An Actor in the Vietnamese Media Landscape

A Case Study of the Online Newspaper VnExpress

Cecilia Eek & Erik Ellström

Abstract

An Actor in the Vietnamese Media Landscape
- A Case Study of the Online Newspaper VnExpress

Cecilia Eek and Erik Ellström

There are no private media in Vietnam, all media activity is owned and controlled by the State and the Vietnamese media landscape is therefore relatively closed and strangled. It is not allowed to produce any news material which criticise the government or put it in bad days. In 1997, the Internet was introduced in Vietnam and online newspapers started to establish.

Through investigating the underlying factors of the development and success of one of the biggest online newspapers in Vietnam, VnExpress, our study intends to describe how it has affected the Vietnamese media landscape. Based in Hanoi during ten weeks, we performed this minor field study with the support from Swedish International Development Cooperation Association, SIDA. Our case study is made from five in-depth interviews. The research questions deals with VnExpress in particular; how they have developed, how they consider their purpose as an online publication and what they find unique about their newspaper.

Through the empirical findings, we can distinguish a couple of factors with which VnExpress has affected the Vietnamese media landscape. First of all, we found that their policy of always reporting news in an objective point of view has made them respected among competitors and used by the same as a source of news material. Furthermore, their close contact to readers through different channels at the editorial, giving them the opportunity to express their thoughts, makes the readers engaged and able to form their own opinions about the society. To achieve the above, it is significant that VnExpress has a unique ownership allowing them to work as free and limitless as possible in a country like Vietnam.

Finally, we can see that the Vietnamese media landscape tends to become more open and we claim that online newspapers and Internet in general will have a great impact of its development.

Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

Politically, media is a central part of a society. Providing the public with information and news, it is a link between the people and the state. It is therefore an important tool for a developing country and for a democratic society. However, this requires an independent media which is not an object of governmental control.[1] Because media is important for the democratic development of a country and the general development of a nation, it is not only interesting, but also important to highlight and study a developing country like Vietnam where the regime and its control of media can be questioned. For the Vietnamese media actors, this implies restricted laws and regulations of what information is allowed and not.

When we looked into the Vietnamese media landscape, we heard about a newspaper that is different to other media in the country, VnExpress. This online publication has dominated the electronic newspaper market in Vietnam since its launch in 2001. It is difficult to understand why this newspaper has become more successful than its competitors in a media environment that is heavily regulated and controlled. Therefore, we wish to investigate the underlying factors to the success of VnExpress and if they somehow has affected the Vietnamese media landscape.

This Bachelor thesis depictures VnExpress and parts of the Vietnamese media landscape. It illustrates media and communication sciences in a culture different from the Western. Our results will be a base for more in-depth research within the area of subject and suggestions of further research are presented in the end of this thesis.

1.1 Problem description

When applying for the Minor Field Study Scholarship, we were investigating developing countries and found that Vietnam has a very unexplored and interesting media situation. Looking more deeply into this, we got in contact with an organisation that works with further education of journalists in Sweden and Vietnam.

Sweden and Vietnam have had cooperated in media questions since the early 1990's.[2] The support from Sweden has been through the organization Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, SIDA[3], which has several programmes for developing media in Vietnam. Institute for Further Education of Journalists, FOJO[4], is one of them. This organisation gave us a brief picture of the media landscape in Vietnam and inspired us with interesting view points to base a Bachelor thesis on. We decided on the online newspaper VnExpress, which was the first electronic newspaper in Vietnam and has made great success. It soon showed that this Internet publication is interesting in many other aspects, as it has unique conditions of ownership for instance.

Media in Vietnam today is owned and funded by the state and there is no press that is completely independent. Publishing a newspaper can only be done by organisations which apply for certain licenses issued by the government. All material published are under the responsibility of the organisation that is in charge of the newspaper. In the newspapers, the

---

[1] Beetham & Boyle, 1995: 25-27
[2] Elmqvist & Luwarso, 2006:7
[3] See Appendix 3
[4] See Appendix 3

state can only be criticised in terms of corruption, although any further or deeper debate about the state is not allowed because the socialistic system must never be questioned. It has happened that journalists have been imprisoned and that newspapers have been banned because of too strong criticism of the authorities. Self-censorship is common; however, no censorship in advance is being applied.[5]

With the above described media landscape of Vietnam, we started to reflect over how an online newspaper could become so successful under the existing circumstances.

The theoretical perspectives addressing the role of the press, state that the press should function as a two way communication channel between the state and the people to support the development of a country. Theories related to the Internet consist of the view that the Internet allows for the possibility to create anything anywhere with consequences of a continuous development of the world.

1.2 Aim

From the very first beginning, we wanted to see how the media landscape looked in Vietnam and how it has been affected by the introduction of Internet and online newspapers. It is quite obvious that the Internet has made great influence on the media landscape in one way or another. The interesting question is of course in what way it has influenced the media landscape. Has it become more open, which many of the theories around Internet claim, or has it made it easier to control media, which another theory suggests?

However, our Bachelor thesis is limited to only ten weeks, which makes it difficult to make a study like one described reliable and meaningful. In addition, the poor availability of earlier research about the Vietnamese media landscape would force us to exclude important parts of the research relating to this subject.

With this study we aim to investigate which significant factors underlying the development and success of VnExpress, as the media in Vietnam is strictly controlled and regulated by the state. Hence, we will put VnExpress in a greater context to see how this online newspaper has affected the Vietnamese media landscape. This case study is a base for further inquiries within this subject area.

Another approach could have been to make a comparison between VnExpress and another popular Vietnamese online newspaper, to try to distinguish the differences between them. Through the differences it might also have been possible to see significant factors which underlie the success of VnExpress. Comparing VnExpress with a Western electronic newspaper would also have been a potential study, trying to see similarities instead to finding factors important to the achievements of VnExpress.

---

[5] http://www.landguiden.se/pubCountryText.asp?country_id=187&subject_id=0

1.3 Definition of central concepts

The concepts central to our thesis are *media landscape* and *online newspapers*. By media we refer to all media in general which reaches the public, such as press, television, radio and Internet. In this context, we refer to landscape as the environment in which these media are produced and distributed. Online newspaper is defined as a newspaper publicised on the Internet, independent of if there is a paper version of the same. This concept will also be mentioned in terms of Internet publication and electronic newspaper. By the concept *objective* we refer to a perspective which is not biased in any direction or to anyone's advantage. Objective news reporting is when it simply renders an occasion and what really happened, independent of somebody's subjective point of view. Furthermore, *success* is another concept used frequently in our thesis and which we consider important to be defined. In our study, success refers to high amount of readers.

1.4 Structure

Our thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2. *Theoretical Framework:*
In this chapter the theoretical concepts and perspectives relevant to this thesis is presented. The perspectives underlie our thesis and are mentioned repeatedly throughout the study. The theoretical concepts covered include independent media, Internet and online newspapers among others.

Chapter 3. *Earlier Research*
Here, the former research within the subject area is described. We have covered a Swedish report about Vietnamese media and research about how the editorial work has changed with the introduction of online newspapers. We have also taken a closer look at a study about the Chinese Internet.

Chapter 4. *Problem Discussion*
In this chapter the purpose of this study is outlined together with the research questions. Additionally, we have described the central concepts used in our thesis as well as a report of the limitations of the study.

Chapter 5. *Background*
The background illustrates subjects which are relevant to the study and facilitates a general understanding of the research topic. It explains the political system in Vietnam, its current media landscape, the Vietnamese Press law, as well as a close description of VnExpress.

Chapter 6. *Methodological Approach*
This chapter presents the chosen method used to gather the empirical data and the specific techniques used to gather reliable data. Here, we also discuss the achieved credibility of our thesis.

Chapter 7. *Empirical Findings*
Here, we present the empirical data, as well as our analysis of the results.

Chapter 8. *Summary of Empirical Findings*
In this chapter we sum up our results and present the key findings which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 9. *Discussion*

Finally, in this chapter we discuss our key findings. We will tie the results to our theoretical framework and discuss the unique contributions of this thesis.

Chapter 10. *Reference List*

Here, we have listed the literature and other sources used to complete this thesis.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the following chapter we present a couple of theoretical concepts relevant to our thesis. These include perspectives of media as an independent contributor to a democratic society followed by the different possibilities to control media activities. Additionally, the vision of Internet as a destination where everything is possible is described, before some theoretical views of press is presented. Finally, we explain four different approaches which online newspapers can adapt.

2.1 The independence of Media

Media is important in many aspects. It is not only a channel used to provide people with information and news; it also plays a central political role in a society. Moreover, it is an inspector of the government and constitutor of a public forum for people to express their opinions. Simply, it serves as a significant channel between those with much power and the people, and promotes the democracy.[6] Actually, the expected positive position of media in society is based on its contribution to democratic political process and development. With media as a communication channel between people and state leaders, it is expected to give a truthful and fair picture of the society. The trust in media has increased a lot during the twentieth-century and its power of influence can be feared by some. However, if media does not fulfil the requirements of spreading true information, it would consequently harm and loose their function as well as their power of impact. It is important to remember that they have the significant role to serve as public communication forum in relation to democratic politics.[7]

For media to be able to fulfil this democratic function, it is essential that the media is free and independent, and is not dominated and controlled by the government itself or by strong private interests. Although, this independence of media relies very much on the professionalism and impartiality of the publishers, editors and journalists themselves.[8]

2.2 Freedom or control

Media is many times a question of freedom or control, two factors which always have played central roles. Books and newspaper press have always been means of communicating not only political opinions, religious views and news in general but also arts and cultural happenings and the like between people and the state. Freedom of expression has therefore always been questioned and somehow regulated for different reasons, either to protect the state or people from unwanted or inappropriate information. Depending on which type of media and what impact it has in society, it is regulated to various degrees and in various ways.

The shape of the political dimension of control depends on the extent the actual communication affects the exercise of power in society. When communication activities such as entertainment, fiction and fantasy are less interesting for the state to control, newspapers and television informational news are more likely to disturb the social law and order and are therefore more of interest to observe closely or control.

---

[6] Beetham & Boyle, 1995:25-26
[7] McQuail, 2003:5-6
[8] Beetham & Boyle, 1995:27

There are different degrees of control of media. The degree of control depends on the possibilities of actually controlling it and on what possibilities there are to actually have power over media. A media with a distribution which is easy to supervise is also the most simple and accessible to control and regulate. Media such as newspapers and other printed media in general together with local radio are relatively complicated to regulate. New technologies that allow manipulation of images and sounds, and the ability to publish material on the Internet have often been regulated by direct censorship, a method which many times have been proved ineffective. Another unsuccessful attempt to control media and new technology like Internet in particular, is the establishment of national borders to prevent undesired international communication. The latter is a consequence of new technology, which promotes freedom and new ways of communication, and is therefore exceedingly a target for control.[9]

2.3 The Web as a future paradise

Just as when other new technologies were first introduced, the Internet has often been seen in relation to the future and the possibilities it offers. When the radio came for example, it opened new ways to educate the people and thereby make them better persons. The new technology was a step to a better world and a future to dream about. The qualities of the web give the opportunities to create and develop communities without consideration of time and space. Furthermore, this is a way of making people more active and engaged which in turn promotes a truer and greater democracy. No other of the earlier forms of media could offer such extensive bank of information and global communication possibilities, which not only facilitates education among the people, but also opens up for new businesses opportunities. In other words- Internet is a future paradise.[10]

2.4 Four theories of press

History shows that society and media influence each other. While the society supports media economically, politically and technically, media has had impact on social development in various ways. The American Hutchins-Commission presented a report in 1947 which describes the relationship between the two in four theories of press which are based on political ideologies. These are *the libertarian theory, the social theory, the authoritarian theory* and *the soviet totalitarian theory.[11]* For Vietnam the two latter are of interest as these depicture the current media landscape in Vietnam very well. We will describe the two theories in more detail, although we will leave the libertarian and social theory without any further comments as we do not find them relevant to this particular study.

2.4.1 The Authoritarian Theory

In the authoritarian ideology all media are controlled by the government. The main task for mass communication in this theory is to vindicate and spread propaganda about the state politics and to entertain the audience. Censorship is commonly used to suppress unsuitable opinions and inappropriate news that may criticise the state. Only people loyal to the state are allowed to have their voice heard in public media. However, the authoritarian view function

---

[9] McQuail, 1994: 23-24
[10] Burnett & Marshall, 2003:8-9
[11] Hadenius & Weibull, 2005: 19

not only as a tool to control media which promotes totalitarian oppression, it can also occur in systems where the media is an important link to the development of the society. This theory was dominant during 17th and 18th centuries, when the press was still in a starting phase. However, it is still adopted in many developing countries.[12]

2.4.2 The Soviet Totalitarian Theory

Media, and the press in particular, play a significant role in societies where the soviet totalitarian ideology has pervaded. Like the authoritarian theory media function as a channel for information and Karl Marx once described the press as a connection between the people, the state and the world. In other words, it should contribute to the development of society. Lenin stated this by saying: "A newspaper is not only a public propagandist and agitator but also a public organiser". While the authoritarian theory speaks of freedom of trade for the publishers, the soviet totalitarian theory claims that such freedom reduces the freedom of speech for the people rather than increasing it in a positive manner.

Freedom of press, according to the soviet totalitarian ideology, is instead the ability of the press to give people liberty by informing them and keeping them updated, not freedom of the publishers. All press is state owned and ruled by an elite.[13]

2.5 Communication with the audience

Internet is a new medium, with which journalists have been given the opportunity to communicate with their audience. By creating public forums, online newspapers are able to interact with their readers, and the readers can exchange information with each other. The public forums on websites allow the audience to participate in discussions without exposing their background and location. The participants also have the opportunity to create their own forums, which implies that the audience can create their own news content. Online newspapers have an unlimited possibility to link archived background stories and through feedback and comments from the readers, journalists can create and follow up stories.[14]

2.6 Online news Service Models

When newspapers started to establish online there were four approaches which they could adapt and work with. They are described as follows:

According to *the 24-hours-a-day continuous news model* online publications, in contrast to traditional newspapers, must be up-dated 24-hours-a-day to survive in this new century. To be able to adopt this approach, to constantly offer the readers up-dated news content, the newspaper need to invest time, recourses and money in their site. This is necessary to compete against other online newspapers.[15]

It is common that an online newspaper establishes a niche to reach a certain market, national or international, and this is the approach of *the community bulletin board site*. If the focus is

---

[12] Ibid:19-20
[13] Ibid: 21
[14] Li, 2006: 245-246
[15] Salwen, Garrison & Driscoll, 2005: 15-16

national, the newspaper publishes local news, weather and the like. An international approach means that the newspaper will report global news instead.[16]

The Supplementary News Site is a complement to the original newspaper, where the online version of it presents different news to attract a special target group with the purpose to make the newspaper more attractive to a larger number of readers. The different type of news could be music, entertainment and health, and are normally not produced by the original editorial. Instead they are produced by unique sources, separate the parent newspaper editorial from which the articles are linked.[17]

The exclusive news site is a model where the newspaper offers a site beside the original one, with content not available anywhere else. Not many news organizations have adopted the exclusive news site model, because maintaining a site like this is very expensive.[18]

---

[16] Ibid: 16
[17] Ibid: 16-17
[18] Ibid: 17

3. EARLIER RESEARCH

The Vietnamese media in general is yet very unexplored in terms of research studies. Consequently, it has been difficult to find earlier research of relevance to this thesis. Anyhow, the research done will be presented in this chapter and touches how the daily work differs between an online and traditional, printed newspaper editorial. Furthermore, a Swedish report describes the Vietnamese online newspapers followed by a closer look into the Chinese views of Internet.

3.1 A New Way of Producing News Material

The new technology of Internet has affected the news reporting on different levels. The content has taken another shape and the way of working in editorial organizations has changed. Over all, the media landscape has become different since the online newspapers emerged and became a just as good alternative as any other newspaper.[19]

In traditional journalism, the editorial consists of a big organisation, all striving towards one mutual goal and product. The news reporting is based around a couple of predetermined deadlines before the newspaper is published at a certain time. This requires thorough structure, daily meetings and a sometimes quite complex organisation to make sure everything works out as planned. Behind every publication there are many people with different areas of responsibility. A regular newspaper has a limited space to be filled with content which means there must always be enough news of current interest available every day.

For an online newspaper the organisations and daily routine looks different in many ways. While a traditional newspaper can only be published once, an online newspaper can always be corrected at any time. This means it requires a completely different organisation. The editorial does not need to deliver according to deadlines or have continues meetings to keep up the work. As the online newspaper is constantly visible and possible to rewrite and edit it is not necessary to have such coordination in the editorial work. Instead the journalists can publish their material on their individual conditions and time constraints. When their material is finished it is put online.

The new conditions of news reporting on the Internet can also be seen in the structure of content in online newspapers. A site has an almost unlimited space for use in contrast to the traditional newspapers and can be filled with almost anything. As the news drops in during the day, they can be moved around depending on their level of importance. Moreover, an article does not necessarily need to be removed after one day; instead it could be saved and modified to a newer and updated version of the same news. Despite the latter, it is of importance and also expected that the online newspapers are always up to date and can provide the readers with latest news.

The new conditions under which news reporting now can be undertaken has its pros and cons when compared to regular, traditional journalism. The rapidity and flexibility of the publications are definitely the biggest advantage for the online newspapers and offer a completely different environment for journalism. On the other hand, the quick news reporting also makes it relevant to sometimes question the sources and ethical aspects within

---

[19] Buskqvist & Ekström, 2001: 9

journalism. Another important difference is the possibility of interaction it offers the readers. The boundary between journalism and media production in general has been erased.[20]

3.2 Vietnamese online newspapers

In the beginning of 2003 there were about 15 Vietnamese online newspapers. Three years later, in 2006, the number had increased to about 50. Most of them were independent newspapers, with no printed version and a few of them were versions of printed parent newspapers.

Many newspapers that are directly managed by the Communist Party of Vietnam, often reference to VnExpress and other online papers because they are seen as unbiased and fact based. Consequently, Vietnam News Agency (VNA), the official news agency which is directly under the Communist Party, has slowly been undermined. This means the electronic newspapers have also affected and changed the content of printed newspapers.

Moreover, the online newspapers have been affecting the news reporting. The speed of the news reporting has increased a lot since its introduction, as Internet publications usually are updated on a 24-hour-basis. Almost every online newspaper has some kind of public forum. In these forums the readers has the possibility to express there opinions, comments and suggestions. The opportunities of interaction of this kind are very popular and the readers like to read what their co-readers think.

Almost every Vietnamese electronic newspapers are self-financed through advertising, sms-support, online fashion magazines, websites for games, music, hi tech etc. They also make the most out of the technology to make their websites attractive and easy to use for their readers.[21]

3.3 Internet in China

The lack of earlier research of the Internet in Vietnam makes it relevant to look into other developing countries with a similar polity and view of media as Vietnam. China is a good example that can be used to describe what recent inquiries have discovered about the views of the Internet and the development of the same in countries similar to Vietnam.

From the 1980's the Internet has developed and has grown fast in China with the encouragement from the Chinese government. The technological infrastructure was built with mostly commercial means as subscribers paid government fees which in turn generated revenue to be able to develop the Internet even further and provide it with more fee-generating services. The telecommunications infrastructure in the country grew 30 percent per year during the 1990's, much due to people who found the Internet important both to the economic development and the political stability and continuity in China. Furthermore, the development and introduction of the Internet in China has been a part of something called *informatization process* by the Chinese leadership. This process is supposed to use Internet as a tool to decentralize decision-making and make it easier for the government to control the policymaking in the provinces of China.

---

[20] Ibid : 23-26
[21] Elmqvist & Luwarso, 2006:22-23

The leaders of China have been able to scrutinize Intranet activities as well as censoring international communication which they consider inappropriate. No other large nation has managed to exercise such a control and China has made this possible by having monopoly over the telecommunication providers. China Telecom is owned by the government and has ruled the market since the introduction of the Internet. Through this company, the government is allowed dominant control over the medium.

Even though China became a member of the World Trade Organisation, WTO, in 2002, and thereby promised to allow more liberal foreign investment in telecommunications, they have found and created new ways to still keep the control and authority over the international Internet connections.

According to the Chinese Communist Party, free flow of information is not accepted to the same degree as in other countries. Instead, the Chinese government believes that the Internet can "give them both modernization and enhanced powers of central control and stability" and believes that a free flow of information would make the country more vulnerable. According to Chinese officials, the country's policies for the Internet strive to move to an ideal of openness, although this ideal can only be reached in stages. Countries leading the development of information technology are turning a blind eye to the facts that the Chinese government is blocking and controlling the flow of information on the Internet, because China is a good market for business within the software and Internet industry. There is always a need for new filter systems to block information and Internet sites.[22]

---

[22] Franda, 2002: 187-202

4. Problem Discussion

The following chapter gives a closer description of our problem area. It also contains a definition of the purpose of the study followed by our research questions and limitations. Finally, an explanation of potential biases is presented.

4.1 Introduction

Earlier, media was a very vulnerable a production. It was dependent of support from the authorities and a target of control from political interests. During the 20th century, media began to take the shape of mass communication and distribution. This change implied not only more complex organisations and bureaucracy; it has also increased the importance of gaining profit of the media industry.[23] Media is a mass-provider of information to the public and works as a communication channel between the power and the people.[24] However, this description illustrates the European media development. In Vietnam it looks different; their situation of media is still more similar to the time before media became independent and given a role of influence in the Western world. As explained earlier, media in Vietnam is today owned and funded by the state and freedom of press does not exist.[25]

4.2 The Purpose of Our Study

The development of the media landscape in Vietnam is a very complex subject and therefore something that is difficult to define. We are also aware that this area of inquiry is far too extensive for a Bachelor thesis. In addition, the insight and knowledge gained in our case study will facilitate and focus further research in the future.

The purpose of this study is to explain the underlying factors of the success of VnExpress and *how* this online newspaper has contributed to the media landscape in Vietnam. Hence, we want to be able to present suggestions to further research within this subject area.

4.3 Research Questions

For studies within areas with little or no earlier research, it is most suitable to proceed from questions rather than hypotheses. This is because the hypotheses need to be well grounded in earlier studies, relevant theories or established statements. Moreover, a hypothesis must be thoroughly argued for using theories and earlier research. A research question, on the other hand, can be formulated without the support of previous research studies and theories, and is exploratory in nature. Hence, it is suitable to use a research question when previous knowledge and research are limited.[26] As the media landscape in Vietnam is not yet well explored, we find it a matter of course to base our study on a couple of well formulated research questions, some grounded in theories used in our essay and others based on pure curiosity. These are also the tool to help us answer to our purpose.

---

[23] McQuail, 2003: 36-37
[24] Beetham & Boyle, 1995: 26
[25] http://www.landguiden.se/pubCountryText.asp?country_id=187&subject_id=0
[26] Backman, 2007: 28

How has VnExpress developed since its launch in 2001?
By this question we hope to be able to distinguish a few main factors that explain how VnExpress has changed over time. This will also provide us with an indication of whether VnExpress has affected the media landscape in some way.

What is the main purpose of VnExpress?
The answers to this question together with theories of press will tell us if VnExpress concurs with the Vietnamese policies regarding media, or if they strive more towards a Western point of view.

What is unique for VnExpress?
Finding the uniqueness of VnExpress helps us to not only get a more detailed picture of how the newspaper differs from its competitors, but also to identify the specific contributions VnExpress may have made in its role as a communication channel between the state and the people.

4.4 Limitations

To make it possible to get a glimpse of how the media landscape is developing in Vietnam we needed to make a demarcation. Therefore, we have chosen to explore a small part of their current media landscape, to observe their view of Internet and how the introduction of online newspapers has affected the media landscape.

4.5 Bias

We find it important to give a closer description of our conceptions about the subject concerning the combination of Internet, online newspapers and Vietnam. This is because the written literature addressing these three areas combined is limited.

When reading the information and earlier research regarding the issue of Internet in Vietnam and online newspapers in similar countries we must be aware that we have construed it with the Western values and norms. For us, free press and freedom of expression is something we take for granted, just as the Internet and the information and possibilities that are associated with it. In other words, we almost condemn countries and forms of government that control and restrict media. It is of great importance that we are aware of our potentially biased attitudes and values, and make sure we stay as objective as possible while conducting our empirical findings. Awareness of potential biases is also a strategy to ensure high quality research.

5. BACKGROUND

To better understand this study and the circumstances in which it is performed, it is of importance to closer describe some background facts. First, we give a closer depiction of the Vietnamese political system and the media situation in the country. Hence, an introduction of online newspapers in general is made, followed by a short presentation of our target of research, VnExpress. Finally, some parts from the Vietnamese Press Law and the strategy for media development in Vietnam is given.

5.1 Political system in Vietnam

Vietnam is a single Party state. That is, only one Party is allowed, the Communist Party of Vietnam, with a several underlying ministries. The Party is ruled by a central committee with the General Secretary as the figure ahead. Every fifth year, a congress is held where the guiding principles of politics are outlined. The legislative parliament, the National Assembly, with its 488 members is electing the President. However, it is the President who appoints the Prime Minister and the other 22 Ministers. In fact, the power is concentrated to the President, the Prime Minister and General Secretary of the Party.[27]

5.2 Media in Vietnam

There is one important year in the history of Vietnam for the Vietnamese media; 1986. This was when the Vietnamese Communist Party introduced *doi moi* which was a reform to shift from a centrally-planned economy to a market economy. Before 1986 newspapers in Vietnam had to rely only on their circulation for revenue but were supported financially by the state. If the revenue was not large enough to cover for production and distribution costs, the state would always help out. With the introduction of *doi moi*, support like this was removed and the newspapers now had to start to make a profit of their publications and cover their own deficits.

To have to make a profit also meant the newspapers had to produce more interesting articles to catch the attention of the readers. Luckily, *doi moi* increased the freedom of information within the country, liberalized the media environment and made it possible to discuss wider subjects.[28] Furthermore, foreign media was now allowed to work in Vietnam which in turn introduced new media ideas into the country.[29]

The changes the new market economy brought for the Vietnamese media caused it to develop in many different ways. However, the most important change was that the media organisations were no longer completely dependent on resources from the state to cover their costs. As a result of this change, not only the produced content of the media became more interesting and diverse, the media industry also grew.[30]

The freedom of press which *doi moi* offered was again regulated in 1995. It became difficult and sometimes even dangerous to express criticisms of the authorities and other information

---

[27] http://www.landguiden.se/pubCountryText.asp?country_id=187&subject_id=0
[28] Heng, 2002: 231- 233
[29] http://www.landguiden.se/pubCountryText.asp?country_id=187&subject_id=0
[30] Heng, 2002: 233

considered inappropriate by the state. In the beginning of the twenty-first-century the media landscape became a little more allowing again, although it is still restricted and in control of the state.[31]

5.3 Online Newspaper

The first electronic newspapers were available in the early 1970's.[32] They were in forms of videotext and other various forms on proprietary services such as American Online, Prodigy and CompuServe before it found its way to the World Wide Web in 1994.[33]

In the early stages the online newspapers were reproducing the printed versions on the Internet. Online newspapers were providing information and news. Some of them only used their Internet sites to present information of how to contact the printed parent version. Furthermore, a report from 1997 made clear that more than a quarter of the online newspaper sites had not been updated in the last 24 hours.[34]

In those days, in the beginning of the introduction of Internet, the modems were very slow. Few users would wait for 20 seconds or more for a site to appear. During the end of the 1990's when computer capacity enhanced and was faster, when portable laptops that could be used during travelling became available and high resolution screens were accessible, the number of online newspapers grew fast.[35]

One big possibility for online newspaper that distinguish them from printed papers is the ability to develop static images and text with video, audio and animation. Advertisers on online newspapers embraced these multimedia elements before the online newspapers themselves embraced them. Moreover, online newspapers differ from printed newspapers with the possibility to engage readers in two-way communication. By offering public forums, related information, electronic mail and site searches, the readers can express their opinion and give feedback to the editorial.[36]

For an online newspaper to be able to grow, the key is a successful economy. The Internet publication is seen as a substitute to a printed version as long as it does not generate profit. Managers and editors will not give away too much free news online, so as not to harm the printed parent paper. There are two obvious incomes for an online newspaper; primarily through advertising and secondarily through subscription fees.[37]

5.4 VnExpress

VnExpress was first published online the 26th of February 2001. It has become the leading electronic newspaper in Vietnam and is the third most visited webpage after Google and Yahoo. In 2006 VnExpress had 1,6 million readers every day.[38] Their editorial consists of nine different departments covering the areas of society, entertainment, international,

---

[31] http://www.landguiden.se/pubCountryText.asp?country_id=187&subject_id=0
[32] Li, 2006:13
[33] Salwen, Garrison & Driscoll, 2006:3
[34] Li, 2006:14-15
[35] Salwen, Garrison & Driscoll, 2006:6
[36] Li, 2006:16-17
[37] Ibid: 12
[38] Elmqvist & Luwarso, 2006: 22

business, sports, science and life, computer, digital device and cinema. They produce 80 percent of their published material alone, the rest is taken from other Vietnamese and global news agencies. VnExpress's head office is situated in Hanoi, Vietnam, with 65 journalists and another 15 reporters in their branch in Ho Chi Minh City. VnExpress is cooperating with the organisation FOJO, giving the editorial mid-career training.[39]

5.5 Press Law

Vietnamese press, referring to the printed press, the voice press, the visual press, and the electronic press, is under the Press Law. From the Embassy of Sweden, we got access to the Press Law from 1999, which is a complimentary to the original Press Law of 1989. The version we have read is a summary translated to English and contains seven chapters; although, we have chosen to only cover the parts that are relevant to our thesis. Note that in 2008 a new and revised Press Law will come into force.

The aims of the Press Law:
"To ensure the citizens' right to freedom of the press and freedom of speech in the press in conformity with interests of the state and the People;
To bring into play the press' role in the cause of construction and defence of the Socialist Vietnam Fatherland along the renewal line of the Communist Party of Vietnam."

5.5.1 Tasks and Powers of the Press

The press must provide the people and the country with true and correct information of both international and domestic situations. It shall also protect the Party's directions and policies. Moreover, the press shall function as a public forum for the people to exercise freedom of speech.

5.5.2 State Management over the Press

The state is in charge of organizing and distributing policies and legal documents regarding the press, as well as being responsible of the planning, development and organization of the press itself. Permits for press activities and journalists are to be granted by the state. Any international cooperation and activities for journalists and press are state managed. This could be educational programmes or technological activities in the journalistic field.

As mentioned above, permits for press activities are granted and issued by the state and the Ministry of Culture and Information. They are in charge of all applications and permissions. Except for permission granted by the state, the applicant must fulfil many different criteria. Among them, the head of a press organisation, the editor in chief, must be of Vietnamese origin with citizenship to be able to establish a newspaper in the country. Additionally, an electronic newspaper are undertaken to use and operate the computerized information network run by the Government.

Finally, the press law also lists a couple of things that are not allowed to be published in the press. If these points are not followed correctly, the freedom of speech in the press could be negatively affected. It says the press is not allowed to openly criticize the Vietnamese government or to encourage people to mistrust them. The press is not allowed to reveal state

---

[39] Information from VnExpress' editorial, 2007-11-14

secrets or any other confidential material that are stipulated by law. The press must not question news.[40]

5.6 Media development in Vietnam

Strategy for media development in Vietnam, 2001 – 2010, is the latest published strategy plan written in 2002 by the Ministry of Culture. The document describes the current media situation of Vietnam and the goals in terms of development and what purpose media should fill in the Vietnamese society.

In 2002, media focused not only on developing and enhancing the quality of content and form, but also to make sure media fulfilled its role as a speaker of the Party, the state and social organisation as well as a people's forum. In the beginning of this century, the numbers of online newspapers and its users grew together with information providers and websites on the Internet. The document also underlines the opportunities of *doi moi* which has created a good environment for media development.

Furthermore, the report lists challenges and opportunities for the Vietnamese media between 2002 and 2010, and mentions the development of information technology as a possibility to improve social welfare. In 2002 the Internet had already heavily affected traditional media, as well as given it a push forward. Together, the new technology and traditional media had contributed to a more effective and quality press. Investment in media is therefore considered an investment for development of society. The report refers to other countries in the world, with different levels of development, and their general awareness of the importance of the role of media and how they have developed strategies and theories of media to ensure further development. At this time, Internet was a relatively new phenomenon in Vietnam, and the country was very determined that the electronic media would very soon achieve an important position in the media system.

The guidelines set up for media development in Vietnam are divided into three main areas. First, media are under the leadership of the Party and management of the state. It should foremost serve as a mean of culture and ideology. Next, it is of importance that media always strives towards correctness and honesty in the information provided and in line with the interests of the people and the nation itself. People working within the media sector must follow the directions from the Party and other state laws. Finally, media development can not continue without good management.

Certain objectives were established for information on the Internet with the aim to be achieved before 2010. Beside building and developing a complete system of legal documents and management of information on the Internet, one of the goals was to develop online newspapers and websites of high quality, an active format with quickly accesses and serves people both on a domestic and international basis. Moreover, the objectives of information on the Internet also aim to investigate suitable tools to both control the system and the quality of the information that circulate online.[41]

---

[40] Ministry of Culture and Information, 1999
[41] Ministry of Culture, 2002: 1-20

6. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In the following chapter, our methodological approach is presented. That is, we describe how this thesis is performed, the techniques used and how they are serving to fulfil our purpose. We also discuss which problems the study has been facing and how we have overcome them. There is also an analytical framework for the operationalism of our research questions illustrated in the end of this chapter. Additionally, in Appendix 1 an interview guide gives the reader a closer picture of how our interviews are constructed.

6.1 Introduction

This thesis is a case study of VnExpress, with the purpose to investigate the underlying factors of the development and success of the newspaper. Through this, we will see how VnExpress has affected the Vietnamese media landscape. We have not found very much earlier research about the specific topic, which implies the results of this thesis will be a first step for further research within the subject area. To answer our purpose, we decided qualitative in-depth interviews could best answer to our purpose.

Our thesis is a descriptive study of VnExpress. In our final discussion we will try to present suggestions of further research within the area, with the aim to explain *why* the result of our study ended up the way it did. The thesis must be something more and different than a summary of a process and it is of great importance that we actually do something of the empirical findings.

A descriptive study like our, should fulfil three requirements. First of all, the descriptive study should be based on a well defined procedure, followed by a presentation and discussion of the empirical data. Secondly, it should be possible to make other conclusions beyond what is actually presented in the result. The last requirement, is that it must be an answer to the question *case of what?* This means, when performing a case study with a descriptive purpose, the case of study must be defined and argued for.[42]

6.2 Qualitative Methodology

Two different perspectives of how individuals perceive their surrounding reality have been purposed. It can be perceived in either an objective or subjective perspective.

The objective perspective is the traditional perspective and means the individual is separated from the surrounding reality in an attempt to explain how the objective reality works. Theories and hypothesis have been developed and tested. The subjective perspective on the other hand, implies that the reality is an individual, a social and cultural construction and the studies of interest are instead how people understand and interpret the surrounding reality.[43] Focus here is how the individual shape and understand its surrounding reality.

Usual conceptions of a qualitative perspective include context, meaning and process. By meaning one is interested in how people think, understand, and interpret the reality in relation to their earlier knowledge and experiences. Furthermore, context refers to that one studies people in "real life" situations. Process is significant for the qualitative methodology and

---

[42] Esaiasson, 2004: 35-36
[43] Backman, 2007:47

alludes to actions and procedures rather than products and results. The important difference between quantitative and qualitative methodology, is that it in the latter, the individual is a significant instrument.[44]

6.3 Case Study

A case study is appropriated to use when conducting complex studies, with the purpose of making an evaluation. It can be used when the aim is to understand, explain and describe systems, organisations or a phenomenon. Case studies can have the intention of describing, explaining or examine. A case study investigates a phenomenon in its natural surrounding or context and when the boundaries between context and phenomenon are not clear. This is also one of the difficulties with case studies.

When performing a case study, an analyze group is chosen. This group can consist of, for example, an individual, a certain group, an organization or an episode. When the analyze group has been established, the case can be identified.[45]

It is very unusual to only stick with one case in a case study. They mean that two analyze groups are required to conclude reason and cause. However, if two analyze groups are used, there is no longer a case study. It is common that a case study is conducted over a specific time period, often before and after a special year or certain occurrences. The case study before and the one after the occurrence make it two analyze units. One way to establish if there are more than one analyze unit is to see how many times a value can be added to the value of the dependent variable. If a value can be put into the variable more than once it is no longer a case study in its simple way.[46]

6.4 Interview Method

There are two forms of interviews. Either it is a *respondent research* which intends to look closer at the very respondent and their thoughts, or it is an *informational study* where the interviewed persons are meant to contribute with information about how they interpret and understand their reality. The latter is therefore particularly suitable when observing how the daily work in an organisation is performed.

Moreover, respondent research can be divided into two diverse groups; conversational interviews and survey or questionnaire research. During a survey or questionnaire research the interviewer simply asks the respondent questions, while the conversational interview aims to create an interaction or two way communication between the parties. However the questions in questionnaire research have multiple answer alternatives which the respondent needs to choose from.[47] In this study we have used conversational interviews. We considered this type of interview most suitable as we did not have enough information to create given answers in advance. In addition, we thought it would be more revealing to have a conversation with our respondents.

---

[44] Ibid: 48
[45] Backman, 2007:49
[46] Esaiasson, 2006:119
[47] Ibid: 255

Interviews can be used in five different areas; when wanting to know peoples' perceptions of the world, when the aim is to develop concepts, for trying a theory, as a complement to other research or when looking into an area relatively unexplored. The latter also explains why the reason why the interview method is the most suitable for our study. We are facing a study with limited previous research to build on.[48]

When doing a statistic analysis it is of importance to be able to define the units of analyses before beginning the empirical work. In terms of qualitative interviews and observations it is not always possible to make relevant definitions or categories. Thus, we have not been able to do the latter.

6.5 Interview guide

When putting together an interview guide, it is important to think thematically and dynamically. Thematically so that the questions connect to the problem of the thesis, and dynamically to make sure the atmosphere makes the respondent feel comfortable and free to speak. An indication of a well constructed interview guide is when the question is short and the answer is long.

There are different ways of beginning an interview. Usually it is a good idea to warm up with a few personal questions to create a good atmosphere and to make a connection between the respondent and interviewer. When getting to the most important questions, the respondent should get the opportunity to talk freely about what he or she thinks about the central problem. These are called *grand tour questions* and should be formed in an open-ended fashion. For example, Can you please tell me about...? or Do you remember…? To get more detailed and exhaustive answers, follow-up questions can be asked. Another technique is to be quiet for a while, just to give the respondent an opportunity to add information if he or she wish to do so.

Direct questions can be asked when the most important issues have not been discussed yet, or when the respondent struggles to answer. To avoid misunderstandings, it is good practice to ask some interpreting questions. That is to repeat the answers in a questioning way and through that double check the answers are correct understood.

6.6 Achieving Credibility

We have chosen to perform a case study, a very suitable method for looking into an organisation and get a deeper understanding of it. To collect the empirical data, qualitative in-depth interviews have been our methodological approach. Already after five interviews, the answers provided by the respondents started to be repeated and therefore decided we had enough data to get a basic understanding of this research topic.

There are a couple of factors in this case study which could be seen as a lack of credibility. First, we have only used respondents working at VnExpress. The reason for this is that they have a good knowledge about the newspaper and their way of working. Additionally, it has been difficult to find other relevant individuals who could provide insightful answers to our questions. This is because of time limits and trouble getting in touch with possible respondents.

---

[48] Ibid: 258

During a couple of our interviews we used an interpreter because some of our respondents had very little or no English skills. This could have affected the answers and it is possible that the interpreter translated the answers with a different meaning than intended by the respondents. Unfortunately, if this is the case we can not do very much about it but trusting the answers we got.

Secondly, in a case study, where a specific target is studied very closely, it is easy to glorify it and become personally involved. However, we have tried to stay objective and leave our Western opinions at home. Although, as we have described earlier in the section about our bias and conceptions of the theme of our thesis, we believe we have managed to complete our study with open minds and with as little subjectiveness as possible.

Furthermore, some of the literature used in this thesis is relatively old due to that media, and the Internet in particular, has developed very fast and information therefore becomes out of date very quickly. We are aware of this, but the information found in the older books is relevant to the study and independent of time.

7. Empirical findings

The empirical data we have found is presented in the chapter as follows. Our findings will be rendered in order of our research questions, which also serves as headlines.

7.1 Introduction

The empirical data we have gathered are based on in-depth interviews with five respondents, all with different positions in the editorial department at VnExpress. We have chosen to not disclose their full names, partly because of ethical aspects and respect to our respondents. We are not sure if the presented material could be sensitive in the wrong hands and we do not want to risk the integrity or personal safety of the interviewed persons. It is not either of relevance or importance to our subject to mention any names. Therefore, we simply named our respondents *R1, R2, R3, R4* and *R5*. These will be entitled as *she* in the following chapter. This solution will also make it easier to follow the discussion around the empirical findings.

7.2 How Has VnExpress Developed?

7.2.1 Starting a Newspaper

In February 2001, VnExpress was published online for the very first time but many years of hard work was needed before the launch. R2 tells that just to get a licence granted from the state to be allowed to establish the newspaper was a hard and long process.

Vietnamese Press Law requires that the applicant of press activities must not only have permission by the sate to perform them, but must also fulfil additional conditions. Moreover, the law declares that the state should be in charge of the organisation under which the newspaper will be published. After have gaining an understanding of the Vietnamese Press Law, it is not surprising to hear about the difficulties and tedious processes involved when starting VnExpress.

7.2.2 The Introduction of VnExpress

In 1997, the Internet was first introduced in Vietnam. According to R2, the access to Internet was limited and using it was very expensive at this time. The first electronic newspapers available then were online complements of printed newspapers and VnExpress was the first Internet publication with no printed parent version. This also implied that VnExpress was the first news portal to update the news material from dusk to dawn. One of our respondents, R4, has been working at the editorial since the start and told us they built the newspaper from scratch. At that time, VnExpress consisted of only edited news based on already produced material from other news agencies. R1 remembers how VnExpress was simply one single main page in the beginning, where all the news were lined up and presented one by one, with no links or sub-sites. Generally, the news at this time, were delivered to the readers as a package without leaving any space or opportunity for them to express their opinions.

It could be questioned why it took Vietnam four years from its adaptation of the Internet to the publication of their first pure online newspaper. Unfortunately, this is something we did not get a clear picture of. Perhaps the protracted process of getting a licence contributed,

along with the fact that the Internet was a new and relatively unexplored medium for Vietnam. Definitely, the limited access to the Internet at this time, and the expensive charges for using it, affected the slow introduction of online newspapers. Additionally, as the early Vietnamese electronic newspapers were straight over copies of a printed version, there was no reason for the readers to take part of it online. It seems the people maintained satisfied with the more accessible, and still cheaper, printed versions.

In the 1990's and by the time of the establishment of VnExpress, R2 explains that the news were mostly propaganda. Therefore, the aim of VnExpress was to present as objective news as possible with no propaganda. Although, it was not always possible to produce everything they wanted. R4 says the editorial had to make selections and priorities of which news to produce. This was not only because of the still limited space of their news portal, but also a consequence of staff resources. Furthermore, according to R5 the reporters needed permission from the Chief Editor of which news that were allowed to be published. She also remembers how this way of working was very time-consuming.

The decision to publish as objective news as possible, in a media landscape permeated with propaganda, must have demanded courage from the Board of VnExpress. Earlier, the editorial of VnExpress had one single Chief Editor, responsible for the material that was put online. Still, it is the Chief Editor that has the utmost responsibility of the newspaper, although nowadays all of the nine different departments of VnExpress have their own Chief who decides which material that is to be produced. From our point of view, this is one of the main developments for VnExpress and its editorial. As R5 describes, the earlier way of working was very unproductive and this change have made VnExpress work more effectively. Also, the accountability for the produced material is now not only one persons' responsibility.

7.2.3 VnExpress in Progress

Since the very start of VnExpress, they have changed in many ways. R4 says that one important development is that the VnExpress editorial now produces news material by themselves, even though they still reproduce some articles. Additionally, she explains that they today are able to report from more events within the country as they have a branch in Ho Chi Minh City in the south of Vietnam.

R3 is one of the international reporters at VnExpress and during her five years at the editorial, she has seen that the international news in the newspaper increase. She also thinks that the less formal news, such as articles of personal stories and the like have become a more important part of VnExpress. The latter is something that is partly influenced by international newspapers such as CNN and BBC that inspire VnExpress with ideas about stories and other news. This is something that R1 claims as well, and adds that Swedish newspapers are an important source of inspiration, especially because VnExpress has frequent cooperation with the Swedish organisations SIDA and FOJO.

The world is becoming global, which means it is getting smaller and smaller. The distances between continents and countries are diminishing and the interest in international news is increasing. This globalisation affects the newspapers themselves and makes it easier for actors within media to get inspiration from other newspapers and they can experience how their competitors work. When hearing that VnExpress is looking into CNN and BBC as a model,

one can understand that smaller electronic publications are inspired by VnExpress as it is ranked in the top 100 of the worlds' online newspapers.[49]

All of our respondents agreed that another significant development of VnExpress is the speed in which articles are produced and updated. R5 tells us that it is possible to have an article online within five minutes. Consequently, the news is more in line with the present time than previously according to R2. An important change that has made this achievable is that the reporters no longer need to ask the Chief Editor for permission to publish an article. Instead, this has become an issue the relevant individuals in the department deal with themselves. Furthermore, R1 claims that the speed is the greatest difference between a printed newspaper and an online newspaper. Therefore it is extremely important that the published news is correct and from reliable sources, she explains. To ensure this, the Head Editor of each department first scrutinizes it and finally the Chief Editor gives approval to publish the material online.

The speed in which the news are getting published online and updated is another important part of the development of VnExpress. As mentioned earlier, the organisational changes that were made at the VnExpress editorial, with separate departmental chiefs have made it possible to frequently update their site with current news material. According to the 24-hour-model, it is of significance for online newspapers to invest heavily in their sites, meaning they need to constantly refresh their sites to ensure their readers to stay loyal.

7.2.4 Interaction with the Readers

Through out the years, the interaction with the readers has become an important factor for VnExpress. R3 says that they get a lot of feedback from their readers and some of the comments are published. It could be anything from tips of material for the newspaper to write about to the readers' own thoughts about a certain news event. Before publishing this feed back, R3 tells that it sometimes need a little bit of editing to make it easier to read. R2 fills in that the communication with the readers is meaningful to VnExpress. However, it is not possible for the readers to comment directly on the website, because VnExpress is responsible for everything that is published there. In addition to R3's comment, R2 says that the articles sent in by the readers must be edited primarily because the content is not always in line with laws and regulations. According to R5, the editorial develops the newspaper together with their readers.

Nowadays, the readers have many choices of how to interact with the editorial of VnExpress. R4 describes that the editorial telephone, also called the "hot-line", and e-mailing are often used by the readers to comment on articles in the newspaper and present ideas of topics they would like to read about. Another method of interaction used by VnExpress is the "voting boxes" following some of the articles. R1 shows us how the readers thereby can express their opinion by voting for the alternative in the box that fits their thoughts regarding a particular article the most.

The communication with the readers appeared to be something very meaningful to our respondents. In all of the interviews, the importance of the readers was highlighted and the editorial always tries to meet the readers' needs. Unfortunately, it is still not possible for the readers to interact directly with each other on the webpage as VnExpress is responsible for

---

[49] www.alexa.com

everything published on their site. It is difficult to offer the readers such an interaction because of the state's requirements and control over the media content. The readers' opinions may not always be appropriate and consistent with requirements.

7.2.5 Internet

Of course, without the Internet, this interaction with the readers would not be possible. R4 enlightens that the relationship between writers and readers has changed with the introduction and development of the Internet. A couple of years ago, R3 remembers how the newspapers delivered news to the readers and that was all they did. There was no opportunity for the readers to express what they were interested in reading about. Furthermore, R4 explains how the Internet has also affected the news reporting. Because the news in an online newspaper need to constantly be updated, the reporters have changed their way of working. R2 continues and claims that the main change over the seven years of online publishing is that the news have become more compact; they are shorter and more focused articles than before. Producing news on the Internet also implies that the space is not limited, R4 describes. Now, it is possible to produce everything, when previously only selected materials that were considered high priority were published. Moreover, R5 points out that the Internet gives the editorial opportunity to conduct more thorough research around a story that will later be put online. This is because Internet contains accessible data bases with a lot of information about many different subjects.

Internet has created the possibility to publish everything produced, with no space limitations. This makes it easy to attract many different target groups and meet their different interests and online newspapers can therefore grow and develop. We find R2'sdescription of how the news in VnExpress has become more compact very interesting. It can be compared to the Swedish newspaper Metro that has the motto to produce short and solid news for people on the run.

7.3 What is the main purpose of VnExpress?

7.3.1 Readers first

R4 explains how VnExpress is important and says that it is not only a channel for Vietnamese citizens abroad to follow the Vietnamese news flow, but also for the inhabitants of Vietnam of course, to provide them with information. R5 continues and claims that people like VnExpress because of their ability to update the news fast. Apparently, the readers also appreciate the way in which the articles are written, they are very straight forward. Moreover, she says that VnExpress at all times, tries to go straight to the source and not "*sneak around in the bushes*" to gain information about something. They want to be objective and produce news with a reliable and correct background, R2 explains. According to R1, VnExpress always put the reader in the first place and that it is also their task to do so. This is sometimes difficult, she continues, as there are always pressure from many other parties of what should be published and not. Despite this, VnExpress always tries to stay loyal to the readers' demands. In Vietnam the press in general is very powerful and people rely strongly to the information given there, R2 argues. Although, they are not late to criticize it and therefore she claims the people indeed have a powerful position as well and are capable of affecting the society.

To put the reader first, and to write as objective and reliable news as possible with a thorough background story, make VnExpress an interesting news provider in the Vietnamese media landscape. We believe this must be an important advantage and results in Vietnamese citizens,

living abroad or in the country, reading VnExpress. That Vietnamese people put great importance on the press makes it easy for media actors to make use of the situation, although, to survive in the long run it is required that the news are reliable and correct. We can see that VnExpress is in line with the government's strategy for the Vietnamese media development. In that document one goal is to develop high-quality online newspapers and websites. Furthermore, the strategy says it is of importance that media always strive towards correctness and honesty in the information provided. VnExpress fulfils both of these goals.

7.3.2 Vietnam's Media Landscape

When speaking of the Vietnamese media landscape and the editorial's own point of view of it, R2 can see that it is heading towards a more open media situation. She is convinced that the introduction and development of Internet has been an important contributor in this development which has also opened up the society more. Despite this, she is aware that many of the Vietnamese newspapers are not effectively enough trying to oppose the publishing of propaganda and are therefore not objective enough. Even though the Vietnamese media landscape has improved to a more open environment, it is still a long way ahead to achieve a media landscape alike a western openness. R2 are inspired by the Swedish newspapers and find the Swedish media landscape the ideal.

The answer from R2 indicates that the media landscape in Vietnam strives towards a more open environment. It is a slow process, and it will take a lot of time before it is comparable to the Western media landscape. Internet seems to be the tool that has enabled the media landscape to change and open up a little bit.

7.4 What is unique for VnExpress?

7.4.1 Objectiveness

The first characteristic of VnExpress that all of our respondents want to point out is its objectiveness. Their ability to deliver objective news also significantly differentiates them from their competitors. VnExpress always try to keep the reporters point of view aside when writing an article, according to R4, and stay as objective as possible. R3 believes that this objectiveness gives them a high level of credibility and that these factors together with their speed of updating the news make VnExpress special. R5 implies that VnExpress also have a different approach compared to other newspapers, a more fair approach, as they go straight to the source of the news.

Again, the objectiveness is in centre of attention, the absolute uniqueness of VnExpress. Elmqvist is giving the proof of this objectiveness when writing that many other newspapers use VnExpress as a source when producing their news and articles because they find the newspaper reliable.

7.4.2 Ownership

Beside the objectiveness, R2 also mentions the ownership of VnExpress as a significant uniqueness. VnExpress is owned by a stock company, FPT Telecommunications, which is the largest telecommunication company in Vietnam. The law requires that all media must be owned by the government and have a licence granted by the same. An ownership like this is

very exclusive in Vietnam. Therefore, VnExpress is only owned by the government on the paper but not in reality, she explains.

"We have no limits or no directions from the government and can work as free as is possible in a country like Vietnam."

The editorial of VnExpress consists of young staff, something that R5 finds extraordinary for a newspaper of their kind. Moreover, R4 states that the design of VnExpress's website provides an advantage to other online newspapers and describes how they have created an online newspaper which is easy to navigate with.

The ownership of VnExpress is not visible to the readers. Indirectly, this must make it possible to present the news in a different way. According to R2, VnExpress is only owned by the state on the paper and it looks as if they are placed in a grey zone. Probably, this has facilitated the daily work but also given more responsibility to the Chief Editor. Moreover, the majority of staff is young and is likely to have a good knowledge of new website technology. This may be the reason why the design of the website ensures easy navigation.

8. Summary of empirical findings

It is time to identify and summarise the key findings of our research. With this case study, we aim to identify the underlying factors of the development and success of VnExpress and to describe how the newspaper has affected the Vietnamese media landscape. The research questions we developed to gain an insight into our research topic have guided us through the collection of our empirical data. Below, we have described the most significant findings.

8.1 24-hour Up-Dating

When VnExpress was launched online in February 2001, they were not only the first electronic news portal in Vietnam with no printed parent version, but also the only one to update their site from morning to evening. The continuous up-dating of VnExpress has later developed into 24-hour a day of non-stop up-dating of their news material. Moreover, VnExpress is striving to get their produced material online as quickly as possible, and today it is possible to get news published on their site within five minutes.

8.2 Objectiveness and Reliability

To deliver the news at such speed, it is important for VnExpress to maintain two of their most significant policies; objectiveness and reliability. At all times, VnExpress tries to produce as objective news as possible. In cases where there are two sides or parties of a story, VnExpress makes every effort to present both sides to the story and remove their own perceptions and biases as much as possible. They are striving to provide news material straight from the source to make sure they are reliable and the rendered information correct.

8.3 Communication with the Readers

The readers and the communication with them in particular, constitute a central part of the development of VnExpress. Together with the readers, the editorial shapes VnExpress to make it fit the different needs of the readers, who are always the priority. To make the site of VnExpress as attractive as possible to different audiences and target groups, they have built and developed sub-sites to meet the various reader interests and requests. Through e-mail, or the editorial's "hot-line", the readers can get in touch with VnExpress and express their opinions or give suggestions of topics or happenings to write about. Sometimes, their thoughts and opinions are published online. However, it is not possible to publish everything suggested by the readers, as VnExpress is responsible for everything put online on their website and has to adhere legal requirements.

8.4 Ownership

The ownership structure of VnExpress is unique for media in Vietnam. They are owned by a stock company, FTP Telecommunications, the leading telecommunication company in Vietnam which is in part owned by the state. The fact that VnExpress is owned by a stock company which has no direct connection with the state implies they have fallen into a grey zone where they have no limitations or directions from the state. Furthermore, this means they can work as independently as possible.

8.5 Internet

The Internet has had a great impact of the development of all media in Vietnam and has made it possible for VnExpress to become the newspaper it is today, with its style and features. Without the Internet, it would not have been possible to communicate with the readers the way they do it. In the unlimited space where they can publish news material, they have a better chance to meet the different interests of their readers, for example through their sub-sites as mentioned earlier.

8.6 Distributed responsibility

To be able to keep VnExpress' news quickly and frequently updated, the structure of VnExpress has improved since they started. Before, the Chief Editor was the only one with the authority to decide which news material to produce and publish. This way of working was very time consuming and today the nine different departments of VnExpress have their own Chief Editor accountable for the published material within their subject area. However, it is still the Head Chief Editor of VnExpress who has the overall responsibility of the content of the site.

9. Discussion

The research questions, which we formulated to be able to investigate our research topic, will hereby be answered and further discussed. Some of the results will be discussed more than once, although in different contexts. Finally, some suggestions to further research will be provided in the end of this chapter.

The aim of this Bachelor thesis, was to get a picture of one of the Vietnamese online newspaper, VnExpress, and how this newspaper had affected the media landscape in the country by identifying the underlying factors of its development and success. The result is also illustrated in the figure presented in Appendix 2.

9.1 How VnExpress has developed since its launch in 2001

Throughout our interviews, we found a couple of factors significant to the development of VnExpress. These distinguishing factors are the w*ebsite, communication with the readers* and *distributed responsibility.*

9.1.1 Webpage

When VnExpress was launched in 2001 they only had one single web page where all the news was presented one after another, with no links or other features. Their way of working was quite similar to an editorial of a traditional, printed newspaper. Like the printed newspaper there was also limited space to publish material. As presented earlier in the theoretical framework of this thesis, there are four approaches that an online newspaper can use; *the 24-hours-a-day continuous news, the community bulletin board site, the supplementary news site* and *the exclusive news site.*[50] It is clear that VnExpress has developed out of parts from the three first approaches which will be described below. The exclusive news site appears to be very unusual for online newspapers as it is very expensive to maintain.

The 24-hours-a-day continuous news- To be able to provide the readers with constantly up-dated news and compare favourably with its competitors, it is necessary for an online newspaper to invest in the site. VnExpress was the first newspaper in Vietnam to update their news many times a day. At the time of the establishment of VnExpress, when other electronic publications were copies of printed versions, they had a great advantage by offering the readers fresh news at all times. In pace with their increased news coverage, they have expanded to nine different news departments which are all responsible for certain news areas. Also, the selection of priority news is distributed between these departments and the updating of news can therefore be done faster. However, this development is something we will discuss further later on in this chapter. We think that such development is a matter of course to be able to fulfil the 24-hours-a-day continuous news approach and to stand strong towards competitors. This is also the reasons why VnExpress still is the number one online newspaper in Vietnam.

The community bulletin board site implies that an online newspaper niche themselves towards a certain market. However, VnExpress has become such a full-sized site they can cover a great number of interests and target groups. While the demand for some particular news topics

---

[50] Elmqvist & Luwarso, 2006:22-23

has increased, they have been able to adjust to the requirements of the readers. Their ability to do this has enabled them to always be in the front line of the development of electronic newspapers. However, tailored news is also a financial question as they need to employ enough staff and keep the technology up-dated. Each of the nine departments has their own market to watch; domestic, sports and entertainment for example, which also has assisted in the development of news that are tailored to readers' current interests.

A *Supplementary news site* is a complement to the original parent news page and presents various news items that attract different target groups. This is something VnExpress has invested in and through linked sub-sites on their web page, they offer games, sms-support and gossip to their readers. According to the supplementary news site approach, it is usually not the original editorial that produces these complementary sites. In the case of VnExpress on the other hand, it is the editorial departments who create and maintain these sub-sites themselves.

To sum up, VnExpress has the biggest news market share in Vietnam, both because they were the first online newspaper with no printed version and also because they up-date the news many times every day. By the time Internet became more accessible and cheaper to use, people realised it was a just as good alternative to a printed version and, moreover, the news were totally fresh. For VnExpress, this implied that the readers had a reason to visit their news site more than one time every day. VnExpress has developed their site to fit the needs of their target groups. To make their newspaper even more complete, they developed sub-sites and can through them attract other, hard to reach audiences. This is also a factor that has made VnExpress maintain their position as the leading online newspaper in Vietnam.

9.1.2 Communication with the readers

One of the most important contributors to the development of VnExpress is the communication with the readers. Through e-mail and a telephone "hot-line" the readers have the possibility to express their opinions and give feedback to the newspaper. The readers can also vote directly on the website, on given alternatives connected to some of the articles. By creating public forums, an online newspaper makes it possible not only to interact with the readers, but also for the readers to communicate with other readers.[51] Unfortunately, the latter is not possible in Vietnam. The reason to this is simply because the newspaper editorial is responsible to everything on their site. Interpreting the result from our research, we understand that some of the readers' opinions are not appropriate and break legal requirements, and is therefore risky for VnExpress to publish online. The attitude of VnExpress which we experienced, the go-ahead spirit, and the increasing interest of interaction among the readers gives us reason to believe that it is only a matter of time before the communication between the readers can become more public. Although, it will still be restrictions and it will not allow criticism or negative thoughts about the government. Vietnam is heavily influenced by the Authoritarian theory of press, which claims that censorship should be exercised to make sure no information that can put the government in a bad light.[52] This is also something that is a threat to further development of VnExpress.

---

[51] Li, 2006: 245-246
[52] Hadenius & Weibull, 2005: 19-20

9.1.3 Distributed Responsibility

In many aspects, the Vietnamese media landscape has much in common with both *the Authoritarian* and *Soviet Totalitarian theory of press.* Like the theories describe, the Vietnamese government is in control of all media, additionally the law says that all media must be owned by the state. Moreover, it is not allowed to criticise the state. Approaches like the Authoritarian and Soviet Totalitarian theory of press are common in countries where media is an important link to social development. To deliver news in a media landscape like this requires courage and awareness of everything reported and produced as the publisher alone is responsible.

Earlier at VnExpress, the Chief Editor decided what was supposed to be reported and published. With the demands of faster news reporting and up-dating of the newspaper, a reorganisation was needed at the editorial. The different departments of VnExpress have a separate Chief Editor choosing which news that is priority. Still, the Head Chief Editor has the utmost responsibility of the news site and what is published there. This structure makes it possible to work faster than before. Moreover, it must be advantageous for a Head Chief Editor to have other people in the organisation who can be involved in the decision on which material to publish. By the distributed responsibility, the Chief Editors can give each other support and advice on what is considered appropriate to publish.

9.2 The Main Purpose of VnExpress

Media has many purposes. The theory of *the independence of media* describes that it is used as a channel to provide people with news and other information but it is also an important part in a democratic society. It is supposed to inspect the government and function as a link between the state and the people, allowing them to express their opinions.[53] This is not the case in Vietnam, although VnExpress is determined about what their role is: it is to present *objective and reliable news* and to always *put the readers first*.

9.2.1 Objective and Reliable News Reporting

As mentioned above, the theory of independence of media claims partly that media should scrutinize the government and be a channel between them and the society. However, this is not easy to completely exercise in Vietnam. According to the Vietnamese Press law, it is a task of the press to provide information about the domestic and international situations that are of interests to the country and the people, as well as in conformity with the Party's stand point. Despite the laws and regulations of the Press, VnExpress has found a way to achieve their purpose in manner that is legal. Before VnExpress became an actor of the Vietnamese media landscape, the majority of newspapers consisted of propaganda. The current media landscape at this time, together with the Vietnamese Press law, instigated the founder of VnExpress to develop a newspaper free from propaganda and subjective news.

This determined objectiveness of VnExpress has changed the Vietnamese media landscape in general. We claim that VnExpress has contributed to make it harder for the state to spread propaganda. In addition, their attempts to always present both sides of a story have increased their reliability among both other media actors and the readers. We consider that this has given the people the opportunity to read the news and then create their own opinions about it. Before, the published news was already providing an opinion for the readers.

---

[53] Beetham & Boyle, 1995:25-27

The objectiveness is strengthened by a reliable source from which the information is taken. As VnExpress always goes directly to the source of the news prevents the information to be distorted by intermediaries. As Elmqvist confirms in her report, other newspapers reproduce news from VnExpress as well as using them as a source.[54] This is a good assesment, and shows that VnExpress maintains high quality news reporting. Moreover, it is a good sign that other newspapers believe VnExpress is good to use as a source because of their unbiased reporting. Hopefully, VnExpress' approach will thereby spread and be adopted by their competitors and will contribute to more objective news reporting in Vietnam.

9.2.2 Putting the Readers First

Putting the readers first means partly to offer them an objective picture of the news world, as clarified above. Although, it is just as much a question of delivering to the requirements and wishes of the readers, what they are interested in taking part of. It is through the communication with the readers that makes it possible for the editorial of VnExpress to give the readers what they want.

The theory of *the press as a future paradise* is speculating that all new media opens up innovative ways of educating people. Internet has qualities and opportunities for making people more active and engaged which in turn support a healthier democracy. Furthermore, the Internet can provide global news and background stories in a way that no other media have been able to do.[55] VnExpress is striving to mirror the news with reliable background research, something Internet has made possible. The Vietnamese people can therefore read more comprehensive news with additional information connected to it, and will consequently make them well-informed. According to the above theory, this should also make people better individuals.

VnExpress is an important supplier of general knowledge and perhaps a first step to a more democratic society in Vietnam. To make the people of Vietnam aware of their country and its situation, but also enlighten the global world in an objective way can encourage them to choose or reject propaganda, to choose or reject democracy.

Even though it is difficult to build a newspaper on the premises that VnExpress wish to do, we got the impression that they have a high expectation of the Internet and the possibilities it offers. It may sound a bit naïve to think that some new technology would enable a revolution, although, we must remember that the Internet actually has been a gateway to new reality for both VnExpress and Vietnam.

9.3 What is Unique about VnExpress?

In our empirical findings we identified two unique factors about VnExpress; the *ownership structure* of the newspaper and the *objectivity in their news reporting* which they are well known for. The objectivity is something we have mentioned already, although it was repeated in all of our interviews and the reporters seemed to be very proud of their policy regarding this. However, the ownership of VnExpress appeared to be something they had very little

---

[54] Elmqvist & Luwarso, 2006:22-23
[55] Burnett & Marshall, 2003:8-9

knowledge about. The respondents aware of the owner relations, on the other hand, underscored it and explained it thoroughly.

9.3.1 Ownership

The Vietnamese Press law requires that all press organisations have a permission granted by the state and must be stated owned. Reading between the lines, this implies the state is supposed to have full insight and control of all kind of media in Vietnam. For VnExpress, this has become unique. The reason to this is that the company that owns VnExpress, FTP Telecommunications, is a stock company where the stocks are partly owned by the state and partly by private owners. Consequently, these owner relations has made VnExpress fall into a grey zone. VnExpress is therefore only owned by the state on the paper, although in reality it looks different. They have no restrictions or directions from the government and can work fairly independently.

It is interesting to speculate why VnExpress has succeeded in having almost no restrictions or directions, while other newspapers are strictly controlled by the government. According to McQuail, some media content is more important than other for authorities to control and scrutinize. Entertainment news is less likely to contain inappropriate information than informational news material which in general is more likely to disturb and harm society. The latter is therefore an interesting target for the state to control and look closer into. Theoretically, this should also be the case for VnExpress and particularly for their, in Vietnam, unusual style of writing and presenting news material. In addition, VnExpress is providing the Vietnamese people with daily news and information, which the state ought to be very interested in controlling and affecting. VnExpress is also giving an objective picture of the news, refusing to embellish any information to the advantage of the state.

Question is why the state does not try to influence VnExpress more? We believe this is because of the ownership structure and the fact that it is a stock company there are two possible aspects why the ownership is of such an importance. First, it could be a planned strategy from the founders of VnExpress who knew that to fulfil their dream of a newspaper completely free from propaganda, they needed to keep the state at distance. To use a future stock company as a shield, they could produce news on their own conditions. Moreover, this strategy could also be a reason why the process of being granted a permission to start the newspaper was very slow.

Secondly, at the time of the establishment of VnExpress, their newspaper could have "slipped between the cracks" and by the time VnExpress grew and became more popular among the readers, it was too late to do anything about it. Actually, in both of the scenarios described above, there must be difficult for the state to make any further regulations as VnExpress today is an online newspaper of great importance to the Vietnamese people. If they tried, it could cause big reactions from the readers. Furthermore, any closer government involvement in VnExpress would make more damage than good as the state risks getting hard criticism from the people.

9.3.2 Objectivity

We have already mentioned the objectivity, although we would like to continue discussing it here as it is a unique characteristic of VnExpress. It would be interesting to identify why other newspapers do not produce objective news material. According to our results there are very

few Vietnamese newspapers striving to produce objective material. We believe the problem is that they do not dare to exclude the propaganda and challenge the government. From this point of view, it could be stated that it has required a great courage from VnExpress to reach their current position among online newspapers. A couple of people have taken huge personal risks to manage the newspaper towards what today is their signification; objective and unbiased news reporting.

Furthermore, we claim that VnExpress has affected the Vietnamese media landscape and encouraged it to become more similar to Western media.

9.4 Internet

Without the Internet, VnExpress would not have existed. The Internet is the tool which has made it possible for VnExpress to fulfil their dream of an objective online newspaper free from propaganda.

In McQuail's theory of freedom or control, he claims that new technologies such as the Internet are complicated to control. It is often regulated by direct censorship, although this has shown to be very ineffective.[56] It is not clearly described in this theory why this is so difficult, but it is quickly understood that the accessibility of the Internet together with its almost unreachable size is the reason for it. Anyone can publish material on the Internet, and the new technology even allows manipulation of pictures and sounds, and therefore it is more or less impossible to exercise full control of this medium. The only way seems to be through threatening with different punishments, like Vietnam does, if someone criticise or question the state.

Speaking of controlling the Internet, China could be exemplified as a country succeeding in this, and in censoring it in particular. The Chinese government has encouraged the development of the Internet within their country since the 1980's and has therefore been able to influence its construction. However, they do not allow free flow of information and countries leading in information technology are consciously ignoring this because China is a good market for business within telecommunications which they do not want to loose. Actually, some of them even provide China with tools to help the government to continuously and strictly control the Internet.

In Vietnam the development of the Internet and the use of the same, have increased incredibly fast. While the Internet has developed together with the support and control of the government in China, the Vietnamese explosion of Internet growth and usage must have surprised the authorities. Consequently, we imagine this made it far more difficult for the Vietnamese government to obtain the control of this new medium. Moreover, we claim that the more advanced the technology becomes, the harder it will be for countries like China and Vietnam to control and censor the Internet.

Both Vietnam and China seems to believe that media and the Internet present possibilities for their countries and its inhabitants, both in terms of development and education, but also to make economic profits. At the same time, it looks as if they are afraid of the Internet and that this new technology will make their governments lose control and authority. The Internet is not only a new medium to scrutinize and be in command of. It is also a technology even

---

[56] McQuail, 1994: 23-24

harder to control as it is completely independent of time, space and country borders. VnExpress has come a long way in their determination of providing more objective and fair news reporting. However, it must be a balancing between right and wrong in their style of presenting news material. Therefore, it is not hard to believe that the Internet is that future paradise which Burnett and Marshall discuss in their theory.[57]

9.5 Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to investigate the underlying factors of the development and success of the online newspaper VnExpress and to see how it had affected the Vietnamese media landscape. As we described earlier in our bias section, we have tried to stay as objective as possible when studying this phenomenon. However, we are aware that we are unconsciously considering and analysing our findings with the Western media landscape as an ideal. Interestingly, our respondents did mention the Swedish media landscape as an ultimate goal and use Western newspapers as a model for their work. Whether this is the ideal or not is something that could be discussed, although in this thesis the Western point of view regarding media is only used as an example of open and independent media.

We have found that VnExpress has contributed to the Vietnamese media landscape in many different aspects and the key four aspects are presented below.

- First of all, their way of producing objective news has spread to other news agencies. Other newspapers use VnExpress as a source for their own news material as they are considered unbiased and objective.
- VnExpress' objective news reporting together with their thorough background researches that underlies the published material has contributed to an increase in the Vietnamese people's general knowledge. Moreover, this type of news reporting gives the opportunity for the readers to form their own opinions.
- The comprehensive communication with the readers that VnExpress exercise has implied that the readers can affect the content of the newspaper and suggest what the editorial should write about. Consequently, as the readers are getting more involved their interest in news will increase.
- Finally, the above three points are all significant contributors to the new and more open media landscape in Vietnam. Therefore, VnExpress has been, and will continue to be an important actor which will push the Vietnamese media in a path towards a more open media environment.

We are convinced that the Internet is the tool which is about to open up the media landscape in Vietnam. VnExpress is the actor who uses this tool in an attempt to push and promote the development towards a more allowing media environment.

9.6 Suggestions to further research

The conclusions of a case study are supposed to contribute to further research within the area of subject. There is definitely a lack of research about the Vietnamese media situation and we hope our thesis will become a good basis for future studies. We suggest the following continuous themes of research about the Vietnamese media landscape and online newspapers:

---

[57] Burnett & Marshall, 2003:8-9

- We have looked into an online newspaper as a contributor to the development of the Vietnamese media landscape. However, it would be interesting to study how other forms of media in Vietnam have had impact on the media environment and its development. In this way, it is possible to get a more comprehensive picture of its progression.

- To get a picture of how the news reporting is developing in Vietnam and how far it has moved towards objective and unbiased reporting, a content analysis of VnExpress and a couple of their competitors could be performed.

- Finally, the new Vietnamese Press law, which will be presented in 2008, is another starting-point. It would be interesting to compare it with the current version and look into how it affects the media actors in Vietnam.

10. Reference list

The literature and other sources used in this thesis are listed below.

10.1 Literature

Backman, J. (2007) *Rapporter och uppsatser.* Poland: Studentlitteratur.

Beetham, D., Boyle K. (1997) *80 frågor och svar om demokrati.* Stockholm: SNS Förlag.

B. Salwen, M., D., Driscoll, P., Garrison, B. (2005) *Online News and the Public.* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Ink., Publishers.

Burnett, R., Marshall, P. (2003) *Web Theory: an Introduction.* London: Routledge.

Buskqvist, U., Ekström, M. (2001) *Nyheter på nätet. Organisering, arbetsformer och teknik.* Göteborg: Universitetsbiblioteket.

Esiasson, P., Gilliam, M., Oscarsson, H., Wägnerud, L. (2004) *Metodpraktikan - konsten att studera samhälle, individ och markand* 2: nd ed. Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik

Franda, M. (2002) *Launching Into Cyberspace: Internet Development and Poltitics in Five World Regions.* Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.

Hadenius, S., Weibull, L. (2005) *Massmedier. En bok om press, radio och TV 8: th ed.* Falun: Albert Bonniers Förlag.

H. K. Heng, R. (2002) *Media Fortunes, changing times: ASEAN States in Transition.* Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

McQuail, D. (1994) *Mass Communication theory, an Introduction 3: rd ed.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

McQuail, D. (2003) *Media Accountability and Freedom of Publication.* New York: Oxford University Press Inc.

Li, X. (2006) *Internet Newspaper: the Making of a Mainstream Medium.* London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

10.2 Reports

Elmqvist, M., Luwarso, L. (2006) *Media in Vietnam 2006. Looking Back, Going Forward.* SPM Consultans, Assigned by the Swedish Embassy in Hanoi.

Strategy for Media Development in Vietnam, 2001-2010. (2002) Ministry of Culture: Hanoi.

Viet Nam Press Directory. (1999) Ministry of Culture and Information.

10.3 Internet

http://www.alexia.com
http:// www.fojointernational.fo.hik.se/fojo_international/fojo
http://www.landguiden.se/pubCountryText.asp?country_id=187&subject_id=0
http://www.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=115
http://www.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=541&a=3654
http://www.vnexpress.vn

10.4 Other references used as inspiration

Davidsson, H, Johansson, T. (2005) *Self-censorship in the Vietnamese Press. A conception Study.Jönköping: Bachelor thesis at Jönköping University.*

APPENDIX 1
INTERWIEW GUIDE

Personal - Warm-up questions

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- What is your position at the editorial?
- How many years have you worked at VnExpress?
- Can you tell us about your background and education?

VnExpress - Grand tour questions

- How do you think VnExpress differ from other newspapers?
- Do you get any insperation from foreign media? If so, how?
- Has the possiblity to update 24-hour-a-day changed the work at VnExpress?
- Has the possiblity to update 24 hour-a-day changed the news reporting?

Conversational questions

-The purpose of VnExpress
Can you describe... What do you think about that... Has it always been that way...?

- Development of VnExpress
Can you describe... What iare the main charachters... How did it proceed...?

- Unique to VnXpress
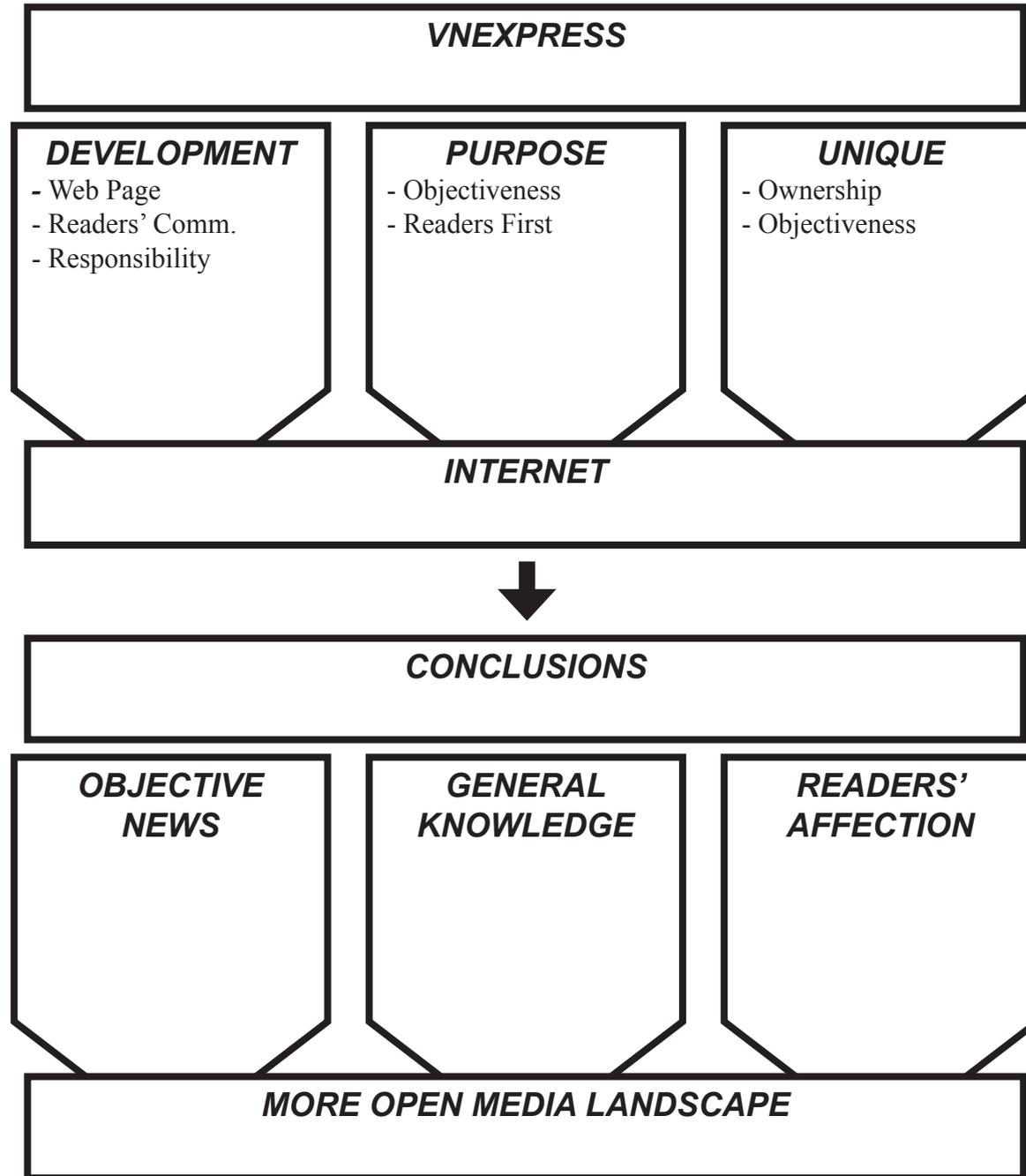What do you think... Can you develop... Why do you think that is...?

General - Grand tour questions

- What do you think about Internet as a new medium?
- Do you think Internet has affected the news, and if so, how?
- Do you think Internet has changed the working methods?
- How has Intternet changed media in Vietnam?
- What about the possibility to update 24-hours-a-day, has it changed the news in general?
- Has the communication with the readers affected the news reporting?
- Has it this communication changed the news in general?

Conversational question

- Development of the media landscape in Vietnam
Can you describe... What is the main charachters... How did it proceed... Can you exemplify...?

APPENDIX 2
RESULTS

VNEXPRESS

DEVELOPMENT
- Web Page
- Readers' Comm.
- Responsibility

PURPOSE
- Objectiveness
- Readers First

UNIQUE
- Ownership
- Objectiveness

INTERNET

CONCLUSIONS

OBJECTIVE NEWS

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

READERS' AFFECTION

MORE OPEN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Appendix 3

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency- SIDA

SIDA is a global organisation based in Sweden. It is a government authority under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. SIDA strives to create better conditions for poor people. There are employees from SIDA in all of the[1] countries where the organisation operates, who has a good knowledge of the local situation.

Institute for Further Education of Journalists- FOJO

The Swedish organisation FOJO provides further and mid-training courses for professional journalists in various subject areas such as basic reporter skills and media management.

FOJO started to educate Swedish journalists in 1972. Today, they offer education for 1500 Swedish students every year. Partly sponsored by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, SIDA, FOJO started to operate in international regions and countries around the world in the 1990's where they train between 800 and 900 international students each year.

The organisation strives to help journalists to get knowledge about free and critically-investigative journalism and creates networks for exchanging of experience between journalists in different regions.[2] Furthermore, they also support local education organisations to perform mid-career training.

---

[1] http://www.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=115
[2] http:// www.fojointernational.fo.hik.se/fojo_international/fojo

APPENDIX 4

Vietnam[1]

Area, km^2	332 000
Capital	Hanoi
Population in 2006	85 300 000
Constitution	Republic, one-party state
Population growth per annum	1,2
Per capita GDP	2 745 (USD 2004)
Life expectancy at birth	70,8 (years)
Adult literacy	90,3 (per cent)
Access to Internet	13 (million people)[2]

---

[1] http://www.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=541&a=3654
[2] Elmqvist & Luwarso, 2006:7