

English-language online newspapers in Vietnam's foreign communication: Evidence from 618 articles

Thi Minh Tam Vu*

Ha Long University, 258 Bach Dang Street, Vang Danh Ward, Quang Ninh Province, Vietnam

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Abstract:

This article examines the legal framework of foreign communication policies. It employs qualitative analysis and quantitative content analysis of 618 articles published in VietnamPlus and VnExpress International during the 2022-2023 period to evaluate the role of English online newspapers (EONs). The findings indicate that EONs frame information to increase coverage of economics, diplomacy, and heritage topics, directing international public attention while promoting reform achievements, investment potential, and cultural image, thereby strengthening soft power. However, a key challenge identified is that a significant portion of the content remains thematically unclear, which may hinder the effectiveness of foreign communication and the achievement of strategic communication goals. Additionally, critical hurdles include maintaining high-quality translations, upholding rigorous journalistic standards, and complying with relevant regulations. Consequently, capacity-building for journalists, adopting technological innovations for content delivery, and refining editorial oversight are essential to ensure consistent quality. Recommended measures include strengthening editorial management, expanding nuanced coverage of foreign affairs, and upgrading digital infrastructure to broaden global reach. Ultimately, EONs can be a pivotal component of Vietnam's foreign communication strategy, fostering deeper understanding among international stakeholders, solidifying national reputation, and bolstering socio-economic development. By implementing these enhancements, EONs can be better positioned to address emerging global challenges and contribute more effectively to Vietnam's continued integration into the international community.

Keywords: digital diplomacy, English-language online newspapers, foreign communication, media framing, Vietnam.

Classification numbers: 5.1, 5.2, 7

1. Introduction

Journalism and communication play a crucial role in the development of a nation. Journalism serves not only as a medium of information but also as an essential tool for implementing communication strategies that directly influence the public's thoughts, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours, thereby contributing to the orientation of public opinion towards positive and progressive values [1]. In the context of globalisation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, EONs have increasingly become a preferred mode of communication for a large public segment, owing to their prominent advantages of speed, high interactivity, and multimedia integration in message delivery. With their distinctive characteristics, EONs encapsulate the advantages of various forms of journalism while employing modern technologies and digital techniques to effectively communicate journalistic messages in general and foreign communication messages in particular. According to Decision No. 2434/QĐ-TTg dated 13 December

2016, from the Government regarding the "Plan for the Foreign Journalism System until 2020, with a vision towards 2030", the term Foreign Journalism (BCDN) was officially utilised in Vietnam. Specifically, "*foreign journalism is one of the crucial forces in foreign information work, forming a part of the propaganda and ideological work of the Party*" [2].

English online newspapers represent a specialised section of electronic news portals. These EONs are affiliated with various countries and disseminate information regarding domestic and international events and topics, facilitating access for the general public within and globally. Numerous online newspaper outlets in Vietnam have established dedicated English sections to convey the nation's foreign information. This platform is recognised as a significant communication channel, enhancing and promoting awareness among the international audience about Vietnam-related information. In the context of Vietnam, EONs can be defined as a specialised segment of electronic news

*Email: vuthiminhthamdhhl@gmail.com

platforms that report on issues and fields concerning Vietnam and the world using English. From the perspective of disseminating external information, EONs can be categorised into two levels:

Level 1: EONs provide information across various fields and diverse issues in regions and countries worldwide, addressing international affairs. The audience for foreign communication at this level includes the global public, representing a broad global spectrum.

Level 2: EONs supply information regarding domestic issues within the confines of a specific country. The audience impacted by foreign communication at this level includes the country's public (irrespective of location: citizens residing domestically or living, studying, and working abroad) and international individuals.

In recent years, Vietnam has significantly enhanced its international standing and reputation by undertaking essential responsibilities, such as serving as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the term 2020-2021, chairing ASEAN in 2020, successfully hosting the United States-North Korea Summit in 2019, and actively participating in major multilateral forums such as ASEAN, APEC, and ASEM. In this context of extensive integration, foreign communication through EONs has become increasingly crucial, particularly in promoting and positioning the national image and brand. Notably, given the current landscape characterised by increasing global volatility, complex geopolitical circumstances, and the prevalence of distorted and misleading information in cyberspace, it is imperative for official Vietnamese media outlets to provide objective information promptly and accurately in English. This aids in positively directing international public opinion on critical issues related to national interests.

Affirming the role of the press in promoting foreign affairs, both the Party and the Government have issued decisions and resolutions related to defining the tasks of the media, including foreign affairs responsibilities. These include Decision No. 79/2020/QĐ-TTg dated 30 October 2010, regarding the "Regulations on State Management of Foreign Information"; Decision No. 2434/QĐ-TTg dated 13 December 2016, concerning the "Plan for the Foreign Press System through 2020, with a vision towards 2030"; Decision No. 1191/QĐ-TTg in 2020 approving the "Objectives, Tasks, and Solutions to Innovate and Enhance the Capacity of Information Propaganda and Foreign Information Work to Contribute to Building Peaceful, Friendly, Cooperative, and Development-oriented Borders"; and

Decree No. 72/2015/ND-CP dated 7 September 2015, on the "Management of Foreign Information Activities". Thus, foreign newspapers, in general, and EONs, in particular, play a significant role, becoming one of the core components for disseminating information and advancing the nation's foreign affairs, especially in the current complex global context.

Research questions: i) How do EONs in Vietnam frame foreign communication messages for the international public?; ii) What roles do EONs play in promoting Vietnam's national image and safeguarding national interests?; iii) What challenges and opportunities do EONs face after the national press streamlining plan?

2. Literature review

Recent scholarship has reconceptualised traditional public and media diplomacy through integrating digital technologies, coalescing under the umbrella of digital media diplomacy. H. Saliu (2022) [3] argues that digital media diplomacy transcends one-way broadcasting by fostering interactive, networked exchanges between state actors and foreign publics, thereby blending information dissemination, persuasion, and co-creation of narratives. C. Bjola, et al. (2019) [4] expand on this by demonstrating how foreign ministries and diplomatic missions leverage social platforms such as Twitter and Facebook not only for announcements but also to manage reputational crises and monitor global sentiment in real-time. S. Barman (2024) [5] further shows that algorithmic targeting and data analytics enable diplomatic services to tailor messages to segmented audiences ranging from diaspora communities to international investors, thus magnifying persuasive impact and aligning content with foreign policy objectives.

In Vietnam, EONs have transitioned from peripheral translation services to strategic state and private-public diplomacy instruments. Following Prime Minister Decision 1976/QĐ-TTg on 24 November 2020, the Vietnam News Agency's portal, VietnamPlus, was mandated to adopt multimedia storytelling, live updates, and social media integration. L.T. Trieu, et al. (2024) [6] document that these reforms nearly doubled VietnamPlus's monthly multimedia outputs and yielded a 35% increase in unique international pageviews between 2021 and 2023. Complementing this state-led model, VnExpress International, launched in 2013, publishes over 150 English-language articles weekly, mixing investigative regulatory reports with analyses for investors and diplomats [6]. T. Duong (2019) [7] finds that 68% of surveyed foreign business leaders regularly consult VnExpress International

for investment-climate insights, a reliance linked to a 20% uptick in inquiries to the Ministry of Planning and Investment in 2018. Further cohesion emerged when Government Decree No. 46 (12 March 2025) unified Voice of Vietnam's print and electronic English services, standardising a diplomatic glossary co-developed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This measure improved terminological consistency across over 230 weekly English publications [7].

These domestic developments are framed within broader theoretical constructs emphasising dialogue, narrative framing, and institutional capacity. G. Cowan, et al. (2008) [8] propose that digital news outlets must evolve from monologic broadcasts to platforms for dialogue and collaborative engagement, while N.J. Cull (2008) [9] positions them as “narrative-framing” agents capable of shaping real-time diplomatic discourse. D. Oloo's (2021) [10] systematic review finds that ministries with dedicated digital diplomacy units staffed and resourced for analytics and rapid response achieve greater online engagement and message coherence. In Vietnam's context, T.N. Nguyen (2024) [11] highlights opportunities in using e-government portals and mobile apps to enhance transparency and reach but also warns of audience fragmentation if content is not tailored for diverse foreign constituencies. V. Lam (2022) [12] further demonstrates how interactive formats such as live Q&A sessions and multimedia explainers on English platforms can mitigate these challenges by fostering two-way dialogue and deepening foreign engagement.

This body of work affirms that EONs in Vietnam have become indispensable to the country's foreign communication architecture. Institutional mandates, private-sector agility, and interagency coordination have converged to position these platforms as frontline digital diplomacy tools capable of projecting national soft power while enabling genuine exchange with global stakeholders.

3. Theoretical framework and application

A robust theoretical framework is vital for understanding how EONs in Vietnam influence international perceptions and contribute to the nation's foreign communication strategy. This study employs three interrelated theories, including agenda-setting, framing, and constructivism, not only to provide conceptual grounding but also to actively shape the approach to data analysis. Each theory is discussed below regarding its core ideas, methodological application, and explanatory power concerning the influence of EONs (Fig. 1).

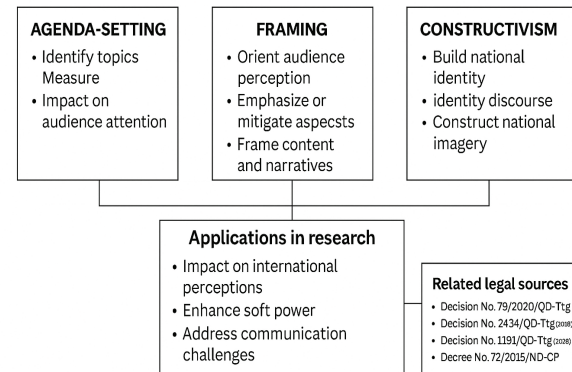


Fig. 1. Theoretical framework for studying EONs. Source: Author's work.

Agenda-setting theory, formulated by M.E. McCombs, et al. (1972) [13], posits that media outlets do not simply reflect reality; instead, they play a key role in determining which issues receive public attention and are perceived as significant. The media guide “*what to think about*” by selecting, emphasising, and repeatedly presenting specific topics, thus shaping the public and policy agenda. In the context of EONs, this theory explains how editorial choices about topic selection, headline prominence, and news frequency can drive international audiences to focus on specific aspects of Vietnam's foreign affairs, such as economic achievements, diplomatic activities, or policy reforms. To operationalise agenda-setting in this research, the analysis systematically quantifies the presence and prominence of different topics within EON content. Headlines, lead stories, and article placement are coded to reveal patterns in topic prioritisation during key events. By measuring the frequency and visibility of each theme, the study uncovers how Vietnamese EONs attempt to shape the international conversation, foregrounding issues that support national interests and diplomatic objectives.

Framing theory explores not just what issues are presented by the media but *how* these issues are constructed and communicated. Frames provide context and narrative structure, highlighting certain aspects of a story while omitting or downplaying others. Through framing, media outlets can guide interpretation, influence opinions, and shape emotional responses. In the case of Vietnamese EONs, framing theory is crucial for understanding how messages about Vietnam, its policies, international relations, or societal challenges are crafted to project particular images or values to global audiences. In practical terms, this study applies framing theory by qualitatively analysing the language, metaphors, and recurring themes of EON articles. Frames such as “*Vietnam as a responsible international partner*”, “*dynamic economic reformer*”, or “*protector*

of cultural heritage" are identified and tracked across different issues and periods. Special attention is given to the framing of sensitive topics, such as maritime disputes, human rights, or environmental challenges, to assess how EONs manage Vietnam's image, address reputational risks, and reinforce positive associations. Comparative analysis across platforms and news cycles helps reveal shifts in dominant frames and their strategic deployment.

Constructivism, as developed by A. Wendt (1999) [14] and others, posits that media are not passive conveyors of information but active agents in constructing social reality and national identity. Through repeated narratives, symbolic language, and the ongoing articulation of collective values, media shape how a nation is perceived externally and internally. In the Vietnamese context, constructivist theory provides a lens to examine how EONs contribute to the formation of Vietnam's desired image in the international arena, embedding concepts such as "*Bamboo Diplomacy*", "*proactive international integration*", or "*resilience*" into the public discourse. This study operationalises constructivist theory through discourse analysis, which identifies, traces, and interprets key narratives, metaphors, and identity markers in EON coverage. By examining the persistence and evolution of particular storylines, the research demonstrates how EONs not only transmit information but also, as "identity entrepreneurs", shape perceptions of Vietnam among foreign audiences. Case studies of major diplomatic campaigns or national branding efforts illustrate the dynamic process by which EONs negotiate and institutionalise Vietnam's strategic identity.

These three theories are not merely cited but embedded in every stage of the research process. Topic selection and coding categories are informed by agenda-setting; qualitative analysis is structured around identifying and interpreting frames; and discourse analysis draws on constructivist insights to understand identity construction. By integrating these theories, the research moves beyond descriptive reporting and systematically explains how EONs influence international perceptions, advance Vietnam's soft power, and address communication challenges in the digital era.

The study also employs documentary analysis of administrative and normative legal texts, such as Decision No. 79/2020/QĐ-TTg of 30 October 2010 on the "Regulation on state management of external information"; Decision No. 2434/QĐ-TTg of 13 December 2016 on the "Master plan for the foreign press system to 2020, with orientation to 2030"; Decision No. 1191/QĐ-TTg (2020) approving the "Objectives, tasks, and solutions for renewing and

enhancing the capacity of information, propaganda, and foreign communication work contributing to building peaceful, friendly, cooperative, and developmental borders"; and Decree No. 72/2015/ND-CP of 7 September 2015 on the "Management of external information activities" across national sectors [16].

4. Methods

This study employs a content analysis methodology that integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of the quantity and depth of meaning of messages in EONs in Vietnam. The research is conducted in two phases:

First, a quantitative analysis was performed by identifying and coding pre-established themes across a sample set of 618 articles. Subsequently, the frequency of occurrence for each theme is statistically analysed, thereby clarifying the prevalence and prioritisation of various content groups and identifying the dominant trends in foreign communication during the survey period. The criteria for selecting news articles for the research sample include:

- (1) The article must be an original piece published in the English section of VietnamPlus or VnExpress International, not an automatic translation or a republished compilation from international sources.
- (2) The article's content must focus on foreign affairs, national image, international integration, diplomatic cooperation, investment promotion, cultural and tourism promotion, or issues influencing the global perception of Vietnam.
- (3) The article must have a clear structure.
- (4) The publication date must fall between January 2022 and the end of December 2023.

The sampling process was conducted using systematic random sampling with a random start. First, all articles meeting the above criteria were listed separately for VietnamPlus and VnExpress International and assigned sequential numbers according to their publication time. The sampling frame consisted of 1,907 eligible articles from VietnamPlus and 1,808 from VnExpress International, giving a total of 3,715 articles. Based on the intended sample sizes of 320 articles for VietnamPlus and 317 articles for VnExpress International, the interval was calculated using the formula $K=N/S$, where K is the sampling interval, N is the population size, and S is the projected sample size determined in Step 1.

Step 1. Determining the projected sample size: The projected sample size was calculated and verified using the SurveyMonkey sample size calculator (<https://www.surveymonkey.com>). The population size was defined as

the total number of articles published by each selected news outlet during the two-year study period. A 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error were adopted, consistent with standard practice in scientific research.

Step 2. Calculating the sampling interval: Based on the projected sample size, a sampling interval was calculated separately for the two news outlets. The sampling interval for VietnamPlus English was denoted as K_1 , while that for VnExpress International was denoted as K_2 . The interval was calculated using the formula $K=N/S$, where K is the sampling interval, N is the population size, and S is the projected sample size determined in Step 1. The calculation yielded a sampling interval of six ($K=6$) for both datasets.

Step 3. Selecting the sample using systematic random sampling: Systematic random sampling was employed using the calculated sampling interval. For each news outlet, a random starting point was first identified within the initial sampling interval. Subsequently, every sixth article was selected until the required sample size was achieved. The same procedure was applied to both VietnamPlus English ($K_1=6$) and VnExpress International ($K_2=6$), ensuring a consistent and unbiased sampling process across the two datasets. This resulted in a sampling interval of 6 for both newspapers. A random starting point was then selected for each list, after which every sixth article was included in the sample. If a sampled article was found to contain duplicated content, no longer met the selection criteria, or had been removed from the platform, the next eligible article on the list was selected as a replacement. As shown in Table 1, after screening and replacement where possible, the final sample consisted of 317 articles from VietnamPlus and 301 articles from VnExpress International, yielding a total of 618 articles.

Table 1. Sampling frame, intended sample size, sampling interval, and final sample size. Source: Author's work.

Criteria	VietnamPlus	VnExpress International	Total
Population size	1,907	1,808	3,715
Intended sample size	320	317	637
Sampling interval (K)	6	6	–
Final sample size	317	301	618

After the sample collection, a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted following the framework established by V. Braun, et al. (2006) [17] for the coded theme groups. In this study, content analysis was employed as the primary methodological approach to systematically examine the sampled articles. Each article constituted a unit of analysis and was coded into thematic categories developed based on the research objectives and the analytical framework of the study. The coding process focused on identifying

dominant topics, message orientations, and patterns of foreign communication across the dataset. On this basis, qualitative thematic analysis was subsequently conducted to explore in greater depth the underlying meanings, interpretative structures, and recurring patterns within each thematic group. In this phase, the content within each theme group is meticulously read and deeply analysed regarding the presentation of messages, the construction of informational frameworks, and the identification of characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses in foreign communication strategies. The qualitative analysis facilitates the exploration of layers of meaning, nuances of expression, and salient issues that quantitative statistical data may not fully capture. These codes were then grouped into broader themes as seen in Fig. 2.

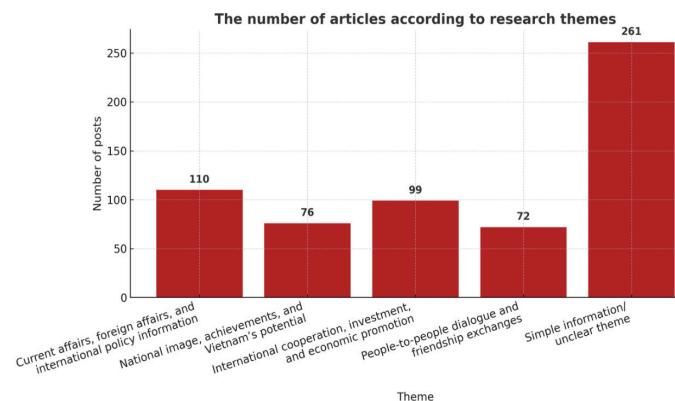


Fig. 2. Distribution of sampled articles by research theme. Source: Author's work.

This process allowed the study to confirm both the content and the communicative strategies used by EONs in Vietnam to transmit foreign affairs messages to an international audience. The use of thematic analysis ensures a systematic and transparent evaluation, following current standards in qualitative research.

5. Findings

5.1. Provision of current affairs, foreign affairs, and international policy information

Firstly, foreign communication via EONs serves as a bridge, providing information and fostering understanding among the public (particularly foreign audiences) regarding the national strategy, the principles and policies of the Party, as well as the laws and regulations of the Vietnamese State. Events such as partnership signing ceremonies, Vietnam's representatives' presence at international gatherings, and regulations across various sectors (including cooperation with other countries) distinctly illustrate the Vietnamese Government's foreign information content. Expressly, in Decree 72/2015/ND-CP, the Government affirms that Vietnam's foreign information comprises [16]:

(1) Official information about Vietnam: Information about the policies and directives of the Party; the laws and regulations of the State; the status of various fields (economy, culture, society, history, etc.); and other relevant information about Vietnam.

(2) Information promoting Vietnam's image: Information regarding the nation, its people, history, and cultural heritage of the Vietnamese ethnic community.

(3) Information on global developments concerning Vietnam: Information concerning global conditions across diverse fields, including insights into the relationships between Vietnam and other countries, aimed at fostering cooperative relationships that support the nation's socio-economic development and facilitate Vietnam's international integration.

As one of the forces responsible for conducting foreign information dissemination, the EONs portal of Vietnam serves as a specialised platform that provides a diverse range of comprehensive information regarding the three primary aspects of national foreign information as outlined in Decree 72/2015/ND-CP in a timely, flexible, and audience-specific manner. Consequently, the public is equipped with essential and significant knowledge about foreign affairs, contributing to an expansion of public understanding and an enhancement of awareness concerning the international positioning and roles of the nation.

Before every major foreign affairs event, such as visits, multilateral signings, activities at the United Nations, APEC, or bilateral meetings with major countries, EONs constantly update developments, publish leaders' speeches, and analyse the context and consequences. A typical example: *"Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh has instructed all ministries and sectors to proactively participate in multilateral mechanisms and promote the country's external relations, aiming for stronger integration and international cooperation"* (VietnamPlus, January 2023). Through this, international readers, investors, researchers, and foreign reporters can grasp Vietnam's foreign policy strategy, commitment to integration, and stance on regional and global issues.

Secondly, foreign communication through the EONs portal alleviates the public's inquiries, questions, and concerns regarding foreign affairs by disseminating accurate, objective, authentic, and reliable information about relevant foreign events in which the public is interested. In August 2023, VietnamPlus published an article titled *"Foreigners pleased as Vietnam extends e-visa validity to 90 days"*. This article provides specific information regarding the extension of Vietnam's electronic visa validity, enumerating the new benefits for foreign tourists and investors: *"Vietnam has extended*

its electronic visa validity to 90 days, a move welcomed by both tourists and foreign investors. The new policy allows for multiple entries and has been praised as a significant step in supporting international mobility". Below the article, numerous international readers left comments about the visa application process, methods for online procedures, and reflecting on the obstacles they encountered during entry. The commentary section also became a "feedback channel", where the foreign public expressed opinions or posed questions regarding Vietnam's visa policies. As a result, the editorial team can collect feedback promptly and continue gathering information from official sources for further clarification. In many cases, when public inquiries are of a specialised nature (for example, concerning length of stay or visa renewal procedures), the editorial office contacts the relevant authorities to subsequently update details in the "Q&A" section or publish additional articles. Through this approach, the EONs portal not only serves as a conduit for one-way information dissemination but also fulfils the role of a bridge, helping the international public gain a clearer understanding of Vietnam's legal framework and foreign policy directions, thereby positively and appropriately guiding public opinion in alignment with current realities.

5.2. Promotion of national image, achievements, and Vietnam's potential

Promoting Vietnam's national image, notable achievements, and future potential is a core component of the country's foreign communication strategy. EONs serve as principal instruments in this endeavour, functioning as official channels that inform and shape international audiences' perceptions. Through systematic coverage and careful content selection, these media outlets contribute significantly to constructing and disseminating a multifaceted image of Vietnam on the global stage.

A central approach employed by EONs involves highlighting Vietnam's economic accomplishments, supported by credible data and international assessments. Reporting on foreign direct investment and investor confidence is frequently anchored in concrete statistics and expert commentary. One notable example is the coverage of Japanese business sentiment: *"Up to 70 percent of Japanese businesses have announced that they want to expand operations in Vietnam, and as many as 65.3 percent of the 787 Japanese companies recorded high profits in Vietnam in 2018"* (VietnamPlus, February 2019). By foregrounding such figures, EONs do not merely inform; they actively construct a narrative of Vietnam as a stable and promising investment environment. This strategic use of quantitative evidence not only enhances the credibility of the reports but also aligns with the expectations of international readers for transparent, data-driven analysis.

Cultural diplomacy is equally prominent in the content strategies of EONs. The media regularly document the recognition of Vietnamese heritage by international organisations, the growing reputation of Vietnamese cuisine, and the country's achievements in arts and education. *"Vietnamese beef Pho is on the list of 20 best watery dishes in the world, according to CNN Travel. The country's cuisine continues to receive international recognition, strengthening Vietnam's reputation as a top culinary destination"* (VnExpress International, January 2024). The presentation of such achievements is not incidental but instead forms part of a broader communication effort to enhance Vietnam's soft power and promote cultural understanding.

The corrective function of EONs is also notable. When misconceptions or negative narratives about Vietnam arise in international discourse, these media outlets provide factual, balanced perspectives that help counteract bias. By referencing Vietnam's policy commitments and recent progress in environmental sustainability, social equity, and public health, the newspapers offer a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the country's development trajectory and willingness to contribute to global solutions. The cumulative impact of these communication activities is observable in Vietnam's improving performance on various international rankings related to business environment, tourism, and cultural influence. EONs regularly cite such indicators as a reflection of the country's achievements and as a persuasive element in shaping further international engagement.

The English online newspaper serves as a vital platform across multiple sectors in Vietnam, such as the economy, culture, education, and science, continuously offering opportunities to strengthen the nation's reputation and build trust among the global community. In turn, this facilitates smoother diplomatic endeavours, both bilateral and multilateral, and streamlines trade promotion, supporting the cultivation of mutually advantageous connections with many countries. Furthermore, this goal aligns with the broader strategy for comprehensive international integration currently pursued by the Vietnamese Party and State.

5.3. Facilitation of international cooperation, investment, and economic promotion

The advancement of international cooperation, investment attraction, and economic promotion remains a cornerstone of Vietnam's foreign communication strategy. EONs play an essential role in this context, serving as primary channels for disseminating information about economic policies, investment opportunities, and collaboration with global partners.

These newspapers provide systematic coverage

of major policy reforms, the signing of bilateral and multilateral agreements, and significant foreign investment projects. Reporting is distinguished by its transparency, accuracy, and the frequent inclusion of official data or authoritative statements. For instance, VietnamPlus reported: *"The Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed a 25 million USD loan agreement with Tien Phong Bank to finance women-led small and medium-sized enterprises (WSMEs), accompanied by a 750,000 USD technical assistance grant to help TPB better meet the needs of WSMEs"* (VietnamPlus, March 2022). Rather than simply noting the occurrence of such events, articles typically place them within the broader context of national development strategies and international cooperation goals. In this example, particular attention is given to Vietnam's efforts to support gender equality and enhance the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises in line with global development priorities.

English online newspapers also devote considerable attention to trade delegations, investment forums, and economic diplomacy activities. Detailed reporting on the participation of Vietnamese businesses in international exhibitions or missions demonstrates the country's proactive integration and highlights priority sectors for cooperation. For example: *"A delegation of Vietnamese enterprises visited Germany to seek new investment opportunities in the fields of renewable energy and digital transformation, underscoring Vietnam's commitment to sustainable growth and international collaboration"* (VnExpress International, July 2023). Such information clarifies Vietnam's orientation towards innovation, openness to high-value partnerships, and readiness to collaborate on key sustainable development issues.

A further aspect is the timely communication of regulatory changes and investment incentives. EONs are often among the first to update international audiences on amendments to investment law, sector liberalisation, and improvements in the domestic business climate. This prompt and detailed reporting is vital in reducing uncertainty, supporting transparency, and strengthening investor confidence, which are crucial for sustainable foreign investment and deeper economic linkages. Additionally, reporting frequently includes the perspectives of international experts, business associations, and institutions such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund. These views provide authoritative context and comparative benchmarks, enabling international readers to assess Vietnam's market potential and the effectiveness of its economic policies.

English online newspapers support Vietnam's economic diplomacy and international integration.

Through comprehensive, timely, and well-sourced reporting, they inform international stakeholders and reinforce the country's image as a reliable and forward-looking partner in global economic relations. Their contribution is integral to the promotion of investment, the facilitation of trade, and the advancement of economic cooperation between Vietnam and its international partners.

5.4. Promotion of people-to-people dialogue and international friendship exchanges

Within Vietnam's foreign communication, EONs are increasingly prominent in promoting people-to-people dialogue, fostering international friendship, and protecting national interests. These functions are closely interrelated and together help to project a positive image of Vietnam while safeguarding its sovereignty and identity in an era of rapid global information exchange. This work's theoretical and policy foundation is established in Resolution No. 8 of the XIII Party Central Committee, which affirms safeguarding national and ethnic interests as the highest priority in national strategy. This is reflected in the directive to "ensure the highest national and ethnic interests, based on the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter and international law" [20]. In practical terms, this commitment requires foreign communication, particularly through official channels such as EONs, to maintain vigilance and proactivity in shaping Vietnam's international reputation.

A primary mechanism by which EONs fulfil this mandate is through rigorous fact-checking and promptly correcting misinformation. In an environment where social media platforms (Meta, YouTube, TikTok, etc.) allow for unregulated and often unchecked content spread, EONs set themselves apart by adhering to strict editorial standards. EONs consistently provide authoritative updates and legal perspectives when tensions arise in the East Sea. An article from VietnamPlus in July 2023 clearly outlined Vietnam's stance: "*Vietnam resolutely and persistently safeguards its sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction in the East Sea by peaceful means and in line with international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982)*". By doing so, EONs not only inform the international community but also help to prevent the escalation of conflicting narratives that hostile actors may exploit.

The function of EONs as protectors of national interests is further illustrated in their response to digital misinformation and cyberattacks. Following coordinated misinformation campaigns targeting Vietnamese institutions, VnExpress International published an in-depth analysis quoting cybersecurity experts:

"Vietnamese authorities have identified and taken action against coordinated misinformation campaigns targeting key infrastructure. Experts emphasise the importance of public vigilance and the government's commitment to transparent communication" (VnExpress International, October 2023). This demonstrates EONs' essential role in disseminating the state's official response and reassuring international and domestic audiences of Vietnam's capacity to manage complex information threats.

Interconnected with this protective function is the active promotion of people-to-people dialogue and international friendship. EONs frequently highlight events and activities that strengthen cultural ties and mutual understanding between Vietnam and other countries. For instance, coverage of the Vietnam-Japan Festival in Ho Chi Minh City focused on both the celebration of cultural heritage and the spirit of bilateral cooperation: "*The Vietnam-Japan Festival 2023 not only showcases the rich cultural traditions of both countries but also demonstrates the deep bond and mutual respect shared by the Vietnamese and Japanese peoples*" (VietnamPlus, March 2023). Similarly, EON reports on the achievements of the Vietnamese diaspora, such as contributions to scientific research recognised by the World Health Organization: "*Vietnamese scientists have played a pivotal role in international COVID-19 vaccine research, with the World Health Organization acknowledging their significant contributions to global health*" (VnExpress International, May 2022). These stories generate international goodwill and build pride and cohesion within Vietnamese communities worldwide.

It is important to note that these efforts align with Vietnam's unique diplomatic philosophy, commonly called "Vietnamese Bamboo Diplomacy". As officially articulated at the National Foreign Affairs Conference 2021, bamboo diplomacy embodies the spirit of strong roots, a resilient trunk, and flexible branches, representing a steadfast commitment to core principles and adaptability in response to external changes. EONs play a central role in interpreting and communicating this philosophy. This diplomatic doctrine is not only reflected in high-level statements but is also vividly present in the way EONs report on international affairs. When covering sensitive regional disputes, EONs consistently underscore Vietnam's reliance on international law, peaceful negotiation, and multilateral engagement, which are fundamental attributes of bamboo diplomacy. The coverage of maritime issues in the East Sea demonstrates Vietnam's legal determination and preference for dialogue and constructive cooperation. Similarly, reporting on Vietnam's leadership in ASEAN, participation in United Nations initiatives, and proactive

role in climate change negotiations consistently frames the country as reliable and adaptable, a nation that stands firm on principle but remains open to partnership and consensus. Bamboo diplomacy is further expressed in EONs' extensive coverage of people-to-people exchanges, cultural festivals, and bilateral celebrations, such as the Vietnam-Japan Festival or international New Year greetings. These stories showcase Vietnam's openness, inclusiveness, and ability to forge deep, lasting friendships, key elements of soft power that the bamboo metaphor encapsulates.

These communication activities are conducted within the policy and legal framework set by Decree 72/2015/ND-CP, ensuring that Vietnam's information is consistent, factual, and aligned with national interests. The integration of bamboo diplomacy into high-level policy and daily news coverage affirms the essential role of EONs in shaping Vietnam's image and the practice of Vietnamese foreign policy itself. EONs are indispensable in expressing and actualising the spirit of bamboo diplomacy. Through balanced, authoritative, and context-rich reporting, they contribute to safeguarding national interests, advancing international friendship, and positioning Vietnam as a resilient, adaptive, and trustworthy partner in the global arena.

6. Discussion and recommendations

Alongside the positive roles that EONs play in Vietnam's foreign communication, this research has revealed several persistent challenges that limit the effectiveness of these platforms in today's era of globalisation and rapid technological change.

First, in a world marked by increasing global integration, rapid advances in communication technology, and complex shifts in international politics, Vietnam faces the ongoing challenge of effectively conveying its foreign policy messages across various domains, especially politics, economics, and social stability. EONs serve as important channels for sharing information about Vietnam with the global community, but they also help shape perceptions, promote the country's image, foster cooperation, and support national unity. However, EONs are confronted with strong competition from global social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, X (Twitter), and TikTok. These platforms enable information to spread instantly, encourage broad public engagement, and offer various perspectives on Vietnam. In contrast, EONs follow formal editorial processes and policy guidelines, which can slow their updates and make attracting young or international audiences who expect fast, diverse, and interactive content more challenging. The findings indicate that many popular topics related to Vietnam

first emerge on social media before being addressed and analysed by official news outlets, sometimes diminishing the role of EONs in guiding international public opinion.

Second, documents from the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party highlight the urgent need to “*renew the content, methods, and effectiveness of foreign communication*”. This sets high expectations for news organisations, especially EONs, to continuously improve content quality, diversify topics, and adopt engaging presentation styles to build trust and expand their international audience. Nevertheless, there remains an ongoing challenge in balancing official policy objectives with the need to make content more appealing, diverse, and engaging for international readers. Most EONs focus primarily on promoting and safeguarding national interests in line with the Party and State directions, leading to a strong emphasis on positive news and limited coverage of sensitive or controversial topics. While this approach ensures a consistent and stable foreign communication message, it may reduce the dynamism and appeal of EONs compared to global social media, where trending topics are openly discussed and can quickly shape public perception.

Particularly, the results of the quantitative analysis indicate a concerning issue regarding the overwhelming proportion of articles categorised as “*Simple information/unclear theme*” (42.2% of the total survey sample). This finding serves as a significant warning concerning the effectiveness of foreign communication in EONs in Vietnam. Articles within this category often merely provide isolated event information, list data, or quote statements, lacking analysis, commentary, or connection to national strategic messages. The article “*Vietnam's major cities push ahead with electric bus revolution*”, published on VnExpress International on 11 June 2023, summarises the situation in Hanoi by stating: “*Five routes have been converted to electric operation, and the total number of electric buses in the city has risen to 225*”. The article merely enumerates the newly implemented electric bus routes and the number of vehicles. It lacks any commentary or analysis regarding the implications of electric bus development for environmental policy, tourism benefits, or social impacts on the populace, particularly concerning international tourists or expatriates residing in Vietnam. This represents a form of reporting that remains at the level of mere events, devoid of depth in understanding or strategic message connectivity.

Furthermore, some articles simply relay international information without providing evaluation, discussion, or connection to the perspectives and interests of Vietnam.

The article “*US pledges to enhance cooperation with Vietnam in coping with climate change*”, published on VietnamPlus on 7 September 2022, primarily reports on the meeting between Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and US Special Presidential Envoy John Kerry, with excerpts such as: “*Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh had a meeting with US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry on September 7*” - “*Kerry said the US wants to strengthen cooperation with Vietnam in coping with climate change, developing renewable energy, and achieving net zero emissions by 2050*”. The article merely lists statements and information regarding the commitment to cooperation, without analysing Vietnam’s actual role and contributions to these global issues, nor does it provide any commentary on the significance of the event for the country’s image or foreign communication strategy. This situation may stem from the pressure to produce news rapidly and a lack of clear thematic direction. If this trend persists, enhancing soft power and positioning the national brand through foreign communication will be challenging to achieve substantively. Lessons learned indicate that reforming foreign communication requires not only diversifying themes and formats but also necessitates a fundamental shift in content development thinking, transitioning from merely updating events to guiding perceptions with clear, in-depth themes closely aligned with national strategic objectives.

Third, translation quality stands out as a significant barrier to the effectiveness of EONs. The primary audience for these platforms consists of foreigners, researchers, international journalists, investors, and overseas Vietnamese, all of whom expect accurate and natural English and consistency in specialised terms, particularly in diplomacy, politics, defence, and culture. In practice, many editors still rely heavily on machine translation, have limited exposure to international audiences, and may not fully understand the expectations of their diverse readers. As a result, translation errors, awkward language, or misinterpretations can occur, especially with technical terms, names, historical events, or sensitive diplomatic content, potentially making articles less persuasive or leading to misunderstandings. Editorial teams are often small, with limited resources for thorough review or consultation with native speakers, and there is a lack of unified terminology across news organisations. The pressure to publish quickly and the increasing complexity of topics such as digital transformation, climate change, and modern international cooperation further shorten the time for careful editing. All these factors can undermine the credibility, appeal, and impact of Vietnam’s foreign communication. They may even harm the country’s image, the reputation of its

media organisations, and international perceptions of Vietnam.

The aforementioned practical challenges impact the operational effectiveness of EONs in Vietnam and influence the communication mechanisms outlined within the study’s theoretical framework. The rapid development of social media, with its capacity to disseminate information and generate multifaceted discussions, has significantly altered the media landscape, thereby affecting the agenda-setting role of EONs. In many instances, the public first accesses prominent topics and information through social media, necessitating that EONs adjust their approaches to maintain their agenda-setting role and provide accurate, timely information. Furthermore, certain limitations regarding the quality of translation and the presence of simplistic articles lacking clear themes may adversely affect the framing function of foreign journalism. In articles introducing economic achievements, if the information is limited to mere data or events without an analysis of their significance, the message portraying “*Vietnam as dynamic, innovative, and integrated*” may not truly stand out or persuade international readers.

Additionally, minor translation errors can diminish accuracy, resulting in incomplete message transmission. When messages regarding national image are not clearly articulated or fail to convey the necessary nuances, establishing a positive and consistent perception of Vietnam in the eyes of international audiences may encounter certain obstacles. Moreover, these factors also influence the construction and reinforcement of national identity within foreign media. The dissemination of distinctive values, such as the diplomatic image of bamboo, necessitates that journalistic content be coherent, profound, and focused on identity elements. If the content primarily serves an informational purpose, lacking connections to identity or strategic values, the ability to create a unique imprint and build the national image on the international stage will be somewhat constrained.

Therefore, this research proposes several recommendations aimed at enhancing the role of EONs in the current foreign communication efforts of Vietnam, as follows:

Adherence to legal regulations and official guidelines is a central requirement in producing foreign communication content for EONs in Vietnam. In practice, editorial departments regularly consult Decree No. 72/2015/ND-CP [15] and Directive No. 05/CT-TTG to verify the accuracy and appropriateness of information before publication, particularly for topics with potential diplomatic or political sensitivity. Editorial workflows are structured so that content relating to

foreign affairs undergoes legal and policy review by designated editors or legal consultants. Regular training sessions and internal briefings keep staff updated on changes in legislation and official directives. Content audits and compliance checks are periodically conducted to identify risks or breaches, ensuring that published material remains within the bounds of regulatory requirements. In cases involving contested narratives or sensitive information, editorial boards coordinate with relevant authorities to clarify facts and provide corrective reporting when necessary. This approach supports providing accurate, comprehensive information and a timely response to misinformation or unfounded claims in the international information environment.

Improving the effectiveness of EONs in foreign communication depends on editorial expertise and technological capacity. Editorial teams benefit from the participation of journalists and editors with backgrounds in international relations, foreign languages, and multimedia reporting. Opportunities for professional development, including workshops on digital storytelling, data journalism, and the coverage of complex foreign affairs topics, contribute to improved content quality. Collaboration with universities and training centres is a practical approach to strengthening staff skills through joint courses and internships. Applying digital tools and new content formats, such as interactive graphics and multimedia explainers, supports broader audience engagement and timely information delivery. Using analytics to monitor article reach and reader feedback enables editorial teams to adjust content strategies based on evidence rather than assumptions. Regular reviews of published content and technological processes help identify gaps and areas for improvement. In this way, investments in human resources and technology support the long-term enhancement of Vietnam's foreign communication efforts through EONs.

One of the most persistent challenges facing EONs in Vietnam is ensuring the consistent quality of English translations. High-quality translations are fundamental for conveying foreign communication messages accurately and enhancing Vietnam's international image. To address this, news organisations should focus on building specialised translation teams that combine strong English proficiency with subject-matter expertise in international relations and journalism. A multi-step review process involving subject experts and native English editors is recommended to minimise errors and ensure clarity. Collaboration with universities, professional associations, and external consultants can help reinforce these efforts (Fig. 3).

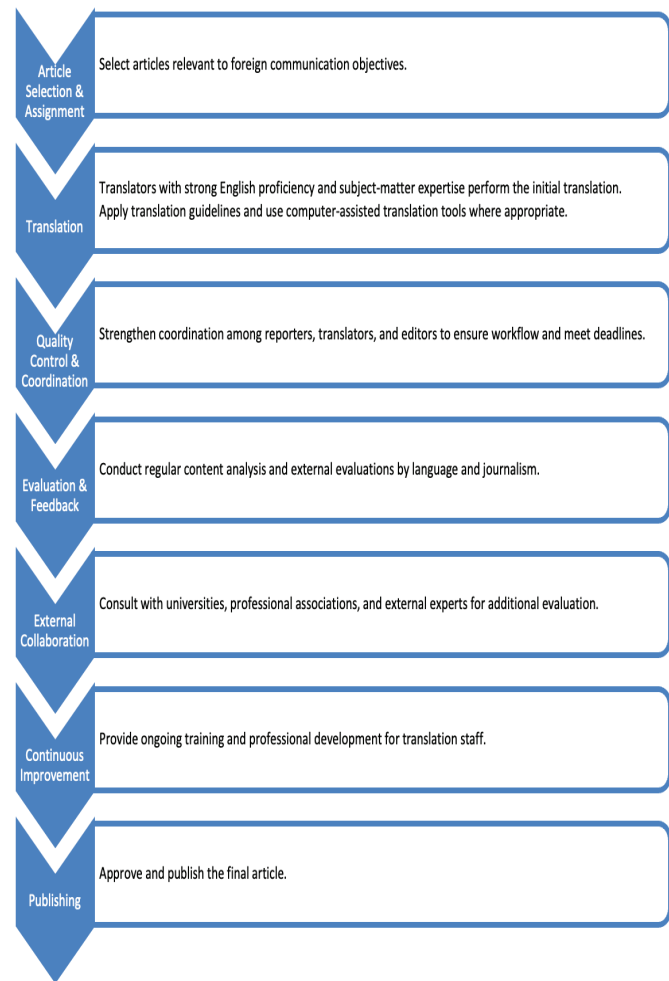


Fig. 3. Proposed workflow for translating and publishing English-language online news articles. Source: Author's work.

In addition, newsrooms should adopt clear translation guidelines, apply computer-assisted tools where appropriate, and strengthen coordination among reporters, translators, and editors to meet tight deadlines without compromising quality. Regular content analysis and external evaluation by language and journalism experts are essential for ongoing quality assessment. Feedback from international readers should also be solicited to further improve readability and credibility. Continuous training and professional development for translation staff will ensure that EONs maintain high standards, supporting the effectiveness of Vietnam's foreign communication strategy.

7. Conclusions

EONs in Vietnam serve as proactive, swift, and credible foreign communication channels with a wide-ranging impact on diverse public audiences. The primary target group significantly influenced by EONs in Vietnam comprises foreign audiences

both within Vietnam and globally. Consequently, the online journalism in English represents a medium that facilitates public access to information and alters perceptions regarding Vietnam's foreign activities. This, in turn, enhances the quality and effectiveness of disseminating information and the Vietnamese State's policies, guidelines, and legal frameworks regarding foreign relations in the contemporary context. Furthermore, the English online newspaper contributes to establishing Vietnam's brand and credibility on the global stage, safeguarding national interests in international endeavours, and addressing media crises while correcting misinformation. Based on these functions, the study proposes three recommendations. First, foreign communication through EONs should continue to adhere strictly to legal regulations and official guidelines so that information remains accurate, consistent, and appropriate, particularly in relation to politically or diplomatically sensitive issues. Second, greater investment should be directed towards both human and material resources, especially through improving technological infrastructure, enhancing digital production capacity, and strengthening the professional expertise of journalists, editors, and translators involved in foreign communication. Third, the development of English content should be treated as a substantive strategic priority rather than a merely technical task. This includes improving translation quality, ensuring terminological consistency, increasing thematic depth and analytical value, and adopting more suitable multimedia and digital formats to expand international reach and audience engagement. These recommendations are intended to address the limitations identified in current foreign communication practices and to further strengthen the role of EONs in Vietnam's contemporary foreign communication efforts.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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