How Does the Existence of an Online Version of the Newspaper Promote the Engagement of Social Media Users Aged between 18-34 with *Binh Dinh* as a News Source?

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of International Communication

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the engagement of the online version of Binh Dinh with online readers aged between 18-34 through social media. Binh Dinh is a local Communist Party newspaper operating in Vietnam’s central province of Binh Dinh. This research was conducted in this province, with the participation of 10 local readers, who are all active online users and five reporters working at Binh Dinh. In addition, the data collected was combined with the statistics from the Facebook page of this newspaper retrieved from October 2015 to July 2016.

To analyse the data, qualitative research methods were used, in which focus groups were conducted with the local volunteers to evaluate their browsing behaviour and reading habits. Content analysis was employed in coding the information from Facebook to evaluate the levels of engagement between Binh Dinh and its readership through this page as well as other supporting factors, such as forms of engagement and types of engaging news. The overall goal of this research is to find out effective solutions to promote the engagement of the readership with Binh Dinh online through Facebook. The findings reveal that the Facebook page of Binh Dinh helps promote the engagement with this newspaper, as online young readers prefer to read online news on social media. The levels of engagement rely on the types of news and its content, which may be useful, negative, or interesting. The level of engagement with the Facebook postings is still limited, partly due to their disinterest in Communist Party newspapers as well as the caution for personal safety when using social media.

Key words: Binh Dinh, Vietnamese newspapers, social media, Facebook, online news, uses and gratifications, online readers
Declaration

Name of candidate: Le Hong Quang

This Thesis entitled: “How does the existence of an online version of the newspaper promote the engagement of social media users aged between 18-34 with Binh Dinh as a news source?” is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Unitec degree of:

Master of International Communication

CANDIDATE’S DECLARATION:

I confirm that:

• This Thesis represents my own works.

• The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.

• Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2016-1028.

Candidate’s signature: ___________________________ Date: 23/03/2017

Student ID: 1435875
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<td>Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPEC</td>
<td>Central Propaganda and Education Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPV</td>
<td>Communist Party of Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTTH</td>
<td>Fibre To The Home</td>
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<td>MIC</td>
<td>Ministry of Information and Communications</td>
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<td>SNS</td>
<td>Social Networking Sites</td>
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<td>VNPT</td>
<td>Vietnam Posts and Telecommunications</td>
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<td>VTC</td>
<td>Vietnam Television Corporation</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the level of engagement between the potential audience of the Vietnamese newspaper *Binh Dinh* and its online version through Facebook. The first chapter provides an overview of the issues studied in this thesis. It also states why the research is conducted and what it may be used for after findings are generated. The research questions and some operational definitions are also presented in this chapter, which outlines the content of other chapters in this thesis.

1. **Overview**

The Internet marked a breakthrough in the revolution of the press, with the creation of online newspaper. Reviewing the transition from web 1.0 to web 2.0 platforms, Alejandro (2010) conclude: “The web has changed the world and revolutionized how information is stored, published, searched and consumed” (p.3).
The development of social media may help to ensure the continuity of the “free flow of information” (Thussu, 2006, p.42) and re-position the online newspaper in terms of engagement with readers. This kind of interaction is a two-way communication, based on “the collection of experiences that readers have with a publication” (Mersey, Malthouse and Calder, 2010, p.41).

*Binh Dinh*, a local broadsheet in the central province of Binh Dinh in Vietnam, is one of official news organisation in this province, besides Binh Dinh Broadcasting Station. Its position and role are printed on the top of every printed issue, saying: “Cơ quan của Đảng bộ Đảng Cổng sản Việt Nam tỉnh Bình Định – Tiếng nói của Đảng bộ, chính quyền và nhân dân tỉnh Bình Định” (The organisation of Binh Dinh province’s Party Committee - Representative of the Party Committee, the local government and the people in Binh Dinh). It may be considered an indispensable part of the local government, as it is an important channel to disseminate the state’s policies and convey the local leaders’ messages to people. Due to the development of information and technology, it has to change to adapt to the development of online news media. With social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Google Plus, the newspaper’s online version provides more choices of interaction with the audience besides the ‘comment’ box on the website, further promoting the engagement of readers with the newspaper and allowing online news users to read the latest news or be able to like, share, or comment directly on its Facebook page.

However, promoting the engagement of social media users with the newspaper’s online version does not happen by only setting up social accounts and calling on
the readers to interact with it. This kind of engagement also depends on the types of news posted on social media and how readers perceive the newspaper’s online presence.

2. Rationale and objectives

In Vietnam, each province has an official newspaper under the management of ‘Tình ủy’ (a Communist Party Committee at the provincial level, which is under the control of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee); therefore, they are thought of as being biased on some specific issues, which may be censored by the local Party’s Propaganda and Education Committees, which are affiliated with the Central Propaganda and Education Committee (CPEC). CPEC also has the right to ask any editors-in-chief of newspapers to remove articles published online if the information is deemed inappropriate and contains sensitive issues in relation to the government, high-ranking leaders or other issues. The term "inappropriate" is very vague since it depends on the CPEC’s decision. This may explain why people, particularly young readers, are not interested in reading local newspapers, like Bình Định. However, this does not mean that the young are not concerned of political issues. In a survey carried out by Epinion (2015), 77 percent of the participants said their top concerns were the disputes over Hoàng Sa (Paracel Islands) and Trường Sa (Spratly Islands). The survey also showed that 79 percent often read news on Facebook.

The main problem is likely to be how the content is delivered to them and in what way newspapers engage with them so that the young readers can relate to it.
While many newspapers want their content to be spread widely and delivered to audiences of all ages, they do not care about solutions to attract young readers. It seems that some broadsheets still follow the one-way communication, ignoring the power of social media in the digital age. This research deals with the above issue to find out how essential the social media is in relation to online newspapers in Vietnam, particularly *Binh Dinh*.

Until now, *Binh Dinh* has been totally subsidised by the local government, but as there is a plan for the State’s subsidies to be reduced in the future, it must partly finance itself by 2020 before the subsidy will be totally removed. To reach the goal of increasing its profitability, the newspaper needs to improve all aspects in order to get the support from readership. The editors have to search for the topics that can attract more readers and adjust the content that does not engage with the readers well.

Generally, engaging with readership as much as possible is always the top priority of any newspapers, since their engagement is absolutely necessary for the existence of a newspaper. However, there have not been many studies on media “regarding circulation, readership, or advertising to help newspapers gauge their audience’s needs and develop long-term strategies” (McKinley, 2010, p.99). *Binh Dinh* online, as a local news organisation, faces the demand to improve its content. It will need to explore how to approach readers in the most effective way and engage with online young readers aged between 18-34. This demographic was selected, based on the statistics acquired from the newspaper’s Facebook page, which showed that Facebook users in this age group engage with this page
very frequently. It also revealed that female cohorts are much more engaged than male cohorts. In this thesis, the user engagement with the media through social media is defined as the two-way communication, in which the engagement implies not only “likes”, “comment” but also “psychological and behavioral experiences” (Ksiazek, Peer, and Lessard, 2016, p.504). In other words, the engagement is also perceived as how readers are interested in online news and how they interact with the media and other users.

The question of what readers think about Binh Dinh has not been studied systematically before. In the digital age, when online news media are strongly emerging and readers do not give much attention to the print newspaper, promoting the online news users’ engagement with Binh Dinh is really important. This research aims to provide an initial ground on which Binh Dinh can base an assessment of the success of its engagement with online readership aged between 18-34. It is expected that the findings of the research will help the newspaper to find solutions to help it engage with its readers more effectively.

This study is also expected to partly fill in the gap regarding the research on social media and online newspapers in Vietnam. Many researchers (Nguyen, 2012; Nguyen, 2013; Ma, 2015; Hoang, 2015) have studied the relationship between online newspapers and their readers, but not many have examined this issue in relation to social media. Most of the studies have focused on the web content analysis. For instance, Nguyen (2013) examined the tabloidised contents of some online newspapers in Vietnam to discuss the contradiction between the press freedom and the personal privacy as well as moral values. Others (Huynh, 2014;
Nguyen, 2012) have limited their discussion to the role of social media in promoting the organisations’ brands, particularly in the business sector, or merely studied the development of online newspapers in the digital age in Vietnam. For example, Eek and Ellström (2007) investigated how the development of the online newspaper *VnExpress* affected the media landscape in Vietnam.

This research deals with the following issue: “How does the existence of an online version of the newspaper promote the engagement of social media users aged between 18-34 with *Binh Dinh* as a news source?”. In this thesis, I use a series of four questions. The main question is as follows:

**RQ:** How is the engagement of readership with *Binh Dinh* online promoted through social media?

The following sub-questions are used in this thesis:

**RQ1.** How does the readership aged between 18-34 use social media to engage with *Binh Dinh* online?

**RQ2.** How can *Binh Dinh* online employ social media tools to promote the engagement with online readership?

**RQ3.** What is the impact of the newspaper’s Facebook page on the engagement of online readership with *Binh Dinh* online?

**RQ4.** What is the impact of the newspaper’s online presence on the readers’ reading habits?
3. Definitions of key terms used in this thesis

The ‘uses and gratifications’ theory provides a framework that defines the relationship between online users and their use of social media as a demand stemming from the users’ motivation. Rubin (2002) states that it “focuses on how individual use mass media and other forms of communication such as interpersonal communication to fulfill their needs and wants” (as cited in Urista, Dong, and Day, 2009, p.218).

Online news media are defined by Kit and Teng (n.d.) “as platforms that provide news online, for instance, online newspapers, online news sites, blogs, and social networking site” (p.2). In this instance, an online newspaper, a platform of online news media, is the target of the research. It is considered a phenomenon that is “one consequence of the expansion and significant development of Internet and the World Wide Web in mass media” (Hashim, Hasan and Sinnapan, 2007, p.1).

Social networking sites (SNS) have three functions that help online users to:

(1) Construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Boyd and Ellison, 2008, p.211)

According to Hinton and Hjorth (2013), while different types of SNS have their distinctive features or requirements, they share one or more common aspects; for instance, most types of the SNS are based on the relationship among people to help their members connect to each other.
Engagement, according to Mersey et al. (2010) “is a collection of experiences that readers have with a publication” (p.41). Opgenhaffen (2011) agrees with this definition when stating that readership becomes “part of news experience” when engaging with online news (as cited in O’Brien, 2011, p.1). Ksiazek et al. (2016), meanwhile, consider it a wider concept including all kinds of involvement with media.

4. Thesis structure

Chapter 1: The introduction provides an overview of the thesis, including some background information about online newspaper and social media, justification for the research and possible implications of this thesis and the research questions that guide this study. The development of the press in general and the press in Vietnam in particular is dealt with in Chapter 2, which also offers background information about Binh Dinh and social media in Vietnam. Chapter 3 is the review of the literature, in which four theories of the press are introduced in relation to the context of Vietnamese press, in addition to the discussion of the ‘uses and gratifications’ theory with the focus on the engagement of social media users with online newspaper. The methodology of the research, including the discussion of the qualitative methods (focus groups and content analysis) and online data analysis, is introduced in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents the main findings. The analysis and discussion presented in in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 is the conclusion, which also examines some limitations of the project and possible directions for further research.
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND OF THE PRESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Chapter 2 includes general information about the development of the newspaper sector in Asia and social media in the world and in Vietnam, followed by a brief introduction of Binh Dinh province and its local newspaper, Binh Dinh. The newspaper’s organisational structure and operation are also briefly presented in this chapter.

1. History of newspaper industry in Asia

A newspaper is defined as “a publication that appears regularly and frequently, and carries news about a wide variety of current events” (Stephens, 2012, para.1). Before the early forms of newspaper existed, people had used different ways to exchange information. “They spread news by word of mouth on crossroads, at campfires or at markets. Messengers raced back from battlefields with reports on victories or defeats” (Stephens, 2012, para.5). In 1450, Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. Bahador, Kemp, Kate, and Rudd (2013) state that:

> The printing press emerged in the 1450s in a Europe dominated politically by monarchies and in religion by the Roman Catholic Church, and spread over the next few decades – rapidly in those days – from Germany to other parts of Europe. (p.22)

The development of writing was used for news reports in ancient Rome. “It is said that the Acta Diurna, founded by Julius Ceasar and one of the forerunners of modern news media, was distributed across most of the Roman Empire” (Thussu, 2006, p.2). The true precursors of today’s newspaper came to exist in Italy in the
16th century. They were known as gazettes, or government’s newspapers. In Europe, there were some popular newspapers in England in the late 16th century, such as Mercury, Herald, Express, Observer, Guardian, and Standard. Other European countries also published their first newspapers in the early 17th century, including Switzerland, France, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland. In 1766, the Swedish government issued a law protecting press freedom, which is known as the first of its kind in the world. This industry saw a new phase of development in 1837 when Samuel Morse invented the telegraph, which “enabled the rapid transmission of information” (Thussu, 2006, p.3). By the late 19th century, print newspapers were seen in almost every part of the world.

In Asia, handwritten sheets of paper called the ti pao (official newspaper) were circulated on the streets in Beijing (China) in the 8th century, informing readers about social issues and important problems discussed by the dynasty. However, the development of newspapers in China might be marked from the reform period, the 1890s, when “there were around 120 newspapers, magazines and journals published in China” (Fang and Ebrary, 2013, p.2). The Globe Newspaper (Wanguo gongbao) was the first reformist one published in 1895 and circulated “among the Qing government officials” (Fang and Ebrary, 2013, p.3). During the 1911 Revolution, The Minpao Magazine became the official newspaper of the revolutionary forces.

It is said that newspapers have their root in Western countries, but the ancient forms of newspapers were also believed to stem from China and Korea where their movable block types existed for a long time before Gutenberg. There were
government news sheets in China and privately printed newspapers in China by the 16th century. Newspapers as we know there were, however, largely a European invention since they were based on Gutenberg’s printing press, rather than the labourious Chinese (or Korean) method of block printing. While arguments abound, it is possible that the earliest newspaper as we know was the Dutch-language *Nieuwe Tijdinghen*, which may have been published as early as 1605.

The news distribution entered a new era in the 1970s, beginning with the efforts by BBC and the French government, which respectively delivered electronic news through Ceefax on the BBC (Engel, 2012) and Minitel, a small terminal sending and receiving information via the French national telephone system (Schofield, 2012). In terms of online newspaper, Eek and Ellström (2007) suggest that:

> The first electronic newspapers were available in the early 1970s. They were in forms of videotext and other various forms on proprietary services...before it found its way to the World Wide Web in 1994. (p.17)

The *Palo Alto Weekly*, which was launched in 1979, became the first newspaper publishing its content on the Internet in January 1994 (Nguyen, 2010). At that time, the new form of newspaper was very simple, as “the modems were very slow” (Eek and Ellström, 2007, p.17). Online news services have become multimedia platforms that fit different devices, rather than personal computers and can earn money through either advertising or subscription for exclusive news. One of the features that distinguishes an online newspaper from a printed version is the two-way engagement of readers with the newspaper in higher interactive
ways. Instead of sending letters to a newsroom by post or calling an editor by telephone, readers who want to interact with news items are now able to send emails or give comments on a newspaper’s website.

2. The newspaper industry in Vietnam

The press history of Vietnam began between 1861 and 1907 when there were 70 newspapers in French and 20 in Vietnamese-style Roman script. The *South Expeditionary Gazette* was the first newspaper published in Saigon in 1861 and the first Vietnamese-language newspaper was *Gia Dinh Bao*, established in Saigon in 1869. Both were sponsored by the French, who colonised Vietnam from 1884 to 1945. In the years that followed, both the French and anti-colonialist forces used newspapers for propaganda purposes. During the period of the *Viet Minh* struggle against the French following the Second World War, many journalists were jailed.

The basis of Vietnam’s current newspaper industry was established in Hanoi during the period of Ho Chi Minh's leadership. The official Communist Party newspaper, *Nhan Dan*, was first published in 1951. Large circulation Vietnamese-language newspapers include *Tuoi Tre* (Youth-newspaper of the Communist Youth League of Ho Chi Minh City), *Thanh Nien, Nguoi Lao Dong* (Labour or The Worker), *Tien Phong* (Vanguard), *Sai Gon Giai Phong* (Liberated Saigon), and *Ha Noi Moi* (New Hanoi). Each year June 21 marks Vietnam’s Revolutionary Press Day, since Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) founded the newspaper called *Thanh Nien* (Youth - newspaper of the Vietnam Youth Union) in June 21, 1925.
Vietnam’s press system is closely connected with the government. It is, thus, necessary to understand the structure of political system within the context of Vietnam. The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) is the only party in this country and its leadership is “elected through a closed-door process every five years” (McKinley, 2010, p.92). The Politburo of the CPV, comprised of 19 members, hold the decision-making power in the most important issues of the country and controls all three legislative, judicial and executive bodies. The Central Committee for Propaganda and Education indirectly manages and monitors the operation of the press system and publication related activities. Its officials hold a meeting with editors-in-chief of national newspapers once a week to inform them about essential issues and review published stories. In 2015, the CPV’s General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong announced that state-owned media would be increasingly invested in both online and multimedia forms.

As a Communist country, the influence of politics on the press in Vietnam is even greater than in non-Communist nations, since the top priority of the newspaper industry in Vietnam is to serve the CPV. As Martin and Chaudhary (1983) state: “In the Communist World, the purpose of news is to shape public opinion along Socialist lines” (p.8). Discussing the relationship between the media and government in general, Bahador et al. (2013) also stress that:

The connection between politics and media is crucially important because the media influences election outcomes and government actions by informing the public, fostering debate and conveying public attitudes to political leaders. (p.3)
After the South of Vietnam was liberated from the American invasion in 1975 and the North and the South united under the control of the Communist government in the North, Vietnamese newspapers, which comprised about 100 titles, were totally subsidised by the government until 1986 when the economy was gradually changed from a central-planned to a “socialist-oriented market mechanism” (“New concept of socialist-oriented market economy introduced,” 2015) under a new economic plan called *Doi Moi* (renovation). This mechanism is essentially an updated version of the New Economic Policy, designed by Bukharin and introduced under Lenin’s reign in the Soviet Union. “One fundamental change that came about was the phasing out of state subsidies for most sectors of state-owned and state-run economy, including the media” (Tran, 2002, p.232). As a result, the number of newspapers mushroomed after 1986. The most obvious sign showing the print media had become more financially independent was the increasing number of advertisements in newspapers (Tran, 2002), as they were able to earn much more money to support their operation, instead of completely relying on the state funding.

However, this does not mean that all newspapers have stood on their own feet as only some of them were able to partly finance themselves and most of the other news outlets still depended on the state budget. Some national newspapers, such as *Tuoi Tre* and *Thanh Nien*, became financially independent, but among the 64 local newspapers, only some of them have been able to partially fund themselves and still rely heavily on the government funding. McKinley (2010) called this a ‘two tier’ system, in which the totally subsidised newspapers belong to the ‘lower
and substantially larger tier’ and the self-financed news organisations form a ‘smaller, elite tier’. Nevertheless, whether newspapers need the support from the state budget or not, all of them are under state control and the newspapers’ editor-in-chiefs have to undertake self-censorship for some types of news.

The CPV takes the overall role in managing the operation of the mass media and, under the Party, there are two bodies monitoring what newspapers can publish: The Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) and the Central Committee for Propaganda and Education. The Vietnam Journalism Association regulates the ethical standards of the national press system. According to statistics released by MIC in December 2015, Vietnam has 858 print news organisations, 649 magazines and journals, 66 broadcasting stations, 105 online news agencies, including 83 online newspapers and magazines with print versions and 22 online newspapers and magazines without print version and 207 news websites that re-post selected information taken from other online newspapers (MIC, 2015).

Vietnamese newspapers are directly under the management of one of three levels, including the CPV, one ministry, or one provincial Party committee. In Vietnam, the Central agencies, ministries, local governments, and state-owned organisations usually have rights to publish either a newspaper, a magazine, or a journal as well as a website. All forms of media in Vietnam operate under the Press Law, which was adopted in 1989 and amended in 1999. According to its articles, the function of the Press Law is 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’s role in the cause of construction and defence of the Socialist Vietnam Fatherland along the renewal line of the Communist Party of Vietnam;

The press operating within the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is the essential means of providing public information in relation to social life; is the mouthpiece of Party organizations, State bodies and social organizations, and a forum for the people. (”Press Law,” n.d.)

While the Vietnamese press is all stated-owned, the reality is that the number of publications in Vietnam created by private enterprises is rising (Nguyen, V.P., 2013). The most typical example of this type is the online news organisation VnExpress. It was launched by the telecom company FPT in 2001, but its editorial operation is managed by the Ministry of Science and Technology. These types of newspapers are controlled by private companies, which make an agreement with governmental bodies in order to be licensed, as only government organisations can legally publish newspapers. However, stories in these publications are mainly business or entertainment oriented. VnExpress, which is said to have no control from the government and its journalists allowed to report any issues freely (Eek and Ellström, 2007), is also in the same boat. This may explain why Vietnamese readers usually find criticism of authorities or political rumours posted on social network and hidden from the public on official newspapers (Nguyen, V.P., 2013).
3. Online newspapers in Vietnam

The Internet was launched in Vietnam in 1997 (Lam, Boymal, and Martin, 2004) and had attracted 47.3 million active Internet users up to January 2016 (see Figure 2). This represents a 10 percent increase since January 2015 (Kemp, 2016).

![Figure 2: Vietnam’s key digital statistical indicators – Jan. 2016. Source: wearesocial.org](image)

In terms of internet providers in Vietnam, the 2014 White Book published by the Ministry of Information and Communications states that there are 38 Internet service providers in Vietnam in 2013, all of them Vietnamese companies. Among them, Vietnam Posts and Telecommunications Group (VNPT), FPT Telecom, and the military-owned Viettel Group (Viettel) are three biggest Internet service providers. In the central province of Binh Dinh, they are the only three Internet service providers offering ADSL broadband and fibre Internet (FTTH- fibre to the home) for the whole province. The average Internet speed in the city and other district is about 18.95 Mbps and 9.58 Mbps respectively (Le, personal communication, April 4, 2016).
The magazine *Que huong (Motherland)* became the first online publication to be launched on the Internet in 1997 (Nguyen, 2010). Tran (2014) states that there have been a variety of online newspapers emerging in Vietnam since then, some of which also have print versions. Compared with traditional print newspapers, online news sites have more interactive features, which allow online news users to interact with each other, with newsrooms, or journalists (Nguyen, 2012). For example, *VnExpress* and *Vietnamnet* are the two first official online newspapers not to have print versions, but they attract a very large number of readers. Meanwhile, *Tuoi Tre* and *Thanh Nien* also have print versions, which are distributed nationwide.

The circulation of print newspapers has fallen gradually in recent years. In Binh Dinh province, *Tuoi Tre* had daily circulations of 2703 and 2633 in 2015 and 2016, respectively. *Thanh Nien* has experienced a decrease in its circulation from 7000 copies per day in 2015 to 5000 copies per day in 2016 (Huynh, personal communication, April 2, 2016). This trend is likely to continue in the context of the ever-increasing use of Internet to read news online in Vietnam. Many private companies have jumped into the share of online news media by establishing a *trang tin điện tử*, which is only allowed to collect and re-post news from other official newspapers.

As there is no equivalent term in English, “news website” is used to imply *trang tin điện tử* in this thesis. However, in reality, many of these organisations co-ordinate with state-owned newspapers and recruit people who have journalistic skills to work as reporters for them (Nguyen, 2013). They then “legalise their products by
using the name of these newspapers as the source of their own articles” (Nguyen, 2013, p.21).

There are also other ways for private firms to launch their own online newspapers legally. The first way, as stated by Nguyen (2013) is through the co-operation between companies and governmental bodies, as with VnExpress. The other solution is that companies “buy the right to produce sub-publications or columns in official online newspapers” (Nguyen, 2013, p.25). Đầu tư, an individual or firm that is the real owner of the sub-publications or columns and has a good relationship with many media outlets, plays a role as an intermediary to reach an agreement with the official online newspapers (Nguyen, 2013).

*Figure 3: The operation of online newspapers in Vietnam. Source: Nguyen (2013)*
4. *Binh Dinh* newspaper

4.1. Overview of *Binh Dinh* province

Binh Dinh is a coastal province located in the southern central region of Vietnam. After the liberation of the South in 1975, the provinces of Binh Dinh and Quang Ngai merged together, forming a new province called Nghia Binh. In 1989, Binh Dinh province was re-established and the province now includes Quy Nhon city as its hub and 10 other districts. With a population of 1.5 million, the province covers an area of about 6000 square kilometers, including 134 kilometers of coastline. The labour force accounts for 55 percent of the province’s population.

4.2. Development of *Binh Dinh* newspaper

This newspaper belongs to Binh Dinh provincial Party’s Committee. There were some precursors of *Binh Dinh* between 1945 and 1975. When the province was named Nghia Binh, their own newspapers had the same name – *Nghia Binh*. Its first issue was published in 1976 and the last in 1989. In 1996, the newspaper also published its own monthly magazine, which was totally self-financed, but this publication was stopped in 2011 due to the budget reductions.
Binh Dinh became a daily newspaper in 2009, but before that, it had launched an online version in 2003. In 2006, the newspaper also launched another online version in English. In 2013, the website had a new look after 10 years of operating, with a video column added and some redundant sections removed.
Like most of the news organisations in Vietnam, the paper is seen as the local Party’s tool of communication and its priority in reporting is activities of the local leadership, which are always positioned on top of the page. Its content ranges from political to economic, social and cultural issues happening within the province. *Binh Dinh* belongs to the press system of the CPV, which also directly controls *Nhan Dan (The People)*, an online newspaper ([www.cpv.org.vn](http://www.cpv.org.vn)) and *Tap chi Cong San (Communist Review)*.

While it targets all ages, those who usually read the print issues are mainly middle-aged and older. This figure could be inferred from the newspaper’s distribution system and its subscribers. The newspaper has an average daily print circulation of 7200, including about 170 copies presented to local high-ranking officials and some local governmental organisations; the remaining 7030 copies are sold at newsstands and to all affiliates of the local Party Committee, which must buy the newspaper in accordance with the Politburo’s instruction on buying and reading Party newspapers and magazines. The average advertising revenue is roughly VND4 million (NZ$265) per issue and its annual profit from advertising is about VND1.6 billion VND (NZ$106,996). Annually, the newspaper receives about VND10 billion VND (NZ$662,656) from the state budget to maintain its operation (Bui, personal communication, April 5, 2016).

4.3. *Operation and organisational structure of Binh Dinh newspaper*

Up to 2016, there were 60 people working at *Binh Dinh*, including 20 reporters, most of them under 36. The newsroom’s staff of the print version usually work
from 8 am to 5 or 6 pm if there is nothing to cover in the evening. In the evening, if there is any urgent news, it will be published online. The draft of the print issue will then be transferred to the press to be printed at night and distributed to all newsstands at 5am on the next day. When there are any special or important events taking place or ending after 6pm, the staff have to wait for the reports.

Its organisational structure is set out in the chart below (the number of departments are classified under the CPV’s regulations for Party’s newspapers).

(* Party-related issues (or Xây dựng Đảng in Vietnamese) include information about policies and directions of the Vietnam Communist Party and the activities of the Party leadership.)
Binh Dinh online newspaper

The website (http://baobinhdinh.com.vn) is an online copy of the print version. The department of online newspaper includes a person who is in charge of the operation of the online version, a technician and three translators who translate news from English into Vietnamese (for the world news column) and Vietnamese into English (for the English site). A video reporter was also employed to work in this department in 2015 when the video column was launched. Every evening, articles that will be published in the printed version in the morning of the next day are published on the website. During the working day, the website is updated with the information taken from other websites and any latest local reports provided by the newspaper’s journalists and freelance reporters.

Figure 7: A screenshot of Binh Dinh’s website.

The Facebook page of the English online version was launched in 2014 and it has attracted more than 1000 followers so far. In order to collect data for this
research and increase the interaction with online audience, I recommended setting up the newspaper’s Facebook page in Vietnamese in October 2015.

Figure 8: A screenshot of Binh Dinh’s Facebook page in Vietnamese.

5. Development of social media

Social media is defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, as cited in Whiting and Williams, 2013, p.363). According to Treem and Leonardi (2012), “the first known use of the term social media in print is believed to have occurred in 1997” (p.144). This is also the year witnessing the occurrence of SixDegrees.com as the first form of social media, followed by the launch of other social platforms, such as Blogger, Wikipedia, MySpace, Yahoo 360, Twitter and Facebook. Alejandro (2010) states: “If the press is the Fourth Estate, William Dutton of the Oxford Internet Institute termed social media as the emergence of the Fifth Estate” (p.13). Launched in 2004 as a social network for Harvard students, Facebook has
grown dramatically in every part of the world and “became the top social network across eight individual markets in Asia – the Philippines, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand, Hong Kong and Vietnam” (Edosomwan, Prakasan, and Kouame, 2011, p.4). Kemp (2016) points out that Facebook is the most commonly used social platform with roughly 1.590 billion active users around the world.

5.1. Social media and young users in Vietnam

In Vietnam, one of the eight above-mentioned markets, the use of social media has become popular since 2005 “when there were new blogs created every minute in an online booming phenomenon [and] the period 2006-2008 was considered the prime time for Yahoo!360 in Vietnam” (Nguyen, 2014, p.7). Zing Me, a Vietnamese social network, also became successful for a short time after it was launched in 2009. However, after Yahoo!360 stopped operating in 2009, online users in Vietnam moved to different types of blogs and Facebook has gradually become the most used social platform (Ma, 2015). McKinley (2010) believes that “given the country’s extremely young demographics, blogs and social media will become more important over time” (p.100). Kemp (2016) states that among 47.3 million online active users in Vietnam, 35 million people use social media of which the number of Facebook user accounts make up 29 percent. The figures show a high potential for the development of online news media in this country, particularly online newspapers.
In a recent study of 710 Vietnamese readers, conducted by Epinion (2015), the answers to the question about which internet/non-internet activities they performed in a typical week showed that 79 percent often read news on Facebook and 50 percent of them read online newspapers. In addition, 64 percent usually checked or posted on Facebook.
A survey conducted by the online market research services in Vietnam, Q&Me (2015), also shows that Facebook is the main source of news for Vietnamese young people. Their common topics, which are set out in the following chart, when talking with friends are about jobs and friends.

**Facebook** is the most common source for Vietnamese youth concerning latest news

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**Figure 11: Where do you get the latest information about news? Source: Q&Me (2015).**

**Jobs and Friends** are the most popular topics when chatting with friends

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**Figure 12: What do you talk about with your friends? Source: Q&Me (2015)**
In terms of age and gender, the percentage of Facebook users who are male is higher than that of female and the younger they are the more frequently they use Facebook (see Figure 13).

![Facebook User Profile](image)

*Figure 13: Detail of Vietnamese Facebook users by age group and gender, in millions.*

One of the notable features helping Facebook to attract Internet users is that it allows direct engagement with online newspapers via their Facebook accounts. According to Nguyen (2014), “under tight censorship controls, blog and Facebook prove to be an excellent tool to fill the gaps and insufficiency in official media coverage” (p.11). The main goal of Facebook is “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected” (Facebook, 2012, as cited in Hunt, Atkin, and Krishnan, 2012, p.188). The rapid development of social media has forced most of news organisations in Vietnam to quickly set up their social accounts as an effective way of connecting with online audience.
According to Correa et al. (2010), “web 2.0-based social media allows users to communicate and interact on the Internet immediately and directly with one another and with mutual friends” (as cited in Dao, Le, Ming-Sung Cheng, and Chao Chen, 2014, p.271). For example, the Facebook company has rolled out more and more new features so far in order to help its users to take full advantage of its functions.

Figure 14: The Facebook pages of VnExpress (above) and Tuoi Tre.

Under the proposition on national press management and planning towards 2025, announced recently by the MIC, the country’s press system will see fewer print and more online newspapers. The report identifies electronic newspapers and
social media as the main role of the press system in Vietnam (MIC, 2015). The connection between online newspapers and social media is indispensable in the digital age and the interactive features may be the deciding factor for the development of the relationship between online readership and newspaper via social media. However, the MIC recently asked all newspapers organisations which have Facebook pages to strictly control users’ comments on these pages, aiming to block comments said to abuse freedom of speech to distort the state’s policies or insult high-ranking leadership (MIC, 2016).

While there are still some differences between social media and social network, the term SNS is used for both social media and social network in this project, since “social networking is an act of engagement as people with common interests associate together and build relationships through community” (Cohen, 2009, and Hartshorn, 2010, as cited in Edosomwan et al., 2011, p.5).
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 3 is the review of four theories of the press, two of which clearly illustrate the core features of the press system in Vietnam. Press freedom in Vietnam is also presented in comparison with the similar context in China. As for social media, this chapter introduces the uses and gratifications theory in relation to the engagement of social media users.

1. Theories of the press

Martin and Chaudhary (1983) suggest four models of communication, based on *Four Theories of the Press* coined by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1957), including the authoritarian model, the Communist model (or Soviet totalitarian model), the libertarian model, and the social responsibility model. The last two are quite different in their role. Under the libertarian model, the media is able to convey any messages with complete freedom; in other words, the press system can operate without censorship. Meanwhile, the social responsibility model restricts the freedom of press in a particular scale and requires the media to be cognisant of the power it exercises in promoting or delaying social change through its reporting.

However, these original theories were also modified over time and many researchers argued that the four theories no longer reflected the nature of the press. In 1971, Lowenstein added another model named ‘social centrist’ to make “the new fifth category” (Ostini and Fung, 2002, p.43). Hachten revised *Four Theories of the Press* to become five theories, including “authoritarian, Western,
Communist, revolutionary, and development or third world” models (Ostini and Fung, 2002, p.43). Despite the revision of these theories, they may still not be universally applicable since Ostini and Fung (2002) argued that all countries have their specific characteristics that may not fit a particular model. It means that the press system of some countries may follow the authoritarian model, but each of them then need to adjust this model to be suitable to their own political features and policies. For example, the press system in China, which has only one Communist Party, was very different from the ideas adapted by the Soviet regime, as it interpreted Marxism-Leninism differently and its policies for the press development was also affected by Mao Zhedong thought. Vietnam has a similar political background to China, but it mainly followed the Soviet model. This difference is likely due to the different models of their economies. Unlike Vietnam (see page 15), China applied the “Maoist line” in developing its economy, instead of following strictly the “Soviet model of economic development” (Gabriel, 1998).

In the case of Vietnam, which has an ‘authoritarian political system’” (Kalathil and Boas, 2003, as cited in Bui, 2012, p.8), the authoritarian and Communist models may best reflect the nature of media environment in this country (Eek and Ellström, 2007), as they both illustrate the government’s control over the press. Under the authoritarian theory, which is actually a variant of the Soviet totalitarian model, negative or sensitive information is often censored before being published if it is found to be against the Party or State’s policies (Eek and Ellström, 2007). Martin and Chaudhary (1983) state that:
In this model the right to send may belong to the individual, but the right to receive belongs to the society [when looking from] two dimensions of communication: the right to receive and the right to send. (p.90)

Similarly, the Communist model, which originated in the Soviet totalitarian model, also describes the press as a propaganda tool that is “state-owned and controlled by the economic or political action of government” (Ward, 1999, p.8); thus, as Martin and Chaudhary (1983) state, it is the Communist government that decides what information should be disseminated and gives preference to certain types of positive news. However, it could also be said that the press system in Vietnam may sit between two models in terms of ownership. As Ostini and Fung (2003) state: “In the authoritarian systems, the press can be privately owned as opposed to state ownership in Communist systems” (p.43), the operation of the media in Vietnam now allows both private and state ownership.

2. Freedom of press in Vietnam

As it is under the government’s control, “Vietnam’s press cannot properly carry out its ‘Fourth Estate’ watchdog role” (McKinley, 2008, p.13). However, the reality of the press in Vietnam is quite different from the above models, partly because it operates “in an environment full of contradictory regulations” (Nguyen, 2012, p.17). McKinley (2008) says of Vietnam that “while the Constitution allows for freedom of speech, Article Two of the same document places the CPV above the law and makes criticism of the party an offence” (p.16). But Cain (2013) argues that in many cases in Vietnam:
The media do not always act in tandem with Party interests. They instead attempt to exploit the growing space between the regime’s political censorship of the media and the need to use the media as tools of economic development and of curbing corruption. (p.3)

It could be said that “when the media is mentioned in the literature, it is often in the context of Western values and norms [and] this is not the case in many developing countries such as Vietnam” (Pham, 2011, p.2). For instance, “the state can only be criticised in terms of corruption, although any further or deeper debate about the state is not allowed because the socialist system must never be questioned” (Eek and Ellström, 2007, p.4). This is one of important features of media operations in a mono-Party country, since it adopted the Soviet totalitarian model. While the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and the Soviet totalitarian model also gradually diminished afterwards, the Soviet model has still continued under other names, like the authoritarian or Communist models. “Rogerson (1997) described the media change after the fall of the Communist regime as transitional” (Ward, 1999, p.9) and this transition did not change the nature of the media under a Communist regime. It means that they are still Stated-controlled media even though the media become more editorially and financially independent. “Some researchers argued that even though the fall of the Soviet Union allowed for media freedom in theory, practice was a different story” (Ward, 1999, p.13).

McKinley (2008) gives four reasons to explain the half-closed and half-open Vietnamese press in terms of freedom in the coverage of corruption and political issues. The first factor may be attributed to “party internal conflicts” (Elmqvist and
Luwarso, 2006, as cited in McKinley, 2008, p.18) as stories about such sensitive issues are often revealed before an important political event, like the Congress of the Party. For example, a group of officials who are nominees for higher positions in the government may want to discredit other officials who are also nominated for the same positions; thus, they reveal their opponents’ wrongdoings in the past and allow some newspapers to publish the information. The second reason is likely to be the ever-increasing independence from the state’s financial support, forcing “some newspapers to break away from ‘safe’ reporting to attract readers with more sensational stories” (McKinley, 2009, p.19). Another reason is the distance from the location of news agencies to the headquarters of the CPV in Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam. In other words, the further from the CPV’s headquarters a newspaper’s location is, the more editorial independence it has and this is clearly shown by the fact that “most of Vietnam’s progressive papers are based in Ho Chi Minh City” (McKinley, 2008, p.19) which is more than 1000 km from Hanoi. Tuoi Tre and Thanh Nien, which are all Ho Chi Minh City-based pro-reform newspapers, are two typical examples. The fourth reason influencing editorial freedom is “the increase in internet and international media access within Vietnam” (McKinley, 2008, p.19). Compared with China, where internet access is strictly monitored and even social media are banned, people in Vietnam are able to get access to internet easily and the use of Facebook and YouTube is extremely popular. Vietnamese readers who know English can also find relevant information published online by international news agencies, like Associated Press, which also employs many freelance journalists in Vietnam.
However, despite some advancements in the press freedom in recent years, according to the statistics for freedom of the press 2016 announced by Freedom House, a Washington-based non-profit organisation, press freedom in Vietnam still ranks badly with a score of 85 on a scale of 0-100 (see Figure 15).

In this map, Vietnam’s neighbouring countries Cambodia and Laos are also in the same boat in terms of press freedom. With similar restrictions on press freedom, social media in these countries also face strict regulations and control despite their popularity. In Cambodia, for instance, among five million active Internet users, 4.2 million people have social accounts and social media users who are in ages of 18-34 are in the majority (Kemp, 2016). Laos, meanwhile, has more than 1.4 million active Internet users and 1.3 million social media users. The largest
number of Facebook users in this country is also in the age group of 18-34 (Kemp, 2016). This age group accounted for the majority among Facebook users in other countries neighbouring Vietnam.

Because there have not been studies of the Vietnamese media environment, researchers have usually had to look into the press development in China when studying the media in Vietnam. In the context of China, which has a very similar political system as Vietnam, the press freedom and regulations of censorship are quite similar. With the development of the Internet, the Chinese leadership used it “as a tool decentralize decision-making and make it easier for the government to control the policymaking in the provinces of China” (Eek and Ellström, 2007, p.12). Chinese newspapers are strictly under the government’s control and “all news media run by the party must work to speak for the party’s will and its propositions, and protect the party’s authority and unity” (Wong, 2016). The Chinese government set up some functional agencies to monitor the press and the information on the Internet, like “Control 2.0, [which is used to control] the rapid spread of negative news reports on the Internet” (Tsai, 2010, p.406). According to Guo (2015):

> There are also a number of methods that the government employs to control online content, including the filtering of ‘sensitive’ keywords and the employment of human monitors. (p.74)

Under the Chinese Communist Party’s leadership, allowing the free delivery of information without monitoring is seen as danger to the state (Eek and Ellström, 2007).
Another limitation for Chinese media is that, unlike Vietnam where social media platforms are very popular, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are banned in China. Google had to move its domain name from China to Hong Kong. At present, Weibo, a type of social platform, “has provided a unique landscape for the Chinese people to express themselves” (Guo, 2015, p.78). Among four services for Weibo users: Tencent Weibo, Netease Weibo, Souhu Weibo and Sina Weibo, the last one is the most used service (Guo, 2015). Compared with other social networks, the percentage of Sina Weibo users also accounts for 16 percent of 653 million active social media users in China (Kemp, 2016).

3. SNS and uses and gratifications theory

According to Urista et al. (2009), SNS have some special features that help users to personalise their own page, share information, pictures and video and connect with other people. Recognising the effectiveness of SNS in disseminating information and connecting people, different organisations, companies and news outlets have used SNS to engage with its customers, partners and readers. It could be said that SNS have now become an indispensable way of connecting the readership with online newspapers, as their “popularity cuts across geographical boundaries, cultures and even generations [and] it is used not only for leisure but also for communication and even news consumption” (Ferrucci and Tandoc, 2015, p.177).

The power of SNS is also considered as a direct news service for the online readership, which means that readers are able to directly read their favourite
types of news on the SNS newsfeed, instead of accessing and seeking articles in each website. The engagement of online newspapers and the readership is likely to depend on what they read and why they read. However, there is little research evaluating the role of SNS in terms of the engagement of readership with online newspapers. Hong (2012) confirms: “Despite the newspaper industry’s rapidly growing use of social media, thus far, very few studies have discussed the impact of social media in the context of the online news industry” (pp.69 – 70).

The uses and gratifications theory, firstly suggested by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in 1973, states that a particular medium is selected because it helps to satisfy one’s demands (Sheldon, 2015, p.21). These demands are listed under “four categories: diversion (escape from daily problems), personal relationship (using media for companionship), personal identity (reinforcing values), and surveillance (information that helps an individual accomplish something)” (McQuail, Blumler, and Brown, 1972, as cited in Sheldon, 2015, p.21). According to Sheldon (2015), this theory has been applied to investigate the use of social media in the past 10 years.

In terms of social media users’ browsing behaviours, the theory of uses and gratifications has been frequently used to explain the online users’ motivation for using social media. As Lariscy et al. (2011) state, “the basic premise of uses and gratifications theory is that individuals will seek out media among competitors that fulfills their needs and lead to ultimate gratifications” (as cited in Whiting and Williams, 2013, p.363). Chung and Yoo (2008) also believe that this theory “has contributed answering such questions related to why people use the media and
why they are motivated to engage in certain media usage behaviors” (p.381). In terms of the engagement through SNS, the uses and gratifications approach “is expressed through behaviors such as commenting on posts, ‘liking’ them, and sharing the post with or without attaching additional information” (Boehmer and Lacy, 2014, p.4).

4. Online news media and engagement

Before the emergence of online news media, readers had already engaged with newspapers in different ways. As Nielsen (2013) states “newspapers have historically been a one-to-many information medium limiting interaction with local readers to personal phone calls, signed letters to the editor, [and] emails to individual journalists” (p.5). Milioni, Vadratsikas, and Papa (2012) describe: “Readers’ letters to editor [as] the most common example of audience participation opportunities offered by the mass media, as an early, pre-digital type of user-generated content” (p.21). During the era of Internet, engagement has come under forms of “many-to-many and one-to-one communication spaces such as forums, chat rooms, and user-authored sites, in addition to one-to-many mode of traditional media” (Boczkowski, 1999b, as cited in Nielsen, 2013, p.6). In other words, new forms of media have brought to the audience new tools to create, find, and exchange information as well as to connect with one another (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002, as cited in Boczkowski and Mitchelstein, 2012).

However, different ways of interacting with readership also mean that online newspapers, one of the forms of online news media, face both challenges and
opportunities in establishing the engagement with their readers. They have alternative options to attract more online news users, but they also have to catch up with the development of digital trend to satisfy their audience. Discussing this feature of mass media, Chung and Yoo (2008) classify it into three types as follows:

Medium interactive features solely rely on the technology to allow users to exert control...those that utilize characteristics of medium interactivity and that allow partial human-to-human communication are considered human/medium interactive features. Finally, human interactive features that facilitate user-to-user mutual communication are considered as higher level of interactivity. (pp. 378-379)

Under this classification, Chung and Yoo (2008) conducted a study and found that the medium interactive feature is the most popular, as online news users often read newspapers for purposes of information and entertainment; while, the human or human/medium interactive features are most suitable for the purpose of socialisation. Larsson (2011) differentiates interactive features in accordance with five types of online visitors, including (1) The Bystander, (2) The Prosumer, (3) The Lurker, (4) The Filter, and (5) The Critic. Accordingly, (1) is a female who is “a passive visitor of newspaper websites”, (2) is a male who belongs to “the most active visitor type”, (3) is “characterized mainly by passive behavior”, (4) is a female who is “a quite focused visitor” and (5) is a type of male visitor who may be featured by “higher age and lower level of education” (Larsson, 2011, pp.1191-1192).
Xiaoge (2008) looked into the engagement of online visitors with news websites by evaluating some Web features: “customization, interactivity, multimedia, user friendly services, additional delivery channels” (p.37). Studying nine news websites in Asia, he concluded that they do not engage or empower the readers, as “users are not allowed to customize webpage layout, language edition, or content [and] to contribute stories online or chat online with webmasters, reporters or editors” (Xiaoge, 2008, p.48).

Anonymous online comments are another issue that needs to be considered when researchers discuss the online users’ engagement with online newspapers. According to Gsell (2009), readers may be more comfortable giving comments online anonymously (as cited in Nielsen, 2013), but from the reporters’ viewpoint, anonymous comments may not be reliable due to their lack of credibility. The engagement between online users and newspapers is, thus, likely ineffective. Hughey and Daniels (2013) state:

> Online news sites have adopted a variety of strategies to deal with vulgar and offensive comments, including turning ‘comments off’, not archiving comments, and adopting aggressive comment moderation policies. (p.333)

Recently, according to Finley (2015), many newspapers have published reports without sections for comments. Instead, they create fora for discussion about reported issues or allow readers to comment on their social accounts. These solutions may also be seen as a way to limit anonymous comments. While this is still a controversial issue at present, many editors “believe that social media is the new arena for commenting, replacing the old onsite approach that dates back
many years” (Ellis, 2015, para.4). It could be inferred that while “online news is a domain ripe for exploring interactive user experiences through the lens of user engagement” (O’Brien, 2011, p.2), anonymous online comments are not much welcomed. They should be accounted for when researching the interactive feature, as the anonymity and the journalists’ willingness of accepting it may, to some extent, play an important role in establishing the connection between the audience and newsrooms. As I have observed, at present, the use of social media accounts and the integration of social media plug-in into websites have forced readers to reveal their identity when engage with online newspapers. However, the identity still may be fake.

For Vietnamese online newspapers, the online readers’ comments are strictly regulated, especially for political issues. Providing that the online users do not use offensive or impolite words, their comments are usually approved for being published in the comment boxes on websites. Newspapers that have social media accounts also have options for their readers to interact with stories. This means that they are able to comment, like or share the stories directly on social platforms without waiting for the approval from the newsrooms. Moreover, the readership’s comments on a newspaper’s social account are able to automatically appear on its website, as is the case with Tuoi Tre.

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 16: Below the comment section on Tuoi Tre’s Facebook page is a note saying that “this comment will also be posted to tuoitre.vn. (Source: Tuoi Tre’s Facebook page)*
From my own observation, many online newspapers in Vietnam now also integrate social plug-ins under each piece on their websites, aiming to help readers to be able to share it on their social accounts easily, like VnExpress, Tuoi Tre and Thanh Nien. According to Hoang (2015), more and more online newspapers in Vietnam actively use SNS to boost the recognition of their brands and the engagement with the readership, as in their opinions, the readers nowadays tend to read what is recommended by social media users, rather than access online newspapers.

To conclude, due to the unique political features in Vietnam, the media practises in this country is quite different from the Western standards of journalism. Being put between the demand for freedom and the state censorship, Vietnamese press is trying to find ways to approach more readers, particularly through SNS. The theory of uses and gratifications suggests that there are various motives behind the online users’ browsing behaviour and the media organisations largely rely on this to promote the engagement between newsrooms and their audience.
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methods used to conduct this thesis, including focus groups and content analysis of online data collected from the newspaper’s Facebook page. The data analysis procedure to find the answers for the research questions is also introduced in this chapter, followed by the ethical considerations of the research.

1. Research methods

In social science research, qualitative and quantitative methods play an equally important role (Bouma and Ling, 2004). While any of these methods have their own strengths and weaknesses, in many cases it would be better to select one of them as the main method for researching a specific issue. Unlike quantitative researchers who follow a deductive process, those who work with the qualitative approach often use an inductive process. “Through the inductive approach, plans are made for data collection, after which the data are analysed to see if any patterns emerge that suggest relationships between variables” (Gray, 2004, p.14).

In the qualitative approach, two commonly used methodologies include face-to-face interviews and focus groups; meanwhile, content analysis, which Lombard, Snyder Duch and Bracken (2002) consider the most basic and important methodology in the field of mass communication research, is the dominance in the quantitative research methods.

In this thesis, the mixed methods were employed when implementing the research process and among the above-mentioned approaches, focus groups and
content analysis were selected. They were the most suitable methods for the aim of this project, which is to explore the readership’s engagement with *Binh Dinh* online newspaper through social media, since they not only examine numbers or statistics but also answer the question why. As for the qualitative methods, when reviewing the studies of different research methods, Lawrence, Shawny and Paul (1998) also found that research methods employed frequently in communication journals are qualitative. In terms of quantitative data, an important phase in the process of data analysis is the coding phase, which was implemented after the data had been transcribed. The data collected from the focus groups were coded by themes that are relevant to the above-mentioned research questions; meanwhile, what was inferred from the newspaper’s Facebook page was also classified into different themes for the evaluation process.

1.1. Focus groups

Using the qualitative approach, this research employed focus groups in which discussions with local readership and *Binh Dinh*’s reporters were used to collect the qualitative data. Wilkinson (2004) defines focus group as “an informal discussion among a group of selected individuals about a particular topic” (as cited in Liamputtong, 2012, p.3) to collect detailed data about the research issue. Coming under the form of semi-structured interviews, focus groups use open discussion to generate in-depth information, without much interference from the researcher; however, “data collection is focused on the topic selected, not on the process of the group interaction” (Carey and Asbury, 2012, p.15). Liamputtong (2012) argues that “the focus group methodology is an ‘ideal’ approach for
examining the stories, experiences, points of view, beliefs, needs and concerns of individuals” (p.5).

In this thesis, I invited local participants aged between 18-24 and 25-34 to join two sessions of focus group discussions. I also established another session with some reporters. This focus group provided a view on the website as insiders, making the findings of the research more credible, since their viewpoints pointed out what needs improving to promote the engagement of readership with the newspaper. Meanwhile, the first and younger participants talked about their roles as online readers and social media users with the focus on Binh Dinh’s online version. All of the sessions were held at weekends in July and each took place for about an hour. The discussions were recorded for analysis later. As Smithson (2008) suggests: “Smaller groups comprising of four to six individuals offer an environment where the participants can discuss actively in the group” (as cited in Liamputtong, 2011, p.42), each focus group in this thesis comprised of five participants.

To recruit participants for the research, I met some of close friends who work in other public organisations and private companies to brief them on the purpose of this research. I then asked these intermediaries to invite their acquaintances or colleagues who were interested in the issue to join the discussion sessions. All of them are under 34 and work in Quy Nhon city, the centre of the province. In addition, these participants are very active social media users. As for the reporters, I directly contacted and invited them to participate in the discussion, but before that, I had already obtained the consent from the newspaper’s
leadership to conduct the discussion with these reporters who usually write for *Binh Dinh’s* online version and use social media. When all of them had agreed to participate in the focus groups, I informed them about the venue and time for the focus groups.

1.2. *Content analysis*

According to Elo and Kyngas (2008), content analysis has been used in media studies since the 19th century. This method, which “has received wide applause for its objectivity and inter-subjectivity” (Neuendorf, 2002, as cited in Bui, 2012, p.31), could be used with quantitative or qualitative data and one of its advantages is that “large volumes of textual data and different textual sources can be dealt with and used in corroborating evidence” (Elo and Kyngas, 2008, p.114).

In this thesis, the content analysis of online material from the newspaper’s Facebook page was conducted to evaluate which types of news usually generate the most engagement. I analysed these kinds of data by accessing the Insights section of *Binh Dinh’s* Vietnamese Facebook page. This section provides all data from this page, ranging from the age of Facebook users, their gender, locations to types of most read postings and the number of users who engage with a posting. News items published on this page in the past 10 months (from October 2015 to July 2016) were exported and classified into different themes and the levels of engagement were based on the number of Facebook users who engaged with each theme. The analysis of Facebook users who follow this page was essential, as this kind of data revealed insights into the online news users’ reading habits and
how they engage with the page, their friends or other accounts. The information included the data of Facebook users, such as age and gender and how they interact with the page.

2. Data analysis

According to O’Leary (2014), methods used for the qualitative data analysis aim:

...to create new understandings by exploring and interpreting complex data from sources such as interviews, group discussions, observation, journals and archival documents, without the aid of quantification. (p.299)

In the field of mass communication research, qualitative data is even more complex as it may be in textual, audio or visual formats (Hansen and Machin, 2013). The data analysis is carried out “in an inductive, data-driven way” (Schreier, 2012, p.25), which means that specific codes, concepts or categories can be identified during this process.

Data collected from three focus group session was transcribed before being analysed. They were then arranged in accordance with the range of ages of the participants and, based on four above sub-questions, each transcript was listed under different themes that fitted these questions.

Quantitatively, online data analysed from the “Insights” section of the Facebook page included the Facebook users’ age, gender, and how they communicate with each other as well as how they engage with the page. These kinds of data were exported as an excel file that was used to make a comparison with the data collected from the focus group discussions. The data from the discussions could
be used to reveal their motivation or purposes when using SNS to read online news, while the data from the newspaper’s Facebook page gave more information about what types of news they prefer. The findings were supplemented with the content analysis of types of news from the Facebook page, which helped to “analyse and describe the most important characteristics of large amounts of qualitative data” (Schreier, 2012, p.30).

Among three types of data from the Facebook Insights: page data, post data, and video data, I exported the post data which gave me the statistics of engagement of every posting. The exported data was saved as an Excel spreadsheet, listing the data of each posting, such as: time of postings, brief content of each posting, and forms of engagement (like, share, or comment). However, this spreadsheet did not show the content of comments, I needed to visit the Facebook page to read what the users commented instead.

To analyse the post engagement, I focused on two tabs: the “Lifetime talking about this” and the “Lifetime post consumers by type” tabs. The former provided all data about the number of likes, shares, and comments (see Figure 17). “Officially it is the number of unique people who created a story about your page post by interacting with it” (Vahl, 2014, para.12). The latter gave the information about link clicks, other clicks (click anywhere on postings), photo views, which revealed how engaging a posting was through the number of clicks or views (see Figure 18). Using the calculation method suggested by Vahl (2014), I combined two tabs to sum up the statistics and got the total number of likes, comments, shares, and other engagement data for each type of postings. I also added other
information about types of news into another column for each posting. Combining the analysis of the content of comment with this classification and the sum of data of the two tabs, I was able to see the most or the least engaging posts under each theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posted</th>
<th>comment</th>
<th>like</th>
<th>share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/30/16 2:42 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/29/16 6:36 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/29/16 5:30 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/27/16 6:44 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/27/16 12:45 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/26/16 7:00 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/26/16 6:30 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/26/16 5:00 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/25/16 2:29 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/24/16 2:58 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/23/16 7:12 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/22/16 9:29 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/22/16 7:04 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/21/16 7:09 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/19/16 7:30 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/19/16 6:30 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/18/16 7:13 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/17/16 9:40 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/17/16 3:45 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/15/16 8:00 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 17: Examples of data on the tab “Lifetime talking about this”. (See explanation above)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posted</th>
<th>link clicks</th>
<th>other clicks</th>
<th>photo view</th>
<th>video play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/30/16 2:42 AM</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/29/16 6:36 AM</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/29/16 5:30 AM</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/27/16 6:44 PM</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/27/16 12:45 AM</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/26/16 7:00 PM</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/26/16 6:30 AM</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/26/16 5:00 AM</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/25/16 2:29 AM</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>193</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/24/16 2:58 AM</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/23/16 7:12 PM</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/22/16 9:20 PM</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/22/16 7:04 PM</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/21/16 7:09 PM</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/19/16 7:30 PM</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/19/16 6:20 PM</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/18/16 7:13 PM</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/17/16 9:40 PM</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/17/16 3:45 AM</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/15/16 8:00 PM</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 18: Examples of data on the tab “Lifetime post consumers by type”. (See explanation above)
Due to the large volume of postings within 10 months, the data shown in figures 17 and 18 were only some samples of postings shared on the newspaper’s Facebook page. These postings were of all types of news presented in this thesis.

3. Ethical considerations

This thesis followed all research-related ethical standards set by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC). Before proposing this project, the research acquired the written consent from Binh Dinh newspaper to conduct a case study of this news organisation. After the proposal of this research was approved by the Department of Communication Studies’ Research Proposal Approval Committee, an ethics application (form A) was submitted to UREC for approval.

When returning to Vietnam to collect data, the information for the participant form and participant consent form, which were translated into Vietnamese, were shown to the participants so that they were able to read, understand and agree with the information in the forms. They were asked to sign the participant consent form if they wanted to join the focus group discussions. The participants were notified that they could withdraw from the research if they disagreed with or changed their mind about being a part of the research. All of the data will be stored and treated at Unitec Institute of Technology confidentially for five years and only supervisors and I will be able to access the data.

As for the data collected from the Binh Dinh newspaper’s Facebook page, I only analysed how readers engage with the page and other Facebook users without revealing their personal information. Apart from general data about age and
gender, no personal information, such as names or places of living, is revealed; thus, their privacy is not breached.
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

This chapter provides the main findings based on three focus group sessions conducted with local readership and reporters in Vietnam. These results are also enriched by the data collected from the Insights section of the newspaper’s Facebook page, which reveals how Facebook users engage with Binh Dinh online. The Facebook Insights provides a deeper view for those who want to collect and analyse the page’s information, including the engagement of all kinds, people, gender, age, and other statistics.

Three focus groups took place in Quy Nhon, the central city of Binh Dinh province, in July 2016. The discussions with local readers were based on a set of nine questions while the conversation with Binh Dinh’s reporters was mainly about how they convey messages to online readers and select topics for their reports. The first two sessions focused on Binh Dinh and Vietnamese online newspapers in general and the participants’ opinions of their favourite types of news, their use of Facebook, and other relevant issues. These questions were designed in accordance with themes in four sub-questions that were used to answer the main question of the research. The findings are also categorised according to four themes that are presented in detail in the first section of this chapter. The second part is about experiences shared by the newspaper’s reporters and their opinions of Binh Dinh online in relation to Facebook. The final section provides statistics drawn from Binh Dinh’s Facebook page. Besides the information about Facebook users collected from the Insights section, news items chosen to be shared on this
page are coded under five themes and some of pieces belonging to each them are selected as samples for analysis.

1. Findings from the focus groups with the local readership

1.1. Participants’ profiles

A total of 10 people were recruited to participate in the two focus group sessions held at weekends in July, when all of them were available. They all volunteered and are all active social media users who frequently read online newspapers. To ensure the diversity of age and gender, they were mixed together and divided into two groups joining two sessions that lasted about an hour each (see Figure 19).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (P)</th>
<th>Group 1 (G1)</th>
<th>Group 2 (G2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 19: The participants’ profiles*

The participants aged between 22 and 32 also worked in different areas, including self-employment, public services, education, and private sectors. With the leading topic of “báo điện tử và mạng xã hội” (online newspapers and social media), the discussions started with opinions about reading online newspapers in general and
the personal use of Facebook and then the participants compared *Binh Dinh* with their favourite websites. “Mạng xã hội” is a Vietnamese term indicating both social media and social network. In the context of Vietnam, due to the popularity of Facebook, this term is also usually used to mention to Facebook only.

1.2. The engagement of social media users with online news

Discussing the personal use of Facebook, most of the participants said that their priority was to connect with their friends and the main purposes of their engagement with online news were entertainment and useful information for personal needs, such as local travel or cuisine, but they had limited sources of information.

In order to read the information on Binh Dinh province, the local newspaper was not always their first choice. Most of the online users usually followed some Facebook pages instead, such as *Quy Nhơn Land, Thanh Pho Quy Nhơn* (Quy Nhơn city) and *Binh Dinh Thong Tin* (information about Binh Dinh), which gave advice about where to visit, what to eat, or what was happening locally. These pages were set up and managed by Facebook users who loved exploring the province and sharing on the Internet. In addition, to search for specific types of local information, some also visited to Google, besides the above pages. As P4G1 said: “I liked some Facebook pages, such as *Quy Nhơn Land or Quy Nhơn City*, where the information about cuisine and tourism is updated frequently”. Meanwhile, P2G1 preferred using the search tool on Google where she was able to find additional information for an issue that she had already known about. For local
news items, P2G1 also used the same method and accessed Binh Dinh’s website to read more. This reader stated that her use of social media was mainly for social connections and while following some online newspapers’ Facebook pages, she had never engaged with online news through social media. She explained this by saying: “What I see is that information on social media is often negative” (P2G1).

Not all the participants agreed with P2G1 and said whether they engaged with online news on Facebook depended on other factors. For example, P1G1 said that he often commented on entertainment related news on Facebook as it was “discussed a lot on Facebook”. Meanwhile, P3G1 said he only read interesting information that was recommended by friends on Facebook, but did not like to engage as he was afraid that the source of news might be unreliable, “as I am afraid that my password may be stolen if I click on a link that contains malware” or he would be monitored for commenting “on a sensitive issue, like mass fish deaths". The same issue was also raised in Group 2 and at least two people described the similar problem as P3G1 had mentioned. Both P1G2 and P5G2 worried that news sources on Facebook sometimes were fake, taking them to a commercialised application or an advertisement. Taking account of the use of social media in relation to the engagement with online news locally, other respondents in this group also agreed that young Facebook users had high demands for information but this was likely restricted to their fields of interest.

1 The environment disaster caused by Taiwanese conglomerate Formosa resulted in tonnes of dead fish in four provinces in the central region of Vietnam in April and May. This event ignited a series of demonstrations in many areas in Vietnam. The government and security forces carried out different solutions to prevent the spread of protests, including the actions of monitoring activities on social media and blocking the access to Facebook prior every Sunday when protestors gathered to march.
For example, as P3G2 noted: “Many people share information about tourism in Binh Dinh” while P1G2 said he only read to know but did not want to share or talk to other people.

The participants also described differences in their reactions to news items shared on Facebook. Mostly, these readers did not want to directly engage with newspapers on their websites for different reasons. For instance, P1G2 did not want to reveal his name; P3G2 preferred to engage on Facebook as he was able to “delete or edit” his comments later. On social media, they usually shared stories they read with their friends by attaching their names in the comment section or sending them via the Facebook messenger. P1G2 said: “If a piece is interesting, relevant or useful for someone, I may share it or tag their names”. Conversely, P3G2 often sent links to his friends directly, instead of sharing posts on social media. There were also some readers who did not interact with online news on social media, like P5G2 who only “uses Facebook to read news”. In other cases, they might “use Facebook to see how people interact with each other” (P4G2). Similarly, P3G1 did not want to engage with online newspapers but did “love reading other readers’ comments”.

1.3. Promoting the engagement of Binh Dinh through social media

In reality, most of the local young readers rarely read Binh Dinh because, according to what some of them told me, this newspaper was mainly for"
viên² (Party’s members). The online version of Bình Định was more popular among the young, but in the focus group sessions, all of the participants said it still needed much more improvements, particularly the contents.

As the Facebook page of Bình Định was only launched in October 2015, not all Facebook users in the province know about or follow it. Similarly, only three of 10 participants of the two focus group sessions knew about this page and the remaining people just engaged with other pages about Quy Nhơn and Bình Định to get updated local information. Having followed the Bình Định’s Facebook page since it was launched, P2G1 suggested that the page should share more information about job opportunities as this was what young people were really looking for. P4G1 said: “Even though I already have a job, I still need the information about vacancies because I can tell the unemployed about them”. Besides the improvement of content, P3G1 also thought that the page should be professionally managed. He said because there were different pages about Bình Định, the newspaper should get its page verified so that readers were able to realise it as an official news channel, rather than a fake page launched by an individual. P5G1 recommended that news items selected to post on the Facebook page should be entertaining “because almost all young people now use Facebook”.

In Group 2, similar ideas were expressed when discussing the role of social media in promoting the engagement of online readership with Bình Định. P2G2 said

² Đảng viên is a person who is accepted to become a member of the CPV. Each State-owned enterprise, organisation, and local government in Vietnam has chi bộ đảng (a Party cell – a type of affiliate of the CPV) and đảng viên belongs to such a cell.
many of her friends used mobile phones to check their Facebook accounts nearly every minute during their free time. Thus, “the best way to connect with them is through social media”, she said. As a student, she also wanted the newspaper to give more spaces for job seekers within the province, in addition to the guiding information about travel. Meanwhile, P1G2, who worked in the local library, described a situation at his workplace when talking about the engagement with newspaper on social media:

At Binh Dinh library, about 400 newspapers and magazines of all kinds were bought and displayed for its users to read several years ago, but at present there are only 150 titles left. The number of people coming to read newspapers has declined. Sometimes I saw only five to six people reading newspapers in the library and most of them are adults.

He said like other younger colleagues, he usually read Binh Dinh’s print version just because it was available at his workplace. He concluded that if a newspaper had its own Facebook page, it would bring more advantages than disadvantages; however, this participant thought that it was still hard to have better interaction through Facebook if contents were unchanged.

1.4. Binh Dinh’s presence on social media and its impact on readership

The Vietnamese Facebook page of Binh Dinh was launched less than one year ago. Many people, including most of the participants of focus group sessions, did not know about it or they were unsure of its existence since there were many pages about Binh Dinh. Hence, we could not have direct discussions about the presence of the newspaper on social media in detail. Instead, the participating readers talked about relevant issues on a broader scale.
Mentioning other websites that they were following on Facebook, these young readers pointed out that sometimes they followed a page because their friends shared it or they saw an interesting story published by that page appeared on their newsfeed automatically. Most of them also agreed that they increasingly relied on Facebook to update information, rather than going to news websites directly.

Based on what the participants said in the two sessions, I believe the impact of social media on online readership could fall into three levels: Complete impact, fair impact and little or no impact. While saying that “too much information updated on the newsfeed makes me confused”, P4G2 also confirmed that most of her understanding of travel, fashion, or cuisine came from reading on social media. According to P3G2, he read any news items when using Facebook, “as it may be very interesting”, but some people used social media mainly to connect with their friends, like P3G1, who used Facebook to “like or comment my friends’ status and photos”.

In the case of Binh Dinh, P3G1 believed that the existence of Binh Dinh’s Facebook page “helped young people to easily access information about province [and] it is also easier for readers to interact with the newspaper”. Those who rarely read Binh Dinh said that they did not like such kinds of newspaper and their favourite sites on Facebook included 24h, Yan News, soha3, similar websites or community pages where there were many stories of crime, entertainment and the latest IT

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3 These news websites are managed by private companies and they do not have print versions. They publish different types of news, but the majority of information is about show business or shocking issues.
products. For example, P2G2 explained, “Binh Dinh does not have much interesting information.” Hence, while she was following its Facebook page, she rarely engaged with its specific content.

1.5. Binh Dinh’s online presence and people’s reading habits

Compared with the print version, Binh Dinh online was more popular among young readers, according to what I found after the discussions. While some of the participants said that they preferred the print version to the website, “báo Bình Định” (Binh Dinh newspaper) was still the key term the participants used when looking for local information on Google, like P2G2.

Explaining his habit of reading the print version, P1G2 thought that it was more reliable than online news, but he is only interested in “some types of information that are useful for his tasks” or personal favourites. Reading the print paper as it was available at home, P2G2 liked to read the last pages where job advertisements were published. Meanwhile, P5G1 sometimes read the print newspaper as a way to spend free time. He also explained that there was always a Binh Dinh’s print version in his house because his grandmother was “a subscriber of Binh Dinh”. Conversely, P3G1 read Binh Dinh’s print version about 10 years ago “when mobile phones and laptops were not as popular as today”. However, he also stated that he now visited Binh Dinh’s website about twice a month.

Similarly, most of the participants said that they only visited Binh Dinh online when they needed specific pieces of information. For example, P1G2, as a member of the local library staff, was assigned to find stories on particular topics
that were published on the website to form a collection. P5G2’s purpose in visiting Binh Dinh’s website was to see pictures by other photographers, as he was working as a freelance photographer. Binh Dinh online was not the first choice for many readers, but it, as some participants said, was the only option for those who wanted to know in detail about an already known issue happening around the province. For example, when the locals heard about a tourism project implemented, there was usually no detailed information about it. They then visited the newspaper’s website to read a report on that construction project.

2. Findings from the focus groups with reporters

The conversation with some of the reporters took place after two focus group sessions with the local readers. We discussed some issues in the practices of their occupation and opinions about social media. A total of five reporters specialising in different areas of reporting were invited to the session (see Figure 20). They were those who met the requirements: active social media users and frequent web news reporters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporter (R)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Specialisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Public security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Youth – Marriage - Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Social affairs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 20: The reporters’ profiles*
There were no reporters working for *Binh Dinh* online, as the website was still considered a copy of the print version. Only when there were any events requiring to be published immediately, did they send their reports to the website first. Thus, the first issue we talked about was how different their work was when they reported for the website. Three of them confirmed that they wrote differently if such reports were published on the website while the remaining participant (R3) said that he seldom paid attention to this as his way of writing was a well formed habit. R1 said his online stories were usually longer, because they included more details and pictures than those used for the printed paper. In addition, he felt it was easier to write about cultural issues for the online publication, since he could write as much as he wanted, without being restricted by the word limitation.

Agreeing with R1 about the word limitation, R2 said, “an online news report may be 800-1500 words long while the same report for the print version only has the length of 400-500 words”. He said he usually provided more information for his online reports, owing to unlimited spaces on the website. However, he also added that the length of a report mainly depended on different types; for example, *phông sự* (a feature) often included more than 1000 words, but *tin văn* (a bulletin) might have less than 100 words. R4 argued that whether her style of reporting was different or not depended on contents of stories and her online reports usually had more pictures, rather than words.

Another issue mentioned in the discussion was the initial sources of information on which these reporters based their reports. They talked about two ways of
identifying topics for their reports: finding topics by themselves and depending on readers’ information, but all of the reporters said that they mainly had to identify topics by themselves, as the information from the readers was not enough for them to fulfil their weekly plans.

As R1 explained, he had to rely on himself first by travelling to different localities to identify problems that could be reported. In addition, he usually used the information about specific events happening in different industries to develop stories. However, sometimes his reports also came from readers’ interesting issues. R5 agreed with R1, but added that any information provided by other people “needed verifying before reporting”, since, from his own experience, the nature of a problem was totally different from what had been heard. To write a short article or feature, he had to investigate every case very carefully before deciding to write about it or not. As for R2, there were not many new events taking place in the field of which he was in charge; thus, he almost had no information from readers and found it difficult to develop stories interestingly. He usually reported on seminars or conferences. Conversely, R4 said that she had an extensive network of connections that might give her many ideas to build a story, as most of them worked in her area of reporting, particularly on social media where her connections shared their activities. However, as she was responsible for other columns of the newspaper, she had no time to dedicate to one specific field.

Talking about the use of social media, these reporters did not deny its popularity and role in the information dissemination, but said that it should be separated
from work. For example, R3 thought that social media should be “used for personal purposes only” and he never shared what he reported on his social account because it might “attract controversial viewpoints” and what was published on the newspaper belonged to the workplace. His Facebook account was only used for personal postings, like photos of friends and family. R2 and R1 shared the same viewpoints with R3, adding that “it mainly talks about conference, local leaders’ activities,” (R1) and because most of its contents were a little bit “boring” (R2). Meanwhile, R4 said: “I sometimes shared my articles on my Facebook account if it was about good deeds and I wanted to ‘tag’ the names of people about whom I had written in that article”. Similarly, R5 also liked to use published reports, in which he thought other people might be interested, to engage with his Facebook friends, but the stories he shared were not limited to his own reports but included articles he read in other online newspapers.

While having different opinions about the personal use of social media, these reporters, by common consent, believed that it was necessary for Binh Dinh online to be more widely known on Facebook. R1 suggested Binh Dinh needed to publish more interesting stories suitable for social media users’ tastes. R2 gave a personal case as an example. He once interviewed some young people for his reports and found out that traditional cultural issues got no attention, but they knew a lot about modern musical bands or contemporary dancing. R4 had the same opinion as R2 and stated that many young Facebook users that she knew usually shared or commented on the information about tourism, cuisine or useful things for daily life. Sometimes they also posted links of articles on officials’ wrongdoings and
controversial issues to complain or express their attitudes about them. R3 recommended that the newspaper firstly needed to “have its own social media regulations and reporters also have to be well aware of benefits of this type of engagement”. According to R3, this was very importance because each of the staff working at the newspaper had different connections on Facebook and they could help to ‘advertise’ the name of Binh Dinh. R5 said more news items should be shared on the newspaper’s Facebook page to show that Binh Dinh online was updated frequently during the day.

3. Findings from the data of Binh Dinh’s Facebook page

Binh Dinh’s Facebook page has had 1704 followers since its launch in October, 2015. A total of 372 published news items covering different issues were shared on this page up to late July 2016, an average of two pieces each day. Except for the world news, which was translated into Vietnamese from different foreign sources and national news copied from other online newspapers, most of the local news was usually selected to share on this page. In this chapter, the findings from the Facebook Insights (a section on the Facebook page providing data about Facebook users and postings) are presented by being divided into different sections, including: people and location, frequency of updates, thematic categorisation, and types of news and levels of engagement.
3.1. People and location

The number of people who are counted in this case included the followers of the page. Between October 2015 and July 2016, the total likes of this page were 1426 (see Figure 22).
So far, among 1704 people who have liked Binh Dinh’s Facebook page, 1671 Facebook users lived in Vietnam, with the largest number, 737, in Quy Nhon City followed by Ho Chi Minh city where 380 social media users were following this page. In terms of age and gender, among Facebook users aged between 18-24, who liked this page, the percentage of female users was higher than male users, but there were fewer women following the page than men, who aged between 25-34 (see Figure 23). In this research, I prefer using the terms ‘like’ or ‘engage’ to the term ‘use’, because the former specifies forms of interaction while the latter is a general term, which may indicate that users only ‘use’ this Facebook page to read the information without interacting with its content.

Figure 23: The percentage of people like Binh Dinh’s Facebook page. (The figures under the “Your Fans” column indicate the number of users who liked or followed the page and their locations)
In terms of engagement, Figure 24 shows that the number of women who engaged with this page was higher than the number of men. The largest number of people, 578, engaging with this page lived in Vietnam, particularly in the city of Quy Nhon and Binh Dinh Province, 274 users.

![Bar chart showing engagement by gender and age]

Figure 24: People who engaged with Binh Dinh’s Facebook page between Aug 24 and Sep 20 and their locations.

3.2. Frequency of updates

Between October 2015 and July 2016, Binh Dinh’s Facebook page shared a total of 372 links of news items taken from the newspaper’s website. On average, a minimum of one and a maximum of three postings were uploaded each day, covering different local stories that were updated on Binh Dinh online. In terms of times of a day, from 8 - 11 am and from 2 - 8 pm were the peak traffic hours when Facebook users were online (see Figure 25). The frequency of updates may account for the levels of engagement between readers and the online newspaper through this page. The more frequently links were shared in a month, the more
engaging the Facebook page likely became, since the followers saw the information updated more often and they might want to keep reading it continuously. In addition, when this page was updated regularly, it also meant that the newspaper had more stories to share. For example, from my observation, in the first three months after launch, the number of users following and engaging with this page was in direct proportion to the number of posting shared (see Figures 22 and 26).

![Figure 25: Times of a day when Facebook users were usually online.](image)

**Number of postings**

![Figure 26: The number of postings on Binh Dinh’s Facebook page between Oct. 2015 and Jul. 2016.](image)

> February had the lowest number of stories (21) shared and October, the first month after launch, saw the highest number of news items shared on this page.
3.3. **Thematic categorisation**

After examining 372 postings on Binh Dinh’s Facebook page, I coded them under five themes: travel/tourism, crime/public security, culture/sport, other social issue and economy (see Figure 27). This classification was based on the contents of each news items and all of pieces selected to share on this page belonged to one of these types. The theme “other social issues” may include such issues as education, environment, health and youth.

![Types of news shared on this page (%)](image)

*Figure 27: The percentage of types of news were shared on Binh Dinh’s Facebook page up to July 31, 2016.*

3.4. **Types of news and levels of engagement**

According to what I found from the Facebook Insights, each theme listed above had at least one news item that was most engaging among the same type while some other postings were less engaging and many just got a few likes or almost had no engagement. However, the comparison among five themes showed that pieces about local tourism and relevant issues, like “must-see” landscapes or
beautiful scenery, always attracted more Facebook users to engage with them than other types. I also found out that the most popular forms of engagement were Facebook shares, likes on shared postings and tagging someone’s names in comments. As it was impossible to present all of 372 postings, to feature the findings I only selected some typical news items of each type that can illustrate my own defined three levels of engagement.

While accounting for the lowest percentage of news items shared on this page, most of the pieces on travel and tourism usually generated the highest level of engagement in comparison with other types. In the following examples illustrating the postings, I present links for each story and the figures are the screenshots of the postings on Facebook, which include the data of engagement on the left-hand side. For instance, when the information about an article of Binh Dinh’s tourism on the UK travel publisher Rough Guides was shared on Facebook on October 5, this link attracted a lot of engagement even though this page had just been launched a few days before (see Figure 28). This article (https://goo.gl/4ZtbLk) named Quy Nhơn, the city of Binh Dinh province, as one of “9 places to get off the tourist trail in Southeast Asia”. A report on the opening of new air routes from Quy Nhơn to Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam, and Da Lat, a tourism city in the Central Highlands region, also got a great attention from online readers (see Figure 29) (https://goo.gl/JCCnRi).
Figure 28: The link of an article entitled “Quy Nhơn – a new destination in Southeast Asia”. The link of the story is on the right side and statistics for engagement with this posting is on the left side.

Figure 29: The report on the opening of Jetstar Pacific airlines’ new routes from Quy Nhơn to Hanoi and Da Lat.

A video post (https://goo.gl/jiXO1D) on beautiful natural landscapes in this province also attracted a lot of interest from social media users after it was uploaded on the newspaper’s Facebook page (see Figure 30). However, not all
information about tourism related issues received such attention from online users. For instance, a photo collection of the beauty of a local tourist spot (https://goo.gl/houVPI) and a Business Insider’s article about a destination in Binh Dinh (https://goo.gl/4N4FMp) drew less engagement than the Rough Guides’ one (see Figure 31).

**Figure 30:** The screenshot of a link sharing a video on Binh Dinh’s Facebook page. (see link above)

**Figure 31:** Links sharing a photo collection of a tourist spot (above) and a report on Business Insider’s story on an attractive destination in Binh Dinh.
Coming second in terms of the levels of engagement is the theme of “other social issues”. News about social issues was in the majority among pieces shared on this page. Under this theme, news items about pressing problems were particularly paid great attention. Issues that were considered urgent might include environmental pollution, changes facilitating the people’s daily activities, alarm at infectious diseases or improper behaviour. For example, many Facebook users expressed their disgust and commented angrily about the report of mass fish death on a canal in a district (https://goo.gl/L9f9b9). The local authorities knew about the problem but did nothing because it was caused by waste disposal (see Figure 32).

Figure 32: A report of environmental pollution causing mass fish death.

Other Facebook postings that drew online readers’ reactions were stories about problems affecting them: warnings about malaria (https://goo.gl/QBBgH3), the regular absence of doctors at a local clinic (https://goo.gl/r5m20I), information about real estate investment (https://goo.gl/yx1khs) (see Figure 33) and a special
competition for undergraduate students. On the other hand, there were also reports on the same problems, but not many or almost no readers engaged with them when these stories were shared on the newspaper’s Facebook page. For instance, this page shared links of a report on the temporary pollution on the sea (https://goo.gl/U8Ic3q) and a story about the illegal sand digging in a local area (see Figure 34).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warning against malaria</th>
<th>Absence of doctors</th>
<th>Real estate information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4,460 People Reached</td>
<td>5,830 People Reached</td>
<td>4,357 People Reached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69 Likes, Comments &amp; S</td>
<td>192 Reactions, Comments</td>
<td>111 Likes, Comments &amp; Sh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57 Likes</td>
<td>138 Love</td>
<td>67 Likes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Comments</td>
<td>21 On F</td>
<td>39 Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Shares</td>
<td>1 Love</td>
<td>0 On F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180 Post Clicks</td>
<td>1 Haha</td>
<td>5 Shares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Photo Views</td>
<td>2 Wow</td>
<td>2 On F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGATIVE FEEDBACK</td>
<td>34 Angry</td>
<td>15 Shares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Hide Post</td>
<td>6 On F</td>
<td>14 On F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 Report as Spam</td>
<td>0 On F</td>
<td>0 Report as Spam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>771 Post Clicks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 33: (From left) The levels of engagement with reports on warning against malaria, regular absence of doctors at a local clinic, and real estate information.
There were 65 postings regarding - crime/public security - issues on this Facebook page, but the number of links generating engagement was limited. What I found showed that reports on officials’ wrongdoings or insecurity in public places usually became favourite topics of online news users. For example, a warning about cheating hitchhikers to steal their money in Binh Dinh (https://goo.gl/KPGfjc) received scores of reactions and shares after it was uploaded on the newspaper’s Facebook page (see Figure 35). However, these were isolated cases, as most of other reports on crime or public security drew less engagement.
Figure 35: A piece on a warning of cheating hitchhikers to steal their money in Binh Dinh.

Reports on culture and sports were also updated regularly on this page, but they were not very interesting to readers since the statistics showed that the highest level of engagement with some news items of this theme was even lower than stories about crime and public security. A story about a singer who visited a fishing village in Quy Nhon to perform free (https://goo.gl/1ickzH) and a report on a martial arts athlete who was the first one in Binh Dinh to win a gold medal in a national competition (https://goo.gl/I52GPA) were typical examples (see Figure 36). Meanwhile, most of the reports under this type just only drew a little attention from Facebook users, who followed Binh Dinh’s page.
Figure 36: The story of a singer performing at a fishing village (above) and the report on an athlete who was the first one in Binh Dinh to win a gold medal at a national taekwondo competition.

Economic issues appeared to be the least engaging type of news among the five themes, unless they were linked to tourism. An example of this fact is an article about the construction of a resort and golf course (https://goo.gl/L0ze9w). This tourism project was aimed at serving tourists and the golf course was built within five months (see Figure 37-1). Meanwhile, the followers of Binh Dinh’s Facebook page seldom engaged with other news of this type, like a report on the construction of tunnels connecting Binh Dinh and its neighbouring province of Phu Yen (https://goo.gl/eFEXsf) (see Figure 37-2).
4. Summary of key findings

The discussions with the readers in Binh Dinh Province revealed that local people want a media channel that will provide useful information for individual needs, such as travel or cuisine, but they have limited options. Most of the participants said that they followed some pages on Facebook that gave such types of information. Some said that they still read *Binh Dinh* and their favourite news was...
about crime and social hot issues, but they had already known that news and just wanted to check it again in the local newspaper.

However, *Binh Dinh* still played an important role as a reliable source of information. Many social media users were reluctant to trust information on Facebook for different reasons; thus, they would only read news on Facebook if they saw it was from official sources. One of the reasons explaining why they were afraid of unverified news was the worry of being monitored by undercover police if they shared or commented on pages that discuss political or controversial social issues. Some of the participants preferred to read the print version rather than access the online version, as it was easier for them to find information they needed on the print version, such as job opportunities or other pieces of advertisement. However, there was also another reason partly explaining why they read the print version. They read it as a way to spend their free time because it was available at that time. While admitting that *Binh Dinh* online was more well known, these participants seldom read it online, since its contents were not interesting.

Most of the participants described the newspaper’s presence on social media as a positive sign. They said one of the advantages of the newspaper’s presence on social media was that it was easier for readers to interact with the newspaper. How to engage with online newspaper was also mentioned during the discussions. Some liked to comment directly on news websites, but did not like to reveal their identity if being asked to fill in their names or emails and most of them preferred the use of Facebook accounts for engaging with online news, as they were able to
tag friends’ names or send links immediately. However, there were also readers who did not want to engage with newspapers but liked to read the others’ comments.

Like other young readers, the participants aged between 18-34, were particularly interested in reading news items about the entertainment industry and travelling on Facebook. They also liked stories about crime and technology. In the list of their favourite pages, in addition to local pages about Quy Nhon and Binh Dinh, other pages were mainly Zing, Yan News, 24h, which published many pieces on show business, crime, and youth-related issues.

The reporters I spoke to admitted that at present Binh Dinh was not a “must-read” newspaper for young readers, as most of its contents were not regarded as being for the young. When discussing ways to report for the online version, all participating reporters said they wrote differently when reportage was used for online publication, but the differences were only about the length of a report and an online article might have more pictures. Another issue was that most of the reports were about political conferences or meetings held annually by governmental organisations. To promote the popularity of Binh Dinh’s Facebook page, the reporters stressed that it was necessary to have more interesting stories and the content should be fixed with social media users’ tastes for information.

The findings from the newspaper’s Facebook page gave a deeper view of the actual level of engagement between online users and the postings on this page. The number of female users engaging with this page was higher than the number
of male readers in terms of both age ranges: 18-24 and 25-34. Interestingly, the ratio of female users on Facebook was lower than the male proportion, confirming Kemp’s (2016) findings. The differences will be discussed further in the next chapter. The types of news shared on this Facebook page were divided into five themes, including travelling and tourism, crime and public security, culture and sport, economy, and other social issues, in which the theme of travelling and tourism accounted for the lowest number of links shared online, but this type of news generally got most engagement. This theme was followed by the ‘other social issue’ which was the predominant type of news shared on Facebook. Under this theme, reports on pressing problems were usually given more attention. Crime stories only became a topic of interest when they mentioned some officials’ wrongdoings or gave a warning of a current situation. Culture and sport related issues were less engaging than the above-mentioned themes. In the case of economic issues, such kinds of information usually did not result in much engagement unless they were combined with stories about tourism.
CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter interprets the findings of the research. In correlating the theories of the press and SNS mentioned in the Literature Review chapter, the analysis is intended to provide answers for the research questions. In the context of Vietnam, the discussion is divided into the following sections: social media users and online news media, the application of social media tool to promote the engagement, *Binh Dinh* and the importance of its Facebook page, how *Binh Dinh* affects the locals’ reading habits and *Binh Dinh*’s challenges for changes.

1. Social media users and online news media

It could be inferred from the findings that online users initially used Facebook as a tool for the social interaction and gradually began to rely on it as a source of information. As Ferrucci and Tandoc (2015) state: “For many users, logging in Facebook is already a habit...without a specific purpose” (p.185). News organisations also took advantage of Facebook to reach a larger number of readers, since they realised the huge impact of this kind of SNS in generating engagement with the readership. Because *Binh Dinh*’s Vietnamese online version was not linked to social media until October 2015, those who wanted to read it had to either buy the printed issues or visit its website. Thus, young readers aged between 18 - 34 only read *Binh Dinh* when they had to find specific pieces of local information. Facebook provided these people with a convenient way to access the kind of information offered by different pages, which were launched by individuals, rather than any organisations. For example, some Facebook pages
about the province of Binh Dinh, such as *Binh Dinh Thong Tin (The Information about Binh Dinh)*, *Thanh pho Quy Nhon (Quy Nhon city)*, or *Quy Nhon Land* were frequently updated with information, videos and photos. The user-generated contents on these pages were usually the page owners’ experience of travel, cuisine, or some extra information that supplemented a piece published in official newspapers. These pages attracted young users partly because, as Q&Me (2015) pointed out in their survey (see page 29), they provided the information that is of the readers’ favourite.

A related problem is that while printed newspapers are able to provide verified information, they do not offer the latest news. In addition, the development of technology, including smart phones and online news media, makes young readers rely too much on the Internet. However, online sources of information are, in many cases, fake or unverified, particularly on social media and this issue makes young readers become uncertain of what they read. Despite of this, online news has still gained more readers owing to its convenience.

In terms of social media, the ‘participatory culture’ may be used to describe a new way of contributing what one knows to the public by sharing it through their social interactions (Jenkins, Ito, and Boyd, 2016). Henry Jenkins (1992) coined this term in his book entitled *Textual Poachers* published in 1992. His book was about “the relationship between fans, texts, and producers but also the social relations that emerged within fandom as fans created a shared space where their own creative and critical interventions could be appropriately valued” (Jenkins et al., 2016, pp.1-2). From my own observation, after the newspaper’s Facebook page
was launched, some pages about Binh Dinh, like *Binh Dinh Thong Tin* or *Quy Nhon Land*, set up by other Facebook users, sometimes shared the same information as *Binh Dinh*’s Facebook page, but the number of users engaging with the information on these pages was always higher than the stories shared by the page of *Binh Dinh*. If we exclude the *Binh Dinh*’s late appearance online, we may interpret the number of readers as indicating that *Binh Dinh* did not find a way to effectively approach these online readers who wanted a great deal of information. Another reason might be that those who followed the page of *Binh Dinh* had already knew the information. Leung, Schuckert, and Yeung (2012) argued that social media users likely wanted to read and interact primarily with stories that they did not read before, besides entertainment news.

Jenkins et al. (2016) also argued that more and more mass media were encouraging participation to promote the engagement with their audience. By publishing content on demand through SNS, the online news media hoped to attract more readers, since the “participation”, according to Hinton and Hjorth (2013), is the best word to describe the distinctive feature of SNS. Discussing the use of social media to promote their newspapers’ reputation, editors of some online newspapers in Vietnam, including *VnExpress*\(^4\), *VTC*\(^5\), and *VietnamPlus*\(^6\), confirmed that they deliberately selected news to share on these online newspapers’ social accounts, aiming to make them suitable to the age range of Facebook users (Hoang, 2015).

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\(^4\) It is the first online newspaper in Vietnam without a print version, founded by the FPT Group.

\(^5\) This is an online website under the management of Vietnam Multimedia Corporation (also known as Vietnam Television Corporation – VTC).

\(^6\) This online newspaper is an affiliate of *Vietnam News Agency*. 
However, in terms of SNS, the engagement, as shared by the participants of the focus groups, depended on not only the contents of news items but also the Facebook users’ attitudes as well as their main purposes of using SNS. Explaining why people use social media, Whiting and Williams (2013) conducted their research, using the theory of uses and gratifications, and concluded that there were 10 causes for social media use, including “social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, expression of opinions, convenience utility, information sharing, and surveillance and watching of others” (p.368). My research reflected some of these reasons in explaining the readers’ use of Facebook, particularly the first four causes. This may prove that the process of the engagement with online news involves different, but interrelated, factors. Meanwhile, the fact that some readers who were less interested in interacting with online news through Facebook is, perhaps, due to their caution or as an act of self-defence in the online environment in Vietnam, where commenting or sharing some political issues may bring them trouble and they have to be ‘smart’ readers to identify fake news or unreliable sources. On the other hand, the disengagement with media is not a rare issue. Nielsen (2006) pointed out that this phenomenon was very common on social media and online communities, with 90 percent just lurking in online networks (see Figure 38). Among five types of online news visitors classified by Larsson (2011) (see page 43), the lurker was also seen as a type of passive users.
Figure 38: The social media engagement rule: 90-9-1: The Lurkers – Commenters - Creators

(Nielsen, 2006).

Noelle-Neumann (1984) argues: “People are less willing to speak about an issue if they perceive that the majority does not share their point of view” (Sheldon, 2015, p.30).

In Vietnam, Facebook has now become more popular for most of readers as a more convenient way to interact with online news sites, instead of commenting on the websites directly. Their answers for this selection reflected how important the convenience of functions on Facebook is in encouraging the readers to engage with online newspapers. As this kind of SNS provides online users with features that no news sites have, such as tagging friends’ names, sharing or sending links of news stories to anyone, and editing comments. However, the most important characteristic of Facebook is that it allows users’ comments to be published immediately without being censored and gives them different options to interact with each other. Ksiazek et al. (2016) summarised these under two forms of
engagement: user-content and user-user, in which the former stems from the demand for information and the latter is for building social relationships.

Among these different ways of engaging with online news media discussed above, as I argued in the previous chapter, commenting on the contents of news stories shared on the Binh Dinh’s Facebook page was seldom seen and the more popular ways were to like, share, and tag friends’ names. This can be explained by the fact that most of the Facebook users just liked to engage with their friends by liking, tagging or sharing the postings that they found interesting or useful. While Hinton and Hjorth (2013) state that the comment function is no different from traditional ways of communicating with the media, such as radio talkback or letter-to-editor, I believe that it is a main factor in deciding the level of engagement of a news story, since the engagement means experience (see the section “Definitions of key terms used in this project” on pages 6 and 7), which is mainly shown through wording. However, expressing ideas on social media does not always work as an effective way of engaging with some types of news stories, like controversial issues. Due to the self-censorship practised by newsrooms and online readers themselves, improper comments are usually removed by editors or readers are unwilling to comment.

Another factor that is likely to affect the engagement with this page is the gender difference. While I found that the gender factor had the minimal impact on the engagement of Facebook users with online news, there was still an interesting fact about this. The number of female users who engaged with this page was higher than the actual number of female followers. According to Raacke and
Bonds-Raacke (2008), compared with men, female online users are more interested in participating in exchanging information on the Internet with those who they know. Other researchers (Parks and Floyd, 1996; Hunt, Atkin, and Krishnan, 2012; Ferrucci and Tandoc, 2015) also concluded that female users paid more attention to the online interaction through social media than men. This may explain the fact that they might not like or follow the page of Binh Dinh directly, but if possible, they still wanted to engage with the information shared from this newspaper’s Facebook page by their online friends.

2. The application of social media tools to promote the engagement

When the Internet moved from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 (see Figure 1 on page 1), the communication between news media and online readers also shifted from “push” to “pull” (Ksiazek et al., 2016). According to these researchers, the features of engagement no longer focus on such measurable criteria as the number of page views, clicks, or web traffic. Instead, the level of engagement of a news report is now indicated by how it goes viral on social media with new standards: likes, shares, or recommendation. Thus, using SNS is possibly the best method for online newspapers to promote the engagement in the present day. What I found also showed that the participating readers, who were aged between 18 - 34, were usually attached to the latest technologies and SNS was always a part of their life. It could be said that all kinds of online news media have the same opportunity to engage with social media users, but not all of them were successful in making the best of SNS.
In the survey of young online users in Vietnam, Epinion (2015) concluded that it was the content, not networks, that caught users’ attention. In this research, the discussions with the local young readers also revealed that the main reason why they rarely visited *Binh Dinh* was due to the uninteresting content of this newspaper. This may be true, as *Binh Dinh* is a politically-oriented newspaper, which mainly reports political or business activities that are of interest only to the relevant parties. However, young readers were still interested in political reports (see page 3). For example, they were very concerned of negative news stories about officials.

With other kinds of information, the data collected from the *Binh Dinh*’s Facebook Insights showed that travel and tourism related stories were always the online users’ favourite type of news. Borden and Harvey (2013) believed that there are two factors which form an attachment between a newspaper and readers: stories about them and their belief in these stories. In a social media environment, where the Facebook users are cautious due to fake news or unreliable sources of information, *Binh Dinh* has an advantage as an official news channel. The term ‘official’ indicate that sources of information is verified, but this is not enough. It needs to share on Facebook what is dedicated to the locals, not for officials only. As on Twitter, using common words or phrases with a hash sign (#) in each Facebook posting is another way to make it more viral. As I found on the Facebook page of *Binh Dinh*, with the shared links of the same type of news, such as tourism, those which had a hashtag, like #quynhon or #binhdinh, usually
reached more online users, increasing chances of engaging with the others who did not know this page.

As for the diversity of Facebook postings, Carpenter (2010) says news items need to become a “smorgasbord” to fit different tastes. Hoang (2015) suggests that a newspaper’s Facebook page should also share more information that is not published on newspapers to make the page look fresher. This kind of information may include videos, proverbs, or images selected from different sources on the Internet. This recommendation would probably be useful for a broadsheet like Binh Dinh, which cannot publish some specific types of news, like show business. Some researchers (Chung and Yoo, 2008; Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Urista et al., 2009) agreed that one of the main reasons why people use social media is for the entertaining purpose. The majority of participants in this research also said that they were particularly interested in entertainment related information, besides other issues.

It may be argued that what has been discussed above does not provide possible solutions for Binh Dinh, which wants to attract young readers to read the politically-oriented contents without becoming a tabloid newspaper. Firstly, it is undeniable that SNS is a crucial tool to approach these target readers, since they seldom visit such a website or read this type of news. After being shared on social media, how the content gets attention largely depends on how interesting these stories are. According to Graber (2001), in such cases it is necessary for the news to be diverse in presentation, as “younger people prefer to experience their media through visuals and interactive features” (as cited in Carpenter, 2010,
p.1069). In Vietnam, the ‘Rap News Plus’ initiative was a successful example of the mainstream media in making young people engage with news of all types “by rapping them over catchy beat music” (“Vietnam newswire claims world journalism prize for rapping its news,” 2014).

Not only does Binh Dinh need to be creative in using social media tools, but it also needs to professionally manage its Facebook page to promote participation. This is what the participant (P3G1) in the Group 1 meant when he said that this page needed to be verified by Facebook as the official social account of Binh Dinh (verified pages have a blue stick next to their names). This is quite important but it may be unnecessary at this time, when the highest aim of this newspaper is to promote the engagement with social media users as much as possible. R5 suggested that the newspaper should have social media guidelines for its staff. Such guidelines are not new for many news organisations around the world. While each news outlet has different guidelines, they basically focus on the reporters’ work ethic in using SNS (Nguyen, 2014). The Associate Press social media guidelines for its employees, for example, strictly regulates the verification of information sources from social media (Nguyen, 2014). At present, Binh Dinh has no social media guidelines for the internal use, partly because the newspaper has not paid much attention to the impact of SNS over its operation. If there is one, it may affect the staff’s Facebook use positively, partly assisting the newspaper in engaging with more readers through Facebook, since each of them is able to spread the news widely and use their social accounts responsibly to promote the newspaper’s position in the online environment.
In addition, the statistics collected from the Facebook page of *Binh Dinh* also revealed other factors that may affect the effective use of social media. The most obvious element having an effect on the engagement of this page with the readers is the different times of a day when postings are published. It means that if postings are shared in specific hour frames in a day, such as from 8 - 11 am or from 2 - 8 pm, they are likely to generate more engagement than links posted in other hours. This fact shows that besides the selection of suitable types of news, every posting needs to be manually published in particular hours to ensure the highest level of engagement.

3. *Binh Dinh* and the importance of its Facebook page

*Binh Dinh* has already been left behind in terms of technological advances due to its limited subsidised budget. Thus, to make any major changes, it needs to broaden its target readership. SNS is perhaps the most economical and convenient solution for *Binh Dinh* to approach more readers. Before the Facebook page had been launched, there was almost no information about the engagement of the readership with *Binh Dinh*’s online version, except the number of daily visitors. Besides the comment box on the website, which has hardly seen a comment for any news items, the interaction between readers with this newspaper could only be done through emails, phone calls, or contact in person.

The newspaper’s Facebook page has helped to resolve these above problems until now. The social feature or user participation of this kind of SNS allows what has been shared by *Binh Dinh* online to reach a larger number of readers, mostly in
the age range of 18-34, according to statistics of the Facebook Insights. The information of the most engaging types of news, the way of engagement, and other relevant issues can easily be found owing to this page. Moreover, this is also the fastest way to bring news to the online readers, who usually do not have much time to visit the website and choose their favourite news stories to read in detail. In the discussions with the local readers, the fact that all of them are active social media users proved that “mass media is passé [and] today it is all about personal media” (Alejandro, 2010, p.9), particularly for those who engaged with all types of news through social media. Some of the participants said they used Facebook mainly to keep in touch with their friends, but in the environment of social media, these connections are actually one of the main sources of information. Therefore, it is likely that Binh Dinh has to rely on such connections to approach other readers indirectly. In fact, many news items shared on this Facebook page were much more engaging on the followers’ personal pages than on the newspaper’s page itself when they shared these links on their own accounts.

It may be argued that Binh Dinh’s stories were uninteresting as most of the participants in two focus group sessions confirmed; hence, in this case the role of Facebook was perhaps not enough. It is undeniable that interesting content is very important, but there are still demands for useful information as the theory of uses and gratifications points out that people use social media for different purposes. As the engagement is the readers’ experience, different types of news always fit different needs; thus, there are no specific postings that always belong
to the most or least engaging types. For instance, the findings from Binh Dinh’s Facebook page showed that the tourism related issues were usually the most engaging postings, but not all of this types of news generated the same level of engagement. Similarly, the economic reports were frequently ignored, but this did not mean that all news items under this theme resulted in less or no engagement.

Mersey et al. (2010) said that some readers, who had different tastes for news, might still be engaged by the same content, which “could engender high levels of multiple experiences” (p.42). In fact, Binh Dinh has always published some types of news reports that readers may find useful, but these reports are in a minority on the newspaper’s online version, which is seldom visited by the young online users. Its Facebook page, therefore, plays a role as a bridge to engage with online readers through selected postings.

As for the usefulness of the contents on Binh Dinh’s website, the results drawn from the Facebook Insights suggested that the most engaging postings were usually about information about leisure activities or reports reflecting current hot issues. For instance, the tourism related issues were more or less given special attention whenever the postings providing the information of where to travel or what to eat around the province were shared on Facebook. This is also partly due to the fact that the province of Binh Dinh has recently become an emerging destination for tourists, with some unspoilt tourist spots. The statistics of the European Travel Commission also revealed that “Facebook is the traveller’s social network of choice, with 29% using this platform for holiday inspiration” (as cited in Leung et al., 2012, p.195). Similarly, the information about travelling with newly
opening routes or the construction of tourism projects got a high level of engagement, as it was relevant to the convenience for people.

In other cases, like the reports of criminal activities, the pieces on some common kinds of crime were not usually as engaging as a warning of wrongdoings, like the cheating of old hitchhikers, which the readers wanted to share to alert their friends or relatives. The environmental pollution was also a cause for concern for many people, particularly after the prolonged event of mass fish deaths in four central provinces. The reports on this issue attracted a great attention of the online readers, perhaps because it was a “hot” issue at that time and it also proved that a domino effect of fear was the main factor causing greater reactions from the Facebook users. Cvijikj and Michahelles (2011) believe that ‘posting type and category have a significant effect over the user interaction and as such should be used for planning of the communication strategy’ (p.168).

4. How Binh Dinh affects people’s reading habits

The rising dominance of Binh Dinh’s website over the printed version is an unavoidable trend in the digital age, when all news organisations must give priority to online platforms. Its online version was launched in 2003, before the start of Facebook in Vietnam in 2009, and this news site was one of a few online Party newspapers in Vietnam at that time and it approached a larger number of readers due to the limited distribution of the print issues. However, financial shortages and the lack of proper investment have kept this website almost unchanged for more than a decade, even though it has been one of the top
choices for those who wanted to read the local information. Compared with the printed paper, *Binh Dinh* online has at least two advantages: convenience and breaking news, of which the former is probably the most important reason in attracting the high readership.

Despite the existence of different information channels, *Binh Dinh* is always an alternative option for the local readership, according to my findings. With about 1500 online users following the newspaper’s Facebook page after 10 months, this figure showed that there was a great demand to receive information from *Binh Dinh*’s website through Facebook. Conversely, most of the participants in the two focus groups seldom visited this website or accessed it only when they had specific reasons, such as finding particular types of information, re-verifying an already-known piece of news, or collecting articles for their work. It could be inferred that the launch of this online version suited the convenience of the readers. Mentioning the role of newspapers as goods, Chyi and Yang (2009) used the terms “inferior goods” for online news and “normal goods” for printed papers. They argued that, “people use inferior goods when they need to – that is, when normal goods are not as readily available or affordable – [and] inferior goods offer functional and convenient alternatives” (p.605).

However, the findings also pointed out that *Binh Dinh* online was not totally convenient for the readership. For instance, some of the participants (P4G1; P2G1) stated that sometimes they read the printed version to find some information about job opportunities published daily, but the job advertisements on the newspaper’s website, according to what I found afterwards, was not
updated regularly. This may be a reason why not many young users visited the website. Except for this, their reading habits are now online news as the Internet is the main tool for most of the young to get connected with the outside world. It could be said that the replacement of *Binh Dinh* online over its print version is not unusual.

The changing of the reading habits from printed to online papers among the young readers also stems from the demand for instant news, but in the case of *Binh Dinh* this factor probably has less impact. The discussions with the local readers showed that one of the reasons why they rarely visited *Binh Dinh* online was out-of-date contents. For instance, P3G1 said that he only visited this website about twice a month. The fact is that the website is updated daily, but the information is likely either not of his interest or already-known stories.

Another issue that may be raised in relation to the impact of the newspaper’s online presence on the reading habits is the content of the print and online editions. As I said at the beginning of this research, *Binh Dinh* online is merely a copy of the printed paper, which means that the contents of these editions are almost identical, except for some additional columns on the website. The impact of the online content in changing people’s reading habits is debatable, apart from the features of convenience and the latest news. *Binh Dinh* is not an exceptional case in terms of identical contents in both printed and online versions. Based on studies conducted by scholars from 16 countries, Kung, Picard, and Towse (2008) concluded that “70 percent of the most important online news stories are identical to news stories published in a print newspaper” (p.79). In fact, this issue
has almost no impact on the readers’ preference for online news. Instead, what makes them move to the online news media is distinctive features of the online platform, such as convenience, instant news update, and free contents. Undoubtedly, technologies can make stories more interesting, but content is vital. This may explain why Binh Dinh’s print version still has its own readers, who cannot or do not want to read online news.

5. Challenges for Binh Dinh to change

What has been discussed so far shows that Binh Dinh needs to change many things, from the content to its operation. According to Larsson (2013), this is a general trend in the digital era. He argues:

The challenges can largely be understood as relating to two different, yet connected, areas of journalistic practice – either involving audience relations and participant, or relating to the skill of crafting online journalism. (p.740)

Alejandro (2010) also says: “As news becomes non-linear and open-sourced, journalism will change and is changing” (p.7). Even taking into consideration of SNS, Binh Dinh online still needs to be better in terms of both technology and content related issues by itself, as this newspaper is expected to be financially independent in the future. In relation to these issues, the focus on reporters’ journalistic skills should be given priority.

The problems relating to reporting skills were found after the data collection process for this thesis. For example, when discussing the way of reporting online, four out of five reporters said they usually reported differently online by adding
more details for their stories, such as words or pictures. Adding more photos to online news stories could make them more interesting and reporting online needed to be different from writing for the printed version. Among three criteria for the online reportage suggested by Morkes and Nielsen (1997), concision is essential, as their studies on the online users’ browsing behaviour concluded that online readers “do not actually read: instead, they scan the text” (p.1). It means that an online report with too many words may be unnecessary, except for long-form stories, like features, because web users unlikely read every word without missing any information. Citing different sources, Nguyen (2014) believes that online reporters should use the ‘inverted pyramid’ style of writing, in which the most important information is stated at the beginning of a report.

As for the news items on Binh Dinh’s website, most of them were the original information copied from the print version while other reports published online first also saw no difference in style. Meanwhile, as Lichterman (2016) states: “On average, when an AP sportswriter covers a game, she produces eight different versions of the same story” (para.1), which are used to publish on different platforms. Explaining this difficulty in the Asian context, Xiaoge (2008) argues:

Asian online journalists have not received any substantial and solid training in online journalism and publishing. Most of them are simply transferred from the traditional newsroom to the online newsroom without any or little further training in Web journalism. (p.51)

Apart from this, writing interestingly is also a challenge for topics that are usually unfamiliar to young readers. As one of the reporters said, there are not many cultural and musical events happening around the province. If there are any
performances, they normally belong to traditional arts that do not get the attention of the young. Similarly, sport news, particularly football, is a favourite theme of the readers, aged between 18-34, but this type of news on the *Binh Dinh*’s website is mainly about community sports or traditional games, which are not favoured by most of the young readers. The reporters still have to report them as their tasks, but they are able to make it better, like using the multimedia forms, which may include a series of photo or a combination of videos with text.

Another challenge is perhaps the reputation of *Binh Dinh* as a Party newspaper. Based on the findings and my own experience, I realised that the behaviour of most people implied they were uninterested in reading *Binh Dinh*, which is believed to mainly publish politically-oriented news. Discussing the role of the press in general, Siebert et al. (1957) state that, “the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates” (as cited in Xiaoge, 2005, p.95). In a Communist state, according to Martin and Chaudhary (1983), this means that the press must act for the sake of the Party and socialist ideology. In reality, all kinds of newspapers in Vietnam are monitored by the Central Commission of Propaganda and Education, but unlike the Party newspapers that are closely related to the local governments and strictly censored, other news organisations have more freedom to publish information. Therefore, to change the readers’ view of *Binh Dinh*’s principles and encourage them to read this newspaper more is not easy. In other words, being a reliable source of information is no longer enough.
In relation to the use of the Facebook’s functions, ‘instant news’ is the feature of which Binh Dinh has not yet taken advantage. Facebook users always prefer fresh news; thus, such types of breaking news as live video or instant update of an event usually encourage much more engagement than a normal posting shared on Facebook. According to Hoang (2015), this ‘social first’ trend has been applied successfully by many news agencies in the world. Unlike the publication procedure at a newspaper, the news update on Facebook always takes place immediately. However, in the context of Binh Dinh, which only publishes major or verified news, this feature needs careful consideration, depending on a particular event. Moreover, it also requires the contribution of all reporters to carry out such a live update; hence, a social media guideline is important for the newspaper’s staff to support the development of its Facebook page.

Technically, Binh Dinh’s website has been left behind not only in terms of SNS but also in other platforms. The data I collected from its Facebook page revealed that mobile users accounted for the highest rate among the followers of the page. Other studies (Kemp, 2016; Epinion, 2015) also gave the same results, with “mobile first” as a new popular trend among young people. Meanwhile, Binh Dinh has not developed a mobile version of its website, causing many difficulties for readers when accessing the website on their mobile devices. Such a drawback is also expected to limit the users’ engagement with the newspaper through its Facebook page, as the website will load more slowly if the readers want to go further for more information. The font size and style of writing are also affected since they now fit the desktop platform only.
6. Summary

This chapter analysed four issues raised in this thesis: the use of social media to engage with online newspapers, the application of social media to boost engagement, the impact of Facebook on the engagement with online readers and Binh Dinh’s online presence and the readers’ reading habits. All of them focus on the relationship between Binh Dinh’s website and online readers through the use of SNS, in which promoting the engagement of this newspaper with Facebook users is the key point. All of these issues are interrelated.

The development of Facebook stemmed from the demand for establishing social connections among online users. More and more news organisations rely on Facebook and its interactive capability to entice more readers. The findings in this research also demonstrated that Binh Dinh has promoted the engagement with more young online users owing to its Facebook page. However, the participation of the readers in this process requires more than such a platform. Previous studies point out that fresh content is really important. It means that the ‘instant’ feature is indispensable, but this is what Binh Dinh is lacking and this means the engagement on this page is limited. The engagement taking place on this newspaper’s Facebook page is mainly the interaction among users, rather than users and content. Commenting on the postings was hardly seen, partly due to the position of this newspaper as an official channel, making the readers feel uneasy. In reality, there have already been some cases in Vietnam, in which Facebook users have been fined or warned by local authorities for ‘insulting’
officials by commenting on Facebook. How readers engage will also depend on whether they are looking for content that is entertaining or useful.

In the case of Binh Dinh, news stories were usually informative rather than entertaining; thus, such forms of engagement as sharing or recommendation (tagging) were seen frequently on its social account. It could be said that different posting types or categories generated different levels of engagement. Thus, selecting types of news to share on the Facebook page is necessary, aiming to make them become suitable to the particular types of online readers. With uninteresting contents, the act of sharing them on the SNS platform was not effective in attracting the young readership. Instead, they should be presented in a more creative or interactive ways, as the evidence showed that today’s online users prefer interaction through web. Also, the efficiency in using Facebook depends on not only content, but other elements that need considering, such as the gender difference, the selected time frame for postings and the contribution of the newspaper’s staff.

However, the most important issue is probably some necessary changes within the newspaper, as they directly affect other relevant factors. The reporters’ style of writing partly contributes to the difference of online content over versions for the printed paper, but Binh Dinh’s reporters have not been aware of this difference. The difficulty is also seen in the way of reporting topics that are likely to be favourite types of the young, such as culture, sports, or youth related activities. However, stories on these topics were not explored by Binh Dinh in an interesting way, partly due to the content of the events in these fields. As for the
use of social media as well as the priority in this digital age, Binh Dinh has not also given attention to the ‘social first’ and ‘mobile first’ features. These disadvantages are shown by the fact that its Facebook page is now just a platform to share links of stories, which are already published on the website and has not been launched in a mobile version.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

1. Summary of the thesis

This research was developed from the fact that Binh Dinh had no connections with SNS that has grown rapidly and become effective tools for news organisations. The newspaper is expected to gain financial independence from the local government’s subsidy by 2020. The main research question for this study “How is the engagement of readership with Binh Dinh online promoted through social media?” was determined by the necessity to gain the wider readership for Binh Dinh by engaging with SNS. The relevant sub-questions assisted with answering the main question:

RQ1. How does the readership aged between 18-34 use social media to engage with Binh Dinh online?

RQ2. How can Binh Dinh online employ social media tools to promote the engagement with online readership?

RQ3. What is the impact of the newspaper’s Facebook page on the engagement of online readership with Binh Dinh online?

RQ4. What is the impact of the newspaper’s online presence on the readers’ reading habits?

What I found in this research reveals that the engagement of Binh Dinh’s online version with its readers through Facebook mainly depended on the content of news stories. In other words, while other factors partly affected the interaction
between online users and the newspaper, the interesting and useful stories still play the key role in this relationship.

The main focus of this study was on Binh Dinh’s online version, readers aged between 18-34 and its Facebook page. In order to conduct the research, three focus group sessions were carried out in Vietnam’s central province of Binh Dinh, with the participation of 10 local young people and five reporters. The data collected from these sessions was also enriched with the statistics from the Facebook Insights. The discussions with these participants were based on some pre-set questions that could be grouped into four issues mentioned above; meanwhile, the opinions from the reporters provided an evaluation of the newspaper from inside organisation. The data of Facebook included types of postings, the information about gender and followers, and other statistics happening between October 1, 2015 and July 31, 2016.

The discussions in these focus groups were then classified and categorised under four topics that are equivalent to the sub-questions, using different theories of the press and studies on online newspapers for analysis and evaluation. While some of their ideas were not directly related to Binh Dinh, the participants’ experience in using SNS to read news was extremely useful in this case. Similarly, types of news shared on the Facebook page of Binh Dinh were thematically divided into five themes: travelling/tourism, crime/public security, culture/sport, economy, and other social issue. They were the main findings from Facebook, besides other kinds of online data. Through the content analysis of these data and the application of the theory of uses and gratifications, I was able to identify
which themes were most or least engaging and unveil a part of the users’ browsing behaviour when they used social media. These outcomes were then used as supplementary evidence for what I found in three focus group sessions. While the research questions directly mentioned *Binh Dinh* as a main point, the discussions with the participants covered not only this local newspaper but other broader relevant issues, as not all of them read *Binh Dinh* regularly.

In general, their use of Facebook was quite similar to the common browsing behaviour that has been studied for years. Thus, when collecting data to answer the question of how the readership uses social media to engage with *Binh Dinh* online, I found that the participating readers shared the same interests. Their popular goals of using Facebook were to interact with their friends and pass the time. It meant that when reading news through Facebook, they mainly looked for the entertaining information, which meant that stories about tourism and cuisine on *Binh Dinh*’s Facebook page were usually the most engaging type. Such types of news were also informative, providing what the readers needed for personal purposes. In this case, *Binh Dinh* gained the readers’ trust as a reliable source on social media where the users were likely cautious about the fake news. However, also due to the role of *Binh Dinh* as a serious newspaper, online readers were less engaged with *Binh Dinh* than other pages on social media, particularly under the form of comment. The analysis of *Binh Dinh*’s Facebook page revealed that the followers of this page mainly liked, shared, or tagged their friends’ names when engaging with its postings. In terms of gender, this page was visited by fewer female users than males, but the level of engagement showed the converse.
While being a reliable source of local information, *Binh Dinh* online was not always the first choice for many readers. For example, some participants said they visited some Facebook pages, rather than *Binh Dinh’s* website, to read the information about the province. Therefore, launching a Facebook page of its own was just an initial step for this newspaper to get closer to young readers. Using social media tools to promote the engagement with online users requires more than that. Based on the data collected from the focus group discussions with the facts and figures from the Facebook Insights as well as other studies, I concluded that the postings shared on Facebook should have content that are of concern to the readers. In other words, such news stories need to be useful or show familiarity with the local community. For example, a report on a warning of cheating hitchhikers to steal money was much more engaging than a news story about the arrest of two drug addicts. In addition, sharing fresh news is also expected to promote more engagement with this Facebook page, as one of the distinctive functions of social media is the ‘instant’ publication. Some individual pages about Binh Dinh attract more users than *Binh Dinh’s* page partly because they can post the latest information without being censored or waiting for approval. Being fresh also means that the Facebook page of *Binh Dinh* is sometimes able to share other information collected from the Internet. It may include videos or photos that are visually or emotionally attractive. A video shared by *Binh Dinh* on its page might be seen as a typical example (*see the link on page 75*). It shows a series of pictures of a local scenic spot and this video got a lot of readers’ engagement.
Promoting engagement with the online readership effectively needs not only the content, but other supporting factors that were found during the process of collecting data from the newspaper’s Facebook Insights. The most noticeable element is the selection of time frames to share news stories, since specific time frames appear to attract the largest number of online users in a day. The more people see a posting, the more engaging it likely becomes. Another technique is to use a hashtag (#) with popular terms to help people easily see postings when they use this way to search for particular pieces of information. These strategies seemed to be effective when being used on Binh Dinh’s page, assisting some news items of specific subjects, such as tourism or cuisine, in reaching more readers.

These above-mentioned issues confirmed the importance of SNS in relation to the website of Binh Dinh. In other words, the impact of the newspaper’s Facebook page on the engagement of online readership with this newspaper was really significant. The most obvious impact is that Binh Dinh has probably reached a larger number of online users, particularly those aged between 18 - 34, according to the evidence shown on the Facebook Insights. Compared with the website that had almost no engagement, most of the reports shared on the Facebook page appeared to draw attention and prompted some interaction. Analysing this Facebook page, I realised that it is the interactive feature of SNS that promoted the level of engagement between online users and Binh Dinh, creating two main forms of the two-way communication: user-user and user-content. The former illustrates the exchange of information among readers, in which they were able to share the contents with their friends. The latter implies the engagement of online
users with the contents only by liking or giving their opinions to show their reactions over the postings. Based on such kinds of communication through Facebook, this newspaper will be able to identify posting types that are most or least engaging to adjust the contents as well as possible solutions to make the best of SNS.

The young readers’ concern for local news on social media also re-confirmed that Binh Dinh is not for the old readership or officials only, providing that its content is useful and it finds a way to approach the young, who experience the convenience of the mass media. Before social media emerged in Vietnam, the online presence of Binh Dinh had also partly affected people’s reading habits. For instance, most of the participants in the two focus groups said that Binh Dinh’s website was always one of options when looking for local information, by either searching on Google or visiting this site directly. Besides the convenience as a distinctive feature of online news, the fact that this website was able to update the latest news and provide more pictures and videos might be another reason making the readers prefer the online version to the printed edition.

Except for the convenient feature and free content, which mainly make people move to read online, Binh Dinh’s online edition still faces many challenges, such as not having a mobile version, unchanged style of reporting copied from the printed version, or uninteresting presentation of issues favoured by younger readers.

With a presence on social media, the impact of Binh Dinh online on its readership has been considerably enhanced, particularly in promoting the level of
engagement. Evidence on the Facebook page, which was launched 10 months ago, proves that online readers have visited and engaged with this site more frequently, but their engagement was also selective. The news stories that were useful or quite negative were usually most engaging.

However, the changes in the content and other multimedia features of this news website itself are still necessary for the long-term engagement, as the preference for SNS in reading online news cannot last forever or become a deciding factor. In Vietnam, some big news organisations or private magazines, such as Vietnamplus (www.vietnamplus.vn) and Dep (Beauty) (www.dep.com.vn), have changed the way of delivering news by publishing some ‘long-form’ stories or combining with other publishers to produce special articles. For example, a mega-story (a combination of long form of text with photos, audio and visual features) about the City of London after Brexit was published on Vietnamplus (https://goo.gl/NBGE6g) or a story about women was co-published by Dep and The thao, Van hoa va Dan ong (Sport, Culture and Men) magazines under a special presentation on International Women’s Day (https://goo.gl/5ZFMLI).

How to engage more readers in their familiar environments is also important. For example, due to the popularity of mobile phones, Newman (2016) predicted that news organisations will be able to send news alerts to mobile phone users to get their attention back to news websites. This researcher also forecasted the “rebirth of audio” in delivering news via different applications, such as Amazon’s Alexa, Apple’s Siri or Google Assistant. Even on social media, the newspaper needs to promote the content on social media by using paid advertising provided by
Facebook because this can help to boost postings to a larger number of online users. Reporting live with video or messages on Facebook also need to be done when possible to enhance the engagement. For example, an important press conference or instant results of a sport event may be shared on the newspaper’s social accounts immediately, instead of publishing on its website first. After that, readers can read the completed stories later on the website. The newspaper’s changes are essential also due to the changes of readers’ demands and interest. It is thus necessary for Binh Dinh to regularly conduct engagement polls twice every year. This will help the newspaper to adapt to its readers’ reading habits as well as maintain the level of engagement.

2. Limitations

Due to the limited number of participants, this research was unable to cover or resolve all issues completely. In addition, the content analysis and focus groups, which are used in this thesis, still have some shortcomings, partly affecting the research outcomes. Meanwhile not many participants knew the Facebook page of Binh Dinh, as it was only launched last year. It would have been better if there were data collected from those who followed this page. There were also no participants who both read the printed paper and visited the website regularly; thus, the data collection might have missed the diversity of ideas from these types of readers.
3. Recommendations for further research

Despite these limitations, this research broke new ground and opened up a new area of research for other scholars to follow. A number of possibilities offer themselves for further explorations of this and related topics. First of all, this research concentrated on readers aged between 18-34 only, while users in different age groups may have other motivations to engage or not to engage with *Binh Dinh* even though they accounted for a small percentage among the followers of its Facebook page. This issue could be explored in more depth to get a broader view in terms of engagement. Furthermore, in the context of Vietnam, not only the browsing behaviour but the readers’ reasons for choosing engagement either on SNS or through news sites are also diverse since, from my own observation and findings, people tended to hide their identities, rather than reveal themselves with their social accounts. On the global scale, many news outlets, like Reuters, The Verge and Radio New Zealand, have closed their comment sections on the website to move readers to their social pages. Thus, a study of different perspectives of this issue, such as the readers’ self-censorship or the control of improper comments, is expected to provide a better understanding of the engagement with online news. Additionally, some news agencies, like the Australia-based ABC News, have begun using the Facebook messenger to deliver news to online users, based on their interests in particular fields, such as sports, business or politics. This solution may be more convenient as it fits each reader’s needs, but it is unlikely to be much more engaging. Studying this issue in relation to the use of Facebook messenger among young readers will also be an
interesting topic in the fields of online journalism and social media. In addition, the similar backgrounds in press freedom and social media use in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia should also allow other researchers to study and compare the engagement in the online environments in Laos or Cambodia.
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This is a video news format produced by VietnamPlus. In 2014, it won an award under the Digital First category in the World Young Reader Prizes held by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA). This category aims to honour “the news publisher that most creatively engages the young through mobile telephones, tablets and other digital devices” (WAN-IFRA). (See one of its video with English subtitle at: [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2xc7sv](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2xc7sv))
APPENDICES

Appendix 1A:

Participant information form

My name is Le Hong Quang. I am currently enrolled in the Master of International Communication degree in the Department of Communication Studies at Unitec New Zealand and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a thesis course, which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The research project is aimed at answering the question “How does the existence of an online version of the newspaper promote the engagement of social media users aged between 18-34 with Binh Dinh as a news source?”

I request your participation in the following way: participating in the interviews. These interviews shall be audio recorded for purpose of the research only.

Neither you nor your organisations will be identified in the thesis. The results of the research activity will not be seen by any other person in your organisation without the prior agreement of everyone involved. You are free to ask me not to use any of the information you have given, and you can, if you wish, ask to see the thesis before it is submitted for examination.

I hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find your involvement interesting. If you have any queries about the research, you may contact my principal supervisor at Unitec, New Zealand.

My supervisor is Dr Philip Cass, phone: 815-4321 (8380), email: pcass@unitec.ac.nz

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2016-1028
This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 26/05/2016 to 26/05/2017. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Tôi tên là Lê Hồng Quang, hiện đang theo học khóa Thạc sĩ Truyền thông Quốc tế, Khoa Truyền thông học, Viện Công nghệ Unitec, New Zealand. Tôi đang tìm sự trợ giúp của quý ông/bà nhằm thực hiện luận tội tốt nghiệp như một phần yêu cầu của khóa học.

Dự án nghiên cứu của tôi nhằm trải lỏi cho câu hỏi: “Phien bản trực tuyến  ảnh hưởng như thế nào đến sự tương tác giữa người sử dụng mạng xã hội trong độ tuổi từ 18 đến 34 và báo Bình Định?”

Tôi sẽ đề nghị ông/bà tham gia vào dự án bằng cách tham gia phỏng vấn và các cuộc phỏng vấn này sẽ được ghi âm lại để phục vụ cho mục đích nghiên cứu.

Kết quả của hoạt động nghiên cứu sẽ không được tiết lộ cho bất kỳ tổ chức, cá nhân nào mà không có sự đồng ý của các cá nhân có liên quan. Ông/bà có thể yêu cầu tôi không sử dụng nội dung của thông tin mà ông/bà đã trả lời, và nếu muốn, ông/bà có thể yêu cầu được xem qua Luận văn trước khi nộp cho hội đồng đánh giá.

Tôi hy vọng ông/bà đồng ý tham gia dự án và sẽ thấy thích thú khi tham gia dự án này. Nếu ông/bà có bất kỳ thắc mắc nào về nghiên cứu này, xin vui lòng liên hệ người giám sát nghiên cứu của tôi tại Unitec New Zealand theo thông tin sau:
TS. Philip Cass, ĐT: 815 4321, số máy lẻ: 8380 hoặc qua email pcass@unitec.ac.nz

MÃ SÓ ĐỤ ÁN ĐƯỢC CẤP BỞI UREC:
Appendix 2A

Participant Consent Form

How does the existence of an online version of the newspaper promote the engagement of social media users aged between 18-34 with Binh Dinh as a news source?

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I don't have to be part of this if I don't want to and I may withdraw within 2 weeks prior to the completion of the research project. All information about me will be treated confidentially.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me and that the only persons who will know what I have said will be the researcher and their supervisor. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on a computer at Unitec for a period of 5 years.

I understand that my discussion with the researcher will be taped and transcribed.

I understand that I can see the finished research document.

I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Participant Signature:………………………….. Date: …………………………….

Project Researcher:………………………….. Date: …………………………….

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2016-1028
This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 26/05/2016 to 26/05/2017. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 2B:

Phiếu đồng ý

Phiên bản trực tuyến của báo Bình Định ảnh hưởng như thế nào đến sự tương tác giữa đồ sộ dụng mạng xã hội trong độ tuổi từ 18 đến 34 và tổ báo?

Tôi đã được nghiên cứu sinh giải thích, đã đọc và hiểu mẫu phiếu lấy thông tin đưa cho tôi.

Tôi hiểu rằng tôi không nhất thiết phải tham gia nếu tôi không muốn và tôi có thể rút lui vào bất kỳ lúc nào trước khi nghiên cứu kết thúc.

Tôi hiểu rằng tất cả kiến thức của tôi sẽ được giữ kín và không có bất kỳ thông tin nào mà tôi đưa ra sẽ xác định nhân thân của tôi, và rằng chỉ có nghiên cứu sinh và những người giám sát để tài nay được biết các thông tin này. Tôi cũng hiểu rằng tất cả thông tin mà tôi cung cấp sẽ được lưu trữ an toàn trong máy tính tại Unitec trong thời hạn 5 năm.

Tôi hiểu rằng cuộc trao đổi với nghiên cứu sinh sẽ được ghi âm và chụp lại bằng tay. Tôi hiểu rằng tôi có thể được xem phản chụp lại nay khi nghiên cứu hoàn thành.

Tôi đã có thời gian để cân nhắc và tôi đồng ý là một phần của dự án này.

Người tham gia (ký tên): ........................................... Ngày: ...........................................
Nghiên cứu sinh (ký tên): ........................................... Ngày: ...........................................

MÃ SỐ ĐỰC ÁN DUỘC CẤP BỞI UREC: 2016-1028
Appendix 3A:

Questionnaire for focus groups aged from 18-34:

1. Where do you usually look for the information about Binh Dinh?

2. What do you think about the online presence of the Binh Dinh newspaper?

3. How often do you visit the Binh Dinh news website?

4. Do you follow any Facebook pages of Vietnamese newspapers? If not, why?

5. If you see an article shared on Facebook with many likes or comments, do you read it?

6. What do you think about the newspaper’s presence on social media?

7. Which types of interactive do you prefer, via social media or comment box on the website? Why?

8. What is your reaction when seeing newspaper’s posts on social media?

Other comments or suggestions: ..............................................................

Questionnaire for reporters:

1. When writing for Binh Dinh newspaper’s website, do you report in a different way from reportage for the print version?

2. What do you find interesting when reporting for the online newspaper?

3. Do you usually share your articles on your social accounts? Why?

Other comments/suggestions: ..............................................................
Bảng câu hỏi dành cho phòng vấn độc giả ở độ tuổi 18-34:

Nghiên cứu sinh sẽ bắt đầu cuộc thảo luận bằng một số câu hỏi về tuổi và nghề nghiệp. Sau đó, từng người tham gia phòng vấn sẽ trả lời các câu hỏi sau:

1. Anh/chị thường tìm kiếm thông tin về Bình Định ở đâu?
2. Anh/chị nghĩ gì về trang web của báo **Bình Định**?
3. Anh/chị có thường xuyên truy cập vào trang web của báo **Bình Định** không?
4. Anh/chị có theo dõi trang Facebook của tờ báo nào ở Việt Nam không? Tại sao?
5. Nếu anh/chị thấy một bài báo được chia sẻ trên Facebook và được nhiều người thích hoặc bình luận, thì anh/chị có đọc bài báo đó không?
6. Anh/chị nghĩ gì về việc báo **Bình Định** lập trang Facebook?
7. Anh/chị thích tương tác với tờ báo theo cách nào, thông qua mạng xã hội hay bình luận ngay trên trang web? Tại sao?
8. Anh/chị thường làm gì khi thấy một bản tin mới được tờ báo chia sẻ trên mạng xã hội?

Ý kiến/ Đề xuất thêm:........................................................................................................

Một số câu hỏi thêm dành cho phòng viên:

1. Khi viết tin, bài cho trang web của báo, anh/chị có viết khác với cách viết cho báo in không?
2. Điều gì khiến anh/chị cảm thấy thích khi viết tin, bài cho trang web của báo?

3. Anh/chị có thường xuyên chia sẻ bài viết của mình trên tài khoản mạng xã hội không? Tại sao?

Ý kiến/ Đề xuất thêm:.................................................................
Declaration

Name of candidate: Quang Le Hong

This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled: How does the existence of an online version of the newspaper promote the engagement of social media users aged between 18-34 with Binh Dinh as a news source? is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of International Communication

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Philip Cass

Associate Supervisor/s: Dr. Elena Kolesova

Candidate’s declaration

I confirm that:

- This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2016-1028

Candidate Signature: [Signature]

Date: 23/03/2017

Student number: 1435875
Full name of author: Quang Le Hong

ORCID number (Optional):

Full title of thesis/dissertation/research project (‘the work’):

How does the existence of an online version of the newspaper promote the engagement of social media users aged between 18-34 with Binh Dinh as a news source?

Practice Pathway: N/A

Degree: Master of International Communication

Year of presentation: 2017

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Philip Cass

Associate Supervisor: Dr. Elena Kolesova

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Signature of author: [Signature]
Date: 11/07/2017