

## Solution Journalism: A Look at Its Development and Recommendations for Vietnam

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### **Abstract**

*The Press: A Powerful Tool for Social Reflection and Problem-Solving. The press, as a mass media outlet, plays a crucial role in mirroring society. Beyond its duty to inform, the press can also contribute to shaping society by proposing solutions to address pressing issues. Solution journalism goes beyond simply informing the public. It carries a mission to enhance understanding, broaden perspectives, and connect with other disciplines to contribute to solving societal problems. In today's world of rampant misinformation, many media outlets have lost public trust, leaving readers feeling anxious and resentful. In response, solution journalism emerged with a mission to restore trust, minimize bias, reduce negativity, and engage audiences in the digital age. This article will provide an overview of the origins and global development of solution journalism, as well as propose practical approaches for Vietnamese journalism in the new context.*

**Keywords:** *Solution Journalism, Constructive Journalism, Positive News, Negative News, VietNam*

### INTRODUCTION

Western media often focuses more on negative than positive information (Soroka, 2014) and this trend is increasing (Van der Meer et al., 2019). This can lead the public to have a pessimistic and disillusioned view of the world around them. The world press, in general, has been showing signs of "degeneration", especially in chasing negative, sensational information that causes fear, and anxiety and distorts perceptions in society. Therefore, the terms "Solution Journalism" and "Constructive Journalism" have emerged and become increasingly popular. Initially, these two terms did not originate from academic journalism research but were strategic terms initiated by journalists in the journalism reform movement.

According to Uwe Kruger & et al (2022), the basic idea of constructive journalism is to solve problems and inspire the recipient. According to Peter Bro, the view of constructive journalism was first expressed in the Journalist's Creed (1914) by journalist Walter Williams of the Missouri School of Journalism (USA): I believe that the most successful journalism... is... constructive. Walter Williams also emphasized the constructive nature of journalism: I believe that the most successful journalism - and the most deserving of success... is independent, unwavering journalism, unshaken by pride of opinion or greed for power, constructive, tolerant but never careless, self-reliant, patient, always respectful of the reader but always fearless (The Journalist's Creed 1914). Constructive Journalism: A Forgotten Yet Resurgent Approach. Although Williams' ideas and calls for a constructive form of journalism were once republished and taught, they have largely been forgotten over time.

According to Kruger (2017), the term "constructive journalism" can be traced back to a 1948 New York-based news service called the Good News Bulletin. Founded by German-Austrian journalist Robert Jungk (1913-1994), the bulletin compiled positive news stories every week, with a circulation of around 150 copies. The publication focused on "successful projects and positive solutions," emphasizing the selection and reporting of positive solutions to problems. Jungk's approach was primarily solution-oriented. Despite receiving positive feedback from the media, the bulletin ceased operation due to a lack of financial support.

The term "constructive journalism" resurfaced (possibly for the second or third time) in 1959 with the publication of David Chalmers' book "Hobson's Choice and the Power of the Press: A Study of Constructive Journalism." Constructive journalism goes beyond simply reporting on social issues; it also presents credible

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efforts to address those problems. In Europe and the United States, "constructive journalism" is also known as "solution-focused journalism" (Gyldensted 2011, 2015; Haagerup 2014; McIntyre 2015).

## **THE ROLE OF SOLUTION JOURNALISM (CONSTRUCTIVE JOURNALISM) IN SOCIETY**

Solution journalism not only plays the role of disseminating news to the public but also has the task of raising awareness and expanding boundaries with other disciplines to solve social problems. Because today, the news world is filled with fake news and many media outlets have lost public trust in the press, and the public feels scared and angry after reading the news. Therefore, solution journalism was born with the mission of restoring trust, reducing prejudice, and bias, and reducing fatigue, negativity, and other unwanted impacts of the press on the public. Solution journalism includes arguments towards solutions that are appropriate to reality and have a positive impact on readers, social issues, and the press. "Solution journalism also has a positive impact on readers, their intention to read similar news and their evaluation of the newspaper is higher than traditional problem-based reporting." (Delphine Ruaro, 2018) "Engaging Audiences Through Solutions Journalism: Effects on Mood, Behavior, and Attitude Toward the Newspaper").

In addition, solution journalism also plays a certain role in several issues such as:

**Attracting readers:** Constructive journalism and solution journalism have a strong appeal to attract readers. Claudia Rowe, a reporter for the Seattle Time newspaper, said that the public's viewership of solution-based news is increasing. The Deseret News news organization in Utah (USA) has partnered with the Solutions Journalism Network. A case study of the newspaper's application of solution-based news shows that solution-oriented stories often lead to increased page views and shares (Noack, Orth, Owen, & Rennick, 2013). Solution journalism can attract the public because although everyone has a sense of curiosity, curiosity and remembers negative things for a long time, they choose what is most beneficial to themselves.

**Guiding citizens in the fight against natural disasters and epidemics:** When natural disasters and epidemics occur, solution journalism plays many roles in intervening, supporting, and guiding citizens. In particular, it highlights different responses and responders within the scope of reporting and exemplifies different roles in different areas. Solution journalism has played more intervention and support roles in reporting on measures to prevent and control natural disasters and epidemics.

**Promoting journalists to think about the social responsibility of the press and the role of journalists or solution journalism in public crisis management:** Solution journalism plays a role in shaping society, so when choosing to solve press problems, it needs to be looked at more positively or focused on solutions rather than the traditional negative approach. In addition, the press needs to identify its capabilities, development, and strengths, not just focus on difficulties and negativity. Agencies or the public can choose the appropriate solutions to overcome the problem based on the information provided by solution journalism. This shows the important role and responsibility of solution journalism in contributing to building a more equitable and positive society. Solution journalism has also contributed to solving public crises and guiding citizens in solving many problems in many countries around the world, especially in a time of great change and constant change as it is today. In addition, solution journalism promotes the press to fulfill its democratic role of the press increasingly better and more effectively, contributing to building a more equitable and positive society. Therefore, research and implementation of solution journalism practices on a wide scale is extremely necessary.

News media plays a crucial role in not only informing the public but also encouraging them to take action on issues presented. However, motivating teenagers to read, analyze, evaluate, and interact with news content remains a challenge. In 2023, Sanne L. Tamboer's team conducted a school-based experiment to explore methods of stimulating teenagers to apply knowledge gained from news articles. The study surveyed 258 participants (52.3% female, 1.2% other) aged 11 to 16. Data collection occurred from April to June 2022 in the Netherlands.

The findings revealed that while teenagers access a vast amount of online information, their ability to verify sources and assess information accuracy remains low. The study suggests that training teenagers in news writing and source verification practices can enhance their information processing skills and promote the effective application of new knowledge. However, the study's focus on analyzing teenagers' news comprehension and writing skills and excluding those with lower educational backgrounds limits its generalizability. Further research is needed to examine a broader range of participants with varying educational levels.

## **THE CURRENT DEVELOPMENT STATUS OF SOLUTION JOURNALISM (CONSTRUCTIVE JOURNALISM) TODAY**

Solution journalism helps balance the negative news trend and build a positive future.

The current trend of "preferring" negative news in the media can be balanced by solution journalism. This type of journalism provides positive information and addresses social problems. Therefore, solution journalism or constructive journalism has gained an important foothold with many news agencies worldwide.

Although it has been around for over a hundred years, solution journalism has only "risen strongly" in recent decades. The development of technology, techniques, social media platforms, and electronic newspapers has created favorable conditions for the development of this type of journalism.

Since the 1990s, news organizations have begun producing solution-oriented stories (Benesch, 1998). The Seattle Times family media group, founded in the 19th century, and YES Magazine are prime examples of the success of solution journalism. From 1998 to 2013, the number of YES Magazine subscribers increased from 5,500 to 40,000.

From the 2010s to now, constructive journalism has appeared more and more, especially in North America and Western Europe. The systematization of constructive journalism is more complete than before. In the Nordic and Scandinavian countries, the use of constructive journalism has taken place strongly and has grown steadily since 2011 (Cobben, 2015, 2016). Or The New York Times has a column called Fixes to find solutions to social problems... Or BBC World News has produced a six-part series, "My Perfect Country", which addresses the audience's interest in solution-based journalism by following solutions to common problems that can be applied elsewhere. By the 2010s, constructive journalism has appeared again, especially in North America and Western Europe, and is more systematized than before. The basic idea of constructive journalism is to solve problems and inspire the receiver (Uwe Kruger & et al, 2022). Notably, in the Nordic and Scandinavian countries, since 2011, the use of constructive journalism has taken place strongly and has grown steadily (Cobben 2015, 2016).

The Christian Science Monitor has created a "Take Action" section that combines journalism and social activism with the motto "Beyond fear, beyond anger. Real news, real hope". Similarly, the online news site Huffington Post has a "Life" section, and the online news site Good News Network (USA) also specializes in publishing positive news with an optimistic trend. In 2018, the Montgomery Advertiser, owned by Gannett media company (USA), switched to a solution-focused journalism model to increase public engagement. The results of the conversion showed that the newspaper's website traffic increased significantly and that there was a longer engagement time with solution-oriented articles compared to traditional news. Data collected from Twitter, and Facebook, and analysis of the newspaper's website also showed that public sentiment was more positive than negative, and that the switch to solution journalism increased the newspaper's connection to the community.

Times Media Group, one of the largest media companies in South Africa, has implemented a solution journalism training program for editors and news reporters. Their new responsibility is to engage readers by facilitating constructive discussion and finding solutions to the problems facing young South Africans (Gyldensted 2015b; Nevill 2015). BBC World News is running a six-part series, "My Perfect Country," which addresses audience interest in solution-based journalism by tracking solutions to common problems that can be applied elsewhere.

In addition, to constructive journalism, solution journalism is being researched and promoted by many organizations such as The Constructive Journalism Project was founded in London (UK) in 2014, and the

Solution Journalism Network founded by David Bornstein and Tina Rosenberg in the US in 2013. Or the Constructive Journalism Project (2014), or the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) has organized training courses on constructive journalism since 2014. In December 2015, Windesheim University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands) integrated constructive journalism courses into the curriculum, the Constructive Journalism Network (2017), the Constructive Institute at Aarhus University (Denmark) was founded by Ulrik Haagerup in 2017 to change the global news culture - helping journalism support democracy.

Claudia Rowe, a reporter for the Seattle Times, notes that public interest in solution-based news is growing. The Deseret News news organization in Utah (USA) has partnered with the Solutions Journalism Network.

A case study of a newspaper's adoption of solution-based news found that solution-oriented stories often lead to increased page views and shares (Noack, Orth, Owen, & Rennick, 2013). Solution journalism has the potential to engage the public because, while people are naturally curious and remember negative things more, they ultimately choose what is best for them.

Constructive journalism in Germany: A nascent field with immense potential. While constructive journalism has gained traction in other parts of the world, it remains a relatively new concept in Germany. According to a 2021 survey by Uwe Kruger and colleagues, journalists with limited or no knowledge of constructive journalism exhibit lower levels of understanding regarding its role. Conversely, journalists well-versed in constructive journalism express a strong desire to act as watchdogs over political and business elites, encouraging public participation and contribution to progressive social change.

Therefore, journalism needs to identify its capabilities, development, and strengths, rather than solely focusing on challenges and negativity. Constructive journalism is viewed by academic researchers as one of the lifelines to improve society, contribute to balancing negative news, heal societal wounds, and promote more stable and sustainable social development. Consequently, constructive journalism holds immense potential in the coming years to become a powerful force for positive change in society.

Despite its long history of development, there is still no consensus among journalism researchers and practitioners on the conceptualization and operation of solution journalism or constructive journalism. In addition, there is a lack of consensus on the perspectives and approaches to solution journalism in practice and research. Currently, it only provides suggestions on conceptualization and practice.

These findings reinforce the notion that measuring the impact of solution journalism in real-world settings is complex and requires further research.

## **CURRENT APPROACHES FOR PRESS AGENCIES VIETNAM TODAY**

To achieve the goal of knowledge creation, journalism should employ at least one positive psychology technique in its reporting (formulate action-oriented solutions to social problems in a positive direction, evoke empathy). This technique helps constructive journalism, solution journalism not only report facts but also focus on finding positive, feasible solutions to problems in a more positive direction. Because positive psychology focuses on studying the positive aspects of people or issues surrounding positivity and goodness, it helps people maximize their strengths. Positive reporting helps the public see that society is not entirely bad, and according to research by Fredrickson (2001) and Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000), these positive emotions are not superficial but hold many values and practical benefits for people.

In addition to its knowledge-building goal, constructive journalism also contributes to the process of social construction. By reporting on solutions to social problems, solution journalism helps the public understand a social issue more thoroughly and provides a focus for that issue in the present and future. By reporting on solutions, solution journalism or constructive journalism helps the public understand the nature of the issue more clearly, which in turn allows them to offer their opinions and contributions to solving the problem. With a perspective that is useful for the present and future of the issue based on the needs and purposes of the public.

Public-oriented approach, encouraging public interaction and feedback. Solution journalism, constructive journalism, has a public-oriented approach to raising public awareness of social issues and encourages them to interact and provide feedback on how to solve those issues. To fulfill this role well, journalists need to have a deep understanding of the issue to guide public opinion and have the ability to communicate information clearly and engagingly.

Promote Solution-Oriented Reporting: Newspaper editors should prioritize factual and balanced reporting that focuses on potential solutions to social problems. This approach, also known as constructive or solution journalism, emphasizes highlighting successful initiatives and exploring viable pathways to address societal challenges. By focusing on solutions, the press can move away from sensationalized negativity and bias that can distort public perception.

## CONCLUSION

Solution journalism, also known as constructive journalism, is a long-established journalistic approach that has experienced a strong resurgence in recent years. This method has been extensively researched and practiced by various media outlets, institutions, and universities worldwide. However, in Vietnam, research and practice of solution journalism remain limited and are still in their early stages. The trend of adopting solution journalism principles is not yet evident in newsrooms in general.

Solution journalism goes beyond simply reporting, challenging, or criticizing social issues; it also proposes concrete solutions to address these problems. It is founded on the principles of social constructionism and positive psychology, aiming to build a better society. Like other journalistic movements and forms, solution journalism adheres to the fundamental principles of journalism, such as accuracy, fairness, and respect for privacy.

In the future, solution journalism holds immense potential to become a powerful force driving positive change in society. It can help balance negative news, heal societal wounds, and promote more stable and sustainable social development. Therefore, extensive research and implementation of solution journalism practices are crucial. This will enable media outlets to meet the needs and engage the public in a way that fosters social construction rather than simply reporting news. Therefore, solution journalism plays a crucial role in contributing to solving social issues and improving people's lives. Solution journalism is not a replacement for traditional journalism, but rather a complementary approach that can help make journalism more relevant and impactful to society.

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