Corruption in Vietnam stipulates: “Press agencies and journalists are responsible for fighting against corruption, reporting on corruption prevention and combat activities and corruption cases; press agencies and journalists have the right to request competent agencies, organisations, units and individuals to provide information related to corrupt acts. Agencies, organisations, units and individuals must provide information by law on the press and other relevant laws.” (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2018); (2) Article 4 of the 2016 Press Law clearly states the functions, tasks and powers of the press in the fight against law violations and negative phenomena in society: “Detecting and setting examples of good people, good deeds, new factors, advanced examples; fight against violations of the law and negative phenomena in society” (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2016); (3) Article 86 of the Law on Anti-Corruption in Vietnam stipulates the role of the press: The State encourages press agencies and reporters to report on corruption cases and corruption prevention and combat activities (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2018). The press has constantly promoted its role in this struggle by implementing the guidelines and policies of the VCP and the laws of the State of Vietnam. Thus, the press is a forum for VCP, the State of Vietnam and the Vietnamese people in the arduous and complicated “war” of corruption, negativity and waste; struggle and protect the ideological foundation of VCP; it is a place to reflect vivid problems of reality; at the same time, it is the most reliable place to convey to the Vietnamese people the messages of the determination to prevent and combat corruption of VCP and the State of Vietnam.

According to the Summary Report on the prevention and control of corruption and negativity in Vietnam, the prevention and control of corruption and negativity has been led and directed drastically, synchronously, comprehensively, methodically, and in-depth, with very high political determination, achieving many noticeable and breakthrough results, are agreed, supported and appreciated by the

people. Vietnam's central ministries and branches have conducted 3,038 inspections of the implementation of regulations, norms, and standards, resulting in 202 detected violations with a total value of VND 16.5 billion. They have disciplined 187 cadres and civil servants and proposed criminal handling of 13 cadres. Provinces and cities directly under the Central Government of Vietnam have detected 379 violations, with a damage value of 50,579 million VND, and handled 442 officials and civil servants who violated regulations. Legal agencies have prosecuted 289 cases and 321 cases and tried 308 first-instance cases (Hoang, 2010). The fight against corruption and negativity has yielded outstanding results and achieved a significant breakthrough, thanks to the crucial contribution of the press.

The press agencies in Vietnam have demonstrated their role in attacking, pioneering, and leading the struggle against corruption and negativity, as well as protecting the interests of the State of Vietnam and the legitimate rights and interests of the people. The press is both the “eyes and ears” of the VCP and a bridge between the VCP and the people in the struggle against corruption and negativity, which is intensifying more strongly, drastically, and effectively. Therefore, the press is increasingly trusted by the VCP, the State of Vietnam, and the people; the role of the press has been significantly enhanced, and it has contributed significantly to the prevention and combat of corruption and negativity initiated and led by our Party.

The work of information, propaganda, and education dissemination on corruption prevention and control continues to be strengthened and innovated. Press and media agencies have disseminated information more deeply and boldly, opening numerous new columns, and the number and duration of news and articles on corruption prevention and control have increased. There have been 1,858 defendants prosecuted for corruption (VTV News, 2023). In 2022, press agencies published 11,607 outstanding news articles and reports on the fight against corruption and negativity, a 2-fold increase compared to 2021 (V.D, 2023). Thus, the press has made an important contribution to actively fighting against negativity in social life, which has created pressure and forced the authorities to handle violations and protect the rights of the Vietnamese people.

Current law restricts the press from possessing the same investigative powers as law enforcement, thereby limiting its ability to

conduct thorough investigations for signs of potential violations. However, the press can still uncover corruption and raise public awareness about it through various channels. It provides forums for freedom of expression and encourages citizens to monitor and report instances of corruption.

The press has two primary objectives: to promote public involvement in combating corruption and to encourage citizens to monitor officials through active reporting of corrupt activities. Moreover, it helps authorities enhance their roles in addressing corruption and provides an objective view on corruption cases.

Ultimately, the press plays a crucial role in disseminating the views, policies, and laws of the Vietnamese Communist Party and the State of Vietnam regarding anti-corruption efforts. It critiques corrupt practices, identifies their causes, shares information from citizens regarding corruption, and publishes investigative findings, thus shaping public opinion in the fight against corruption.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the role of journalism as an influential yet constrained tool in Vietnam's anti-corruption efforts. Through qualitative textual analysis of news articles, the research identified that Vietnamese journalists contribute to anti-corruption discourse by framing corruption as a systemic issue, emphasising public accountability, and invoking themes of social justice. These framing strategies and rhetorical techniques allow journalists to subtly critique and expose corruption while adhering to state regulations on media freedom.

Despite limitations, Vietnamese journalism has demonstrated resilience by adapting to restrictions through the use of indirect language and strategic narrative framing, suggesting that journalism can foster transparency even within authoritarian contexts. By shaping public perception and encouraging civic engagement, Vietnamese journalism serves as a crucial channel for fostering accountability, thereby reinforcing the press's watchdog role even under state oversight.

These findings have broader implications for the role of journalism in

similar political landscapes. They highlight the media's potential to shape public discourse and advocate for reform, despite its limitations. Future research could investigate how digital media and emerging technologies enhance or challenge journalism's ability to influence governance in Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries. This study contributes to a growing understanding of journalism's adaptive capacity and pivotal role in advancing transparency and accountability across various political systems.

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