

Solution Journalism: A New Prospect for Ensuring Revenue of Vietnamese Press Agencies Nowadays

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Abstract

Furthermore, to foster the growth of solution journalism in Vietnam, this article provides valuable insights and recommendations for news organizations to implement effective development strategies and attract readers. In this topic, the main concepts and theories that underpin the research are presented. Solution journalism or Constructive journalism stand out, providing a solid basis for understanding the context of the investigation. The editorial board were to charge readers, 45% of the public would agree to subscribe to a membership package, 41% would still be unsure about the quality of the newspaper when subscribing, and the remaining 14% would say they would not subscribe to the membership package. A survey conducted in Vietnam found that 59.3% of adults over 18 are willing to pay between 7,000 and 10,000 VND per week to read news in a solution-oriented journalism model. In Vietnam today, there is still limited research on this type of journalism. This article utilizes an analytical and statistical approach to explore the origin and implementation of solution journalism in several international news organizations. Additionally, the article presents the results of a survey conducted on 400 individuals regarding their willingness to pay for news content. The practical and theoretical implications of this research are discussed, providing insights into how the results can be applied or influence practices in the field of journalism (Solution journalism or Constructive journalism). Solution journalism is a type of journalism that has been gaining popularity in recent years. In the context of the media being flooded with negative and sensational news, the trend of solution journalism emerges as a “breath of fresh air” gradually asserting its role and importance. Unlike “traditional” journalism which focuses on reporting events, solution journalism focuses on providing readers with positive news and proposing solutions to social problems based on positive psychology. Solution journalism is becoming increasingly popular worldwide, because it offers many benefits to society, such as encouraging public action, proposing and solving social problems, attracting readers, and especially increasing revenue for news organizations.

Keywords: Solution Journalism, Constructive Journalism, Revenue, Positive News, Negative News

INTRODUCTION

Advertising and newspaper sales revenue of Vietnamese media agencies have been on a sharp downward trend in recent years. According to statistics from the Institute for Policy Studies and Media Development, the total revenue of the newspaper sector in 2021 decreased by 30.6% compared to 2020.

Total revenue of the magazine sector in 2021 decreased by 44.6% compared to 2020. This trend continues in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, although there are signs of stabilization, the recovery and growth are still very slow. The years after the pandemic have shown signs of stabilization but the recovery and growth are slow. Specifically, 78% of media agencies have revenue that remains unchanged or increases slightly from 10-30%; 16.9% of media agencies still record a decrease in revenue; 71.1% of media agencies have revenue from print advertising that remains stable or decreases.

The first cause of this decline can be attributed to the rise of social media platforms as a main source of information for many people, making them less dependent on traditional media. These platforms have also become advertising sources for many businesses, leading to a further decline in advertising revenue. Secondly, the public's demand for information is constantly changing, and there are currently many newsrooms that publish too much negative news, making the public bored with the news.

To overcome this situation, media agencies need to have many drastic solutions such as digital transformation, charging readers to create a sustainable and stable revenue source by creating high-quality content, not just reporting events but also explaining, analyzing, and providing useful and feasible solutions to solve problems. Reviving revenue for Vietnamese media agencies by charging readers is a matter of great urgency. However, it

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is not easy to get the public to pay for reading newspapers. This requires the content that the press transmits to have useful value before the public is willing to pay.

Study Subject And Methodology

Study Design: This is a cross-sectional community-based study.

Target Population: Vietnamese citizens aged 18 and over residing in all three regions of Vietnam (North, Central, and South).

Sample Size: The sample size will be large enough to ensure a 95% confidence level.

Sample Size Calculation: The sample size was calculated using the following formula for estimating a proportion in a community:

$$n = N / (1 + N * E^2)$$

n = sample size

N = total population size

E = allowable error (in this case, 5% or 0.05)

Sample Size: 384. The sample size will be rounded up to 400 for data collection purposes.

Data Collection Method: A structured questionnaire will be administered to the study participants. Participants will be randomly selected from urban and rural areas (as defined by local authorities) within clusters. Clusters will be stratified by geographic region:

Northern Region: Cluster 1: Uplands and Northern Mountains; Cluster 2: Hồng River Delta

Central Region: Cluster 3: North Central Coast; Cluster 4: South Central Coast; Cluster 5: Central Highlands

Southern: Cluster 6: Southeast Region; Cluster 7: Mekong Delta

Within each region, one urban and one rural cluster will be randomly selected from the list of clusters. Data collection will be conducted among the general population over 18 years of age in three out of six clusters. Data collection will take place from February to April 2024.

Data Processing and Analysis: Data collected from the questionnaires will be cleaned and processed before being entered into SPSS 20.0 software for analysis.

An Introduction Solution Journalism

Solution journalism, also known as constructive journalism, is a growing trend in media worldwide. It has been adopted and implemented by many news organizations around the globe. This type of journalism utilizes positive psychology principles to integrate positive news and problem-solving approaches into reporting. The aim is to engage readers, enhance the reputation of newsrooms, and increase revenue.

Origins of Solution Journalism

The term "solution journalism" is often attributed to the New York-based news service Good News Bulletin, founded in 1948 by Austrian-German journalist Robert Jungk (1913-1994). Robert Jungk compiled positive news stories weekly, publishing around 150 copies each time. The bulletin focused on "successful projects and positive solutions," emphasizing and selecting constructive solutions to report on. Content-wise, it primarily highlighted solutions. Despite positive feedback from the media industry, the bulletin had a short lifespan due to its inability to secure funding.

According to Uwe Kruger et al (2022), the fundamental idea of solution journalism is to address problems and potentially inspire the audience.

Walter Williams' Pioneering Views

However, Peter Bro argues that the concept of solution journalism was first articulated in the 1914 Journalist's Creed by Walter Williams, a journalism professor at the University of Missouri (USA):

I believe that the most successful journalism... is... constructive.

Williams further emphasized the constructive nature of journalism:

I believe that the most successful journalism - and most deserving of success... is the independent, vigorous, courageous journalism, that is unbiased, uninfluenced by any selfish interest, that is constructive, tolerant but never neutral, self-reliant, self-respecting, respectful of its readers but always unafraid. (The Journalist's Creed 1914). Despite being republished and taught at times, Williams' call for constructive journalism was largely forgotten. The term "solution journalism" resurfaced (possibly for the second or third time) in 1959 with the publication of the book "The Manipulators and the Power of Business: A Study of Solution Journalism" by David Chalmers. Solution journalism goes beyond simply reporting on social issues; it also presents credible efforts to address those problems.

In Europe and the United States, "Constructive Journalism" is also known as "Solution Journalism". Solution journalism has gained new momentum in recent years. News organizations have been producing solution-oriented stories since the 1990s (Benesch, 1998). From the 2010s to the present, constructive journalism has become increasingly common, especially in North America and Western Europe, and has become more systematized than before. In the Nordic and Scandinavian countries, since 2011, the use of constructive journalism has been strong and has grown steadily (Cobben, 2015, 2016).

New Prospects For Ensuring Revenue Streams For Vietnamese Press Agencies Today

Since the 2010s, constructive journalism has re-emerged and gained traction, particularly in North America and Western Europe. The framework of constructive journalism has become more refined compared to its earlier iterations. In Nordic and Scandinavian countries, the use of solution-oriented journalism has been prevalent and has experienced steady growth since 2011 (Cobben, 2015, 2016).

Notable examples of constructive journalism include: *The New York Times* Fixes section: This section is dedicated to finding solutions to social problems. *BBC World News* six-part series "My Perfect Country": This series addressed audience interest in solution-based journalism by exploring solutions to common problems that could be applied elsewhere. The core idea of constructive journalism is to be problem-solving and potentially inspiring to the audience (Uwe Kruger & et al, 2022). Notably, in Nordic and Scandinavian countries, the use of solution-oriented journalism has been strong and has grown steadily since 2011 (Cobben 2015, 2016).

The Christian Science Monitor has combined journalism and social activism with the motto "Beyond fear, beyond anger. Real news, real hope". Similarly, the online news site Huffington Post has sections called "Life" and "What's Working" and the online news site Good News Network (USA) also specializes in publishing positive news with an optimistic slant. The Washington Post also has a section called "The Optimist".

In 2018, the *Montgomery Advertiser*, owned by Gannett media company (USA), switched to a solution-oriented journalism model to increase public engagement. The results of the switch 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, Facebook, and website analysis of the newspaper also showed that public sentiment was more positive than negative and that the switch to solution-oriented journalism increased the newspaper's connection to the community.

Times Media Group implements a constructive journalism training program. Times Media Group, one of the largest media companies in South Africa, has rolled out a constructive journalism training program for its editors and news reporters. Their new responsibility is to engage readers by facilitating constructive discussion and finding solutions to the problems of young South Africans (Gyldensted 2015b; Nevill 2015).

The Guardian's successful reader-funding model. The Guardian, one of the leading newspapers in the UK and the world, has used a very effective reader-funding model. In 2020, revenue from readers through The

Guardian's US membership subscriptions surpassed advertising revenue to become the newspaper's largest source of revenue in the US. By 2024, The Guardian's total revenue shows that about 1/3 comes from reader subscriptions, 1/3 from print, and the remaining 1/3 from advertising and other activities. Of which, about 1/3 of revenue from reader subscriptions comes from the United States. Readers are not only paying to read the newspaper but are also sponsors. A publication on niemanlab.org in the first half of January 2024 showed that The Guardian was very successful in its late 2023 campaign. The reader drive raised \$2.2 million for the newspaper. For the fiscal year, The Guardian raised and received approximately \$30 million from readers in the US and Canada.

The Guardian reiterates its commitment and pledges to: “The Guardian is editorially independent, meaning we set our own agenda, free from commercial bias and the interference of billionaire owners, politicians or shareholders. No one edits our Editor. No one steers our opinion. Guardian Patrons help keep our journalism free of a paywall, so it remains open and accessible to everyone. With their support we can tell the stories of people and communities that otherwise might go unheard, pursue the most complex or time-consuming stories and hold the powerful to account”. The success of *The Guardian* US: Reliable information and unique perspectives

The success of *The Guardian* US lies not only in its compelling calls to action or its honeyed promises but also in its provision of trustworthy information with new and unique perspectives on events and issues. Its analytical and thought-provoking articles on social issues are what truly set it apart. Well-written, high-quality journalism is largely what determines a newspaper's success and influences readers' decisions to pay for it. When news is valuable, high-quality, and impartial, the public is more willing to pay for it.

The decline of print newspapers in Vietnam and the rise of paid digital news

In Vietnam, while the public was once willing to pay for print newspapers to access essential information, this trend has declined sharply, as a large number of readers have switched to online news. Solution-oriented journalism with engaging, useful, and exclusive stories is also a reason why readers are willing to pay for online news.

Actual survey data by the author shows that if news organizations were to change their reporting style by practicing solution-oriented journalism (such as providing comprehensive analysis of issues, commentary, avoiding sensational headlines, and being unbiased while focusing on solutions to social problems, including child abuse), and if the editorial board were to charge readers, 45% of the public would agree to subscribe to a membership package, 41% would still be unsure about the quality of the newspaper when subscribing, and the remaining 14% would say they would not subscribe to the membership package (See Table 1).

Table 1: Public opinion of people over 18 years of age on the issue: If news organizations change their reporting style by practicing solution journalism (analyzing the whole issue, providing commentary, avoiding sensationalism, being unbiased, and focusing on solutions to social problems), and if the editorial board starts charging readers, would you be willing to pay for a subscription?		
		Frequency Percent
Valid	No	56 14.0
	Yes	180 45.0
	Still under consideration	164 41.0
	Total	400 100.0

Source: The author's field survey was conducted from February to April 2024

Willingness to pay for solution-oriented journalism in Vietnam among adults over 18

Current pricing and willingness to pay

A survey conducted in Vietnam found that 59.3% of adults over 18 are willing to pay between 7,000 and 10,000 VND per week to read news in a solution-oriented journalism model. This is a positive sign for the potential development of solution-oriented journalism in Vietnam. However, a price range of 7,000 to 10,000 dong per week may be affordable for some users but could be a barrier for those with low incomes.

Breakdown of willingness to pay

7,000 - 10,000 VND/week: 59.3%

10,000 VND/week: 19.3%

10,000 - 15,000 VND/week: 8.5%

Over 15,000 VND/week: 5%

Still under consideration: 8% (See Table 2).

Implications for news organizations. The survey results suggest that there is a significant market for solution-oriented journalism in Vietnam. However, news organizations need to consider carefully the pricing of their subscription models to ensure that they are accessible to a wide range of readers. They may also want to consider offering tiered pricing options or subsidized subscriptions for low-income readers. The survey results are based on a self-reported willingness to pay, and actual payment behavior may differ. The willingness to pay may also vary depending on the specific type of solution-oriented journalism being offered. News organizations will need to invest in marketing and education to raise awareness of solution-oriented journalism and its benefits.

Overall, the survey results are encouraging for the future of solution-oriented journalism in Vietnam. However, news organizations will need to carefully consider pricing and other factors to ensure that their models are sustainable and successful.

Table 2: If newsrooms practice solution-oriented reporting, how much do you think it is reasonable for them to charge per week or per month?

	Frequency	Percent
7,000 - 10,000 VND/week	237	59.3
10,000 VND/week	77	19.3
10,000 - 15,000 VND/week	34	8.5
Trên 15nghìn đồng/tuần	20	5.0
Still under consideration	32	8.0
Total	400	100.0

Source: The author's field survey was conducted from February to April 2024

Overall, the reader-pays model for solution journalism has significant potential in Vietnam today. However, to succeed, news organizations need to make significant strategic, technological, and content-related changes, as well as improve the public's experience, when shifting to solution-oriented journalism production. However, news organizations also need to further research the income, preferences, and newspaper reading habits of the public in order to take appropriate and effective steps.

CONCLUSION

The Vietnamese government has expressed support for the development of solution journalism, which could provide a favorable environment for its growth. Because Solution journalism has many benefits for both readers and news organizations. When reading solution or constructive journalism, the public will have useful and practical information, better understand and solve social problems in a positive information environment that is no longer “shocking, cheesy, sex”. Solution journalism or Constructive journalism is a type of journalism that focuses on analyzing and solving social problems. This type of journalism has gradually re-emerged recently as one of the highly effective solutions to attract the public, especially in the context of declining advertising and newspaper circulation revenue. Solution journalism and constructive journalism promise to be a creative business direction for journalism with many development prospects, attracting a large number of readers to pay for newspapers.

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