

## THE CURRENT SITUATION OF MASS MEDIA ON NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S ACTIVITIES

Vũ Tuấn Hà\*

Academy of Journalism and Communication, Vietnam.

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**\*Corresponding Author**

Vũ Tuấn Hà

Academy of Journalism and  
Communication, Vietnam.

[vuhaquang@gmail.com](mailto:vuhaquang@gmail.com),

Cell phone: +84989893938

### 1. INTRODUCTION

To meet the increasing requirement of quality of media in general and quality of media on national assembly in particular, we have conducted a research on the topic “Mass media and Public opinion on the National Assembly’s activities”. This paper presents the results of a study on the current situation of mass media covering NA’s activities

including enactment of laws; overseeing and settlement of major issues of the country; and NA deputies’ meeting with voters. Quantitative research sample includes 233 journalists who specialize in the field of national assembly communication. In-depth interview sample includes 6 former NA deputies and senior leaders. The results of the study show that the current situation of each NA’s activity is reflected by analyzing and describing frequency of message, frequency of conveying messages via the mass media, content of messages as well as significance and effect of communication on voters.

**KEYWORDS:** Enactment of laws; journalist; mass media; message; national assembly’s activity; overseeing; settlement of major issues of the country; voter.

### 2. RESEARCH METHODS

#### 2.1. Theoretical approaches in studies

##### 2.1.1. Functionalism

R. Merton’s functionalism posits that the society is structured into components with specific functions; and these components operate in synchronism with others on the principle of functional unity. Three major functions existing within the society are public, hidden and

anti-function (Phuong 2015). Public function is performed by the society to achieve a determining purpose in which the action's result is in line with its purpose. This theory posits that the society is structured by units or components with specific functions and these units or components can collaboratively maintain social dynamic balance as a system. When one component's function declines, others can provide support or complementation to maintain the system's balance. A balanced society is one which can sustain a system with four major functions: adaptation, goal, integration and latency or pattern maintenance (Quang 2017). Mass media is also considered to have its own structure and functions. Applying this theory to mass media with regard to activities of the National Assembly (NA), we clarify the functions of mass media, assisting citizens from various social classes in receiving the message and being familiarized to law-related knowledge. In addition, the purpose of mass media is to widely disseminate to the public so that different social communities can comprehend the general essence of law and the whole society can maintain the same law enforcement pattern. R. Merton's functionalism is employed in research on mass media's public and hidden function and functional disorder. Public function presents communications whose purposes are achieved. Meanwhile, hidden function demonstrates communications or even communication strategies that fail the communicators' intention. Employing R. Merton's functional structuralism, modern communicators express that mass media agencies in general and journalism in particular are deemed as a social unit which functions by disseminating information to the public. The public is a social unit whose function is to receive information from mass media to achieve its information-searching purpose, performing public function. If information from mass media is not in accordance with the public's projected purpose about one particular event, the public manifests its hidden function. If that information worries the public or creates different awareness than expected, collective behaviors or attitudes would be stirred. In conclusion, mass media can create social consensus but can also bring instability to some components and even the whole society or build anomie. Nowadays, some information circulated around on social networks is sometimes fabricated and can trouble the public.

### **2.1.2. Two-step flow of communication**

The two-step flow of communication theory was introduced by sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld (Lazarsfeld 1955) in 1944; he and Elihu Katz published this theory in 1955. According to the two-step flow of communication model, most people form their opinions under the influence of opinion leaders who are influenced by the mass media. Only opinion leaders can interpret

the information within social situation and specific social context to the public. The two-step flow of communication model disproved the one-step flow of communication model or magic bullet theory. According to the magic bullet theory, the media injects the hypodermic needle into the public who was in turn immediately affected by the injection. The multi-step flow of communication and network-based communication model are the expansion of the two-step flow of communication model. All communicational models expanding their steps emphasize the reputation and capacity for processing and synthesizing information of opinion leaders (Quang 2016).

### **2.1.3. Agenda-setting theory**

In 1968, Max McCombs and Donald Shaw (McCombs 2002; McCombs 1972) introduced the agenda-setting theory to describe the ability of the media to influence the importance placed on the topics of the public agenda. Agenda-setting is a sociological theory attempting to make highly accurate predictions. According to this theory, if a piece of news is covered regularly and predominantly, the public will consider it more important than others.

### **2.1.4. Theory of Priming Effects**

Theory of Priming Effects introduced by Iyengar, Peters and Kinder in 1982 posits that the general public have difficulty in making political decisions without the guidance of the mass media (Quang 2016). Like in the agenda-setting theory, mass media actors create typical affairs or issues to attract the public. The theory of priming effects emphasizes that mass media actors generate stimuli to rekindle already existed or existing memories in the public's mind. The second step is to lead the public via images and the mass media language in films, newspapers, culture, music, arts etc. On that basis, mass media actors create the "Background effect", stimulate, direct and guide the public to focus on political topics such as elections or campaigns. The public will focus on predominant issues and ignore other peripheral ones.

### **2.1.5. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence model**

According to Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (Noelle-Neumann 1993), human nature entails the fear of isolation; hence, people commonly act and follow others if knowing that they belong to the minority. Applying this rule to mass media, mass media actors often create masses of people to put pressure on smaller and weaker groups when they want to propagate a particular viewpoint or issue, especially one related to belief and political sensitivity. Depending on the purpose of the communication or communication campaign, mass media

actors can use the majority of the public to promote or disseminate a viewpoint, lifestyle, social policy, social product etc.

## **2.2. Sampling and data-processing method**

The study chose a comprehensive sample of journalists specializing in the field of National Assembly communication. According to the list of journalists provided by journalism management agency, we conducted an opinion poll of 235 journalists and collected 233 questionnaires. The journalists work on various types of press such as print, television, radio and on-line press. The obtained results were processed on IBM 20.0 program.

In addition to quantitative sampling method, we interviewed 6 experts who either currently are and used to be NA senior leaders.

Using content analysis method to analyze the content of issues of the Nhan Dan (People's Daily), Tuoi Tre (Youth) newspapers in 1 month before (September), during (October) and after (November) the Third session of National Assembly. The Nhan Dan newspaper is the daily, weekly and monthly issue of the Communist Party of Vietnam. The Tuoi Tre Newspaper is a publication of Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union. Its main audience is young people. The Tuoi Tre Newspaper has the same daily circulation as the Nhan Dan newspaper. We chose them as two representatives for other newspapers currently in circulation in Vietnam.

Using a Likert scale with point scale ranging from 1 to 5 to calculate the average value and predict the respondents' tendency of assessment of the meaning or significance of a certain issue.

## **3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

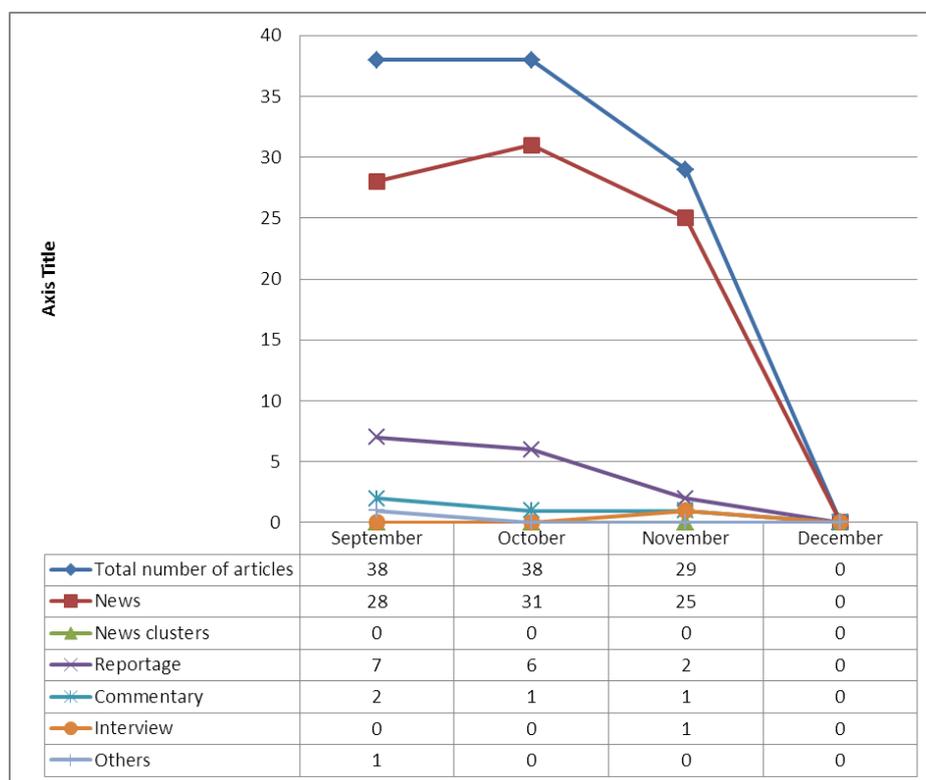
**3.1.** Coverage of the 10th session of the 13th National Assembly (Opening on October 20<sup>th</sup> and concluding on November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016) on the Nhan Dan and Tuoi Tre newspaper.

### **❖ The Nhan Dan newspaper**

From its beginning to the present, the Nhan Dan Newspaper has always closely followed activities of the Party, the Government and NA. Many people have the habit of reading daily newspapers regularly. Reading the Nhan Dan Newspaper helps the public to grasp new issues and decisions of the Party and the Government as well as important activities of NA.

All the articles about NA’s operations and administration activities published in the Nhan Dan Newspaper are collected for the purpose of this study. Contents updated by the researcher include: (i) Law-making; (ii) Overseeing with the supreme authority; (iii) Decision-making with regards to critical issues of the country; (iv) Meeting with voters. Statistics were collected from September to December, 2016, 1 month before and 1 month after NA sessions. Forms of messages published on the Nhan Dan Newspaper included: News, news clusters, reportage, commentary, interview, among others. The statistics are described in Figure 1.

From the aggregate data in Figure 1, we can see that in the total number of articles in September, October and November was 38, 38 and 29 respectively. The greatest number of articles on NA was seen in these three months. In December, there was a sharp decrease as there were significantly fewer articles than the three previous months, during and after NA sessions. The articles were mainly in the form of news (28 articles in September and 31 in October) and reportage (7).



**Figure 1: The number of articles about NA from September to December in the Nhan Dan Newspaper.**

*Source: The author’s aggregate data of articles on the Nhan Dan Newspaper in September, October, November and December of 2016.*

From the aggregate data in Figure 1, we can see that in the total number of articles in September, October and November was 38, 38 and 29 respectively. The greatest number of articles was seen in these three months. In December, there was a sharp decrease as there were fewer articles than three previous months, during and after NA sessions. Articles were mainly in the form of news (28 ones in September and 31 ones in October) and reportage (7). As illustrated by Figure 1, journalists published articles before and during the 3rd session of the 14th National Assembly. After the conclusion of the NA sessions, the media continued to cover NA's activities, which helped constituents better understand NA's activities. Newspapers (Nhan Dan and Tuoi Tre) performed as opinion leaders in commenting and interpreting events and results of the 3rd session of the 14th National Assembly. Messages were in the form of news and reportage. These types of information were easily comprehensible, memorable and impressive owing to the combination of verbal interpretation and images.

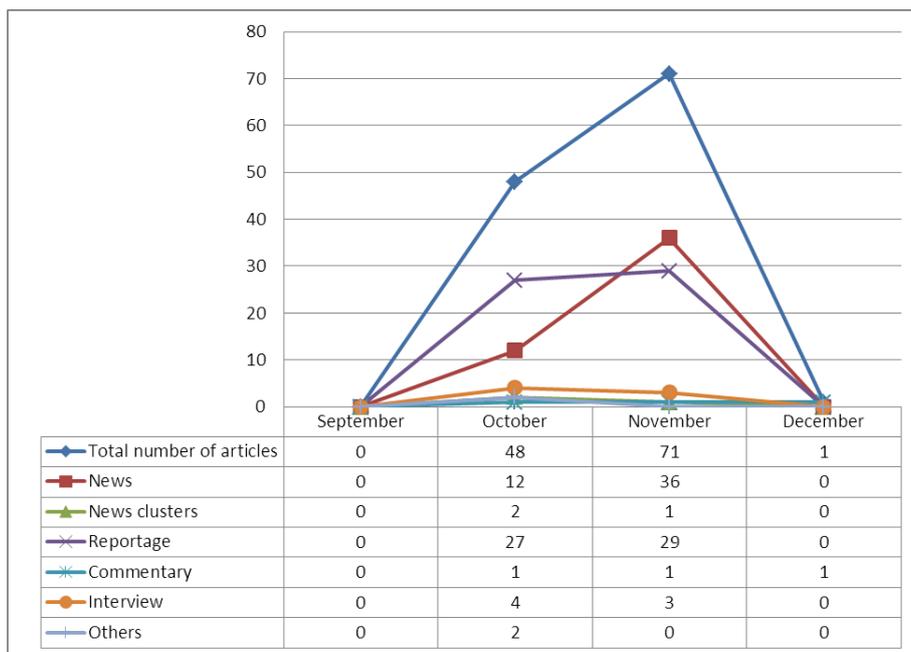
#### ❖ The Tuoi Tre Newspaper

**The Tuoi Tre Newspaper** represents the voice of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union. It has developed into a multimedia communication group which publishes Tuoi Tre daily, weekly Tuoi Tre Cui Tuan, fortnightly Tuoi Tre Cui, online newspaper *Tuoi Tre online* and English online newspaper *Tuoi Tre News*. Contents of the Tuoi Tre Newspaper often are real-life issues of the public. Using the same synthesis method applied to the Nhan Dan Newspaper, the author listed the number of articles about NA on the Tuoi Tre newspaper in Figure 2.

As it can be seen from Figure 2, before the 10th session of the 14th National Assembly, the Tuoi Tre Newspaper had no article. While in October, during the session, there were 48 articles; particularly 01 month after the session, the newspaper published more articles (71). In October, during the 3rd session, articles were mainly in the form of news (12) and reportage (27); others were 04 interviews, 01 commentary and 02 new clusters.

Particularly after the conclusion of the 10th session on November 27th, the number of articles on the Tuoi Tre Newspaper nearly doubled that in October (71 articles), 39 of which was reportage. This proved that the audience of the Tuoi Tre Newspaper had quite different needs when compared to those of the Nhan Dan Newspaper. Noticing this difference bore significant meaning in proposing solutions to enhance the quality and efficiency of communication on each form of newspapers. Further study on the form of articles about

NA’s activities on the Tuoi Tre Newspaper has found out how Tuoi Tre attracted its audiences, which should be further encouraged when covering NA sessions.



**Figure 2: The number of articles about NA on the Tuoi Tre Newspaper.**

*Source: The author’s aggregate data of articles on the Tuoi Tre newspaper in September, October, November and December in 2016.*

Figure 1 and 2 indicate that there is a fundamental difference between covering tactics of the Nhan Dan and the Tuoi Tre Newspaper. The difference lies in different functions of each newspaper. The Nhan Dan Newspaper is mandated to cover the period before, during and after NA sessions while the Tuoi Tre newspaper is not obliged to perform this function; hence, it covers news according to the needs of audiences.

**3.2.** Information published on communication channels (newspapers, television, radio) about NA’s activities.

**3.2.1.** Messages on law-making, oversight, major issues of the country, meeting with voters

**Table 1. The number of messages on NA’s activities on mass media.**

		Messages on laws	Messages on oversight	Messages on major issues of the country	Messages on meeting with voters
N	Valid	233	233	233	233
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		.64	.71	.67	.67
Sum		149	165	155	155

Of the four types of NA's activities, we can see that mass media paid greatest attention to oversight, while messages on law-making, deliberating on major issues of the country, or meeting with voters had equal number.

**Table 2: The number of messages before, during and after the 3rd session**

		Messages before the NA's session	Messages during the NA's session	Messages after the NA's session
N	Valid	233	233	233
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		2.32	2.90	2.75
Sum		541	676	640

As it can be seen from Table 2, on average, a journalist published 2.32, 2.9 and 2.75 articles before, during and after the 10th session of the 13th National Assembly respectively. Therefore, during the session, journalists published the largest number of articles, which then decreased in November (post-session). However, the number of publications after and during the session was much higher than that in the month before the session.

The above data is only representative of journalists specializing in communication of NA's activities. In fact, the number of publications of NA on mass media is significantly greater.

### 3.2.2. Forms of messages published about NA's activities

To provide better illustration on forms of messages published before, during and after the 10th session of the 13th National Assembly, we have listed the numbers of these in Table 3.

**Table 3: Articles categorized as news, news clusters, reportage, commentary, and interview published before, during and one month after the 3rd session of the 14th National Assembly.**

		Number of news articles published	Number of articles on reportage published	Number of commentary articles published	Number of news cluster articles published	Number of interview articles published
N	Valid	232	232	232	232	232
	Missing	1	1	1	1	1
Mean		4.66	3.63	3.0	3.68	3.55
Sum		1080	841	719	854	823

Figures in Table 3 indicate one of the 233 interviewees gave no answer. The average value of the variable "Number of news articles published" is the highest of all at 4.66; the runner-up is "Number of news cluster articles published" at 3.68; the variable "Number of articles on

reportage published” ranks third with 3.63 articles; the fourth is “Number of interview articles published” at 3.55 and “Number of commentary articles published” ranks last at 3.0 articles. The number of commentary articles accounts for lower percentage than other forms of messages because more time and effort is required for this form than it is for news reporting and others. News and news clusters are found in larger number possibly because these are the simplest and easiest forms of message for journalists to convey. Yet, it would not be appropriate to say that commentaries are the most valuable of the five forms of message since a message’s value is expressed in both its significance and the extent to which it influences on various groups of the public. Commentary articles help the public achieve in-depth understanding of the situation and the nature of things or phenomena; nonetheless, not all members of the public are capable of comprehending thoroughly the essence of a commentary article. Meanwhile, messages in the forms of news and news clusters have their main content understood by everybody. Therefore, the trend of modern mass media is the increase of news that features visual aid, sounds and colors to attract the public and enable easier understanding and memorization.

R. Merton’s functional structuralism applied in the media has supported communicators in the approach to communication strategies through thematic groups suitable for different groups of the public and through specialized channels to provide servitude to the public in each and every concerned field in accordance with the public’s cultural goals. For that reason, “post-modern” mass media has established both extensive and in-depth reach into every corner of life. Post-modern media has minimized the world in which we are living, in the dimension of both space and time, into means of mass media, especially television. What we want to mention here is that the dedicated NA Television channel (VOV) needs to uphold its strengths to facilitate in-depth communication on the NA’s topics. Nevertheless, other channels also are obliged to assist collaboratively so that the television channel focusing on the NA can work its best.

In addition, communicators disseminating information on NA’s activities need to pay attention to the time frame of transmission for effect maximization.

**Table 4: Message transmission time during the 10th session, NA's 13th Legislature.**

		Messages covered in the session from 6:00 to 12:00	Messages covered in the session from 13:00 to 18:00	Messages covered in the session from 19:00 to 24:00	Messages covered in the session from 1:00 to 5:00
N	Valid	233	233	233	233
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		.52	.63	.60	.22
Sum		120	146	140	52

Table 4 reflects that there is a tendency of transmitting messages from 13:00 to 18:00. This coincides with the normal office hours; thus unsurprisingly, most information coverage is within these hours. The second most message-packed time frame is from 18:00 to 24:00, followed by the 6:00-12:00 time frame. Discovering the rules of information transmission would help the researcher in finding the suitability of news reporting or message coverage. However, in this research study, we have not yet achieved that. Further research on the relationship between the public and the media needs to be conducted to clarify which time frame has the most number of people tuning in to television and radio programs in order to meet their demands.

### 3.2.3. Trend of publishing about the NA's different forms of activities

**Table 5: Types of messages about NA's activities published before, during and after the session.**

No.	Message	Number of articles	Average numeric value
1	The implementation of recently passed laws	491	2.12
2	The process of passing laws	543	2.33
3	The amendment of existing laws	549	2.36
4	The procedure of law-making	485	2.08
5	Oversight role of the NA in anti-corruption	506	2.19
6	The use of state budget	520	2.25
7	Capital construction	525	2.25
8	Poverty reduction	576	<b>2.47</b>
9	On inequality and social stratification	553	2.38
10	Social security	503	2.16
11	Property security	523	2.24
12	Issues related to national sovereignty and territories	505	2.17
13	Oversight of Government's activities	529	2.28
14	Oversight of activities and eligibility of NA deputies	532	2.28
15	Decisions by the NA on issues of national importance	517	2.22
N = 233			

Note: The above average numeric values are given by IBM 20.0 did not count the missing respondent.

Table 5 demonstrates the number of articles published before, during and after the 3rd session of the 14th NA. Of those, the issue of poverty reduction receives the most coverage, which reflects the degree to which journalists are concerned about this. On average, each journalist writes 2.47 articles about “Poverty reduction” that was discussed in the 3rd session, NA’s 14th Legislature. The second most popular message is “On inequality and social stratification” with 2.38 articles; ranking third is “The amendment of existing laws” at 2.36; “The process of passing laws” is the fourth issue at 2.33; “Oversight of Government’s activities” and “Oversight of activities and eligibility of NA deputies” both rank fifth with 2.28 articles.

The above figures reveal that the issue of “Poverty reduction” gains the most attention from journalists, even more than “The implementation of recently passed laws” (2.47 with 2.12). “Inequality and social stratification” also emerges as one of the most important matters in recent NA’s activities. Other issues such as “Property security” (2.24) and “Social security” (2.16) have not received the same attention as poverty, inequality and social stratification has. “Oversight of Government’s activities” and “Oversight of activities and eligibility of NA deputies” also are sensitive matters about which journalists are most concerned.

The number of articles published about the 10th session of the NA’s 13th Legislature objectively reflects which issues are of the public’s interest. In fact, the public’s demand motivates journalists’ activities. Journalists obtain news from the NA through various means such as the NA’s media publication or live-broadcast sessions. Through their articles, journalists reflect the NA’s activities and lead the public to access knowledge about those.

### **3.3. Journalists evaluating the significance of messages on the NA’s activities**

- **Evaluating the significance of messages**

Evaluating the significance of messages covered by means of mass media helps us understand which of the NA’s activities receives the most attention and answer to the question “Why so?”.

**Table 6: Ratings on the significance of messages transmitted by means of mass media about the NA's four basic types of activities.**

No.	Issue	Highly significant	Significant	Barely significant	Insignificant	Total %
1	Law making activities	35.9	59.7	3.5	0.9	100.0
2	Oversight activities	23.6	63.1	12.4	0.9	100.0
3	Decisions of national importance	22.4	64.7	10.8	2.2	100.0
4	Meeting with constituents	21.1	57.3	17.2	4.3	100.0

N = 233

From Table 6, we can compare the journalists' ratings on the NA's four types of activities.

In the column with the highest level "Highly significant", the order goes as followed: Law making activities (35.9%), Oversight activities (23.6%), Decisions of national importance (22.4%) and Meeting with constituents (21.1%).

With the second level "Significant", there is a change of order: Decisions of national importance (64.7%), Oversight activities (63.1%), Law making activities (59.7%) and Meeting with constituents (57.3%).

The above figures indicate the NA's activity of meeting with constituents is less appreciated than the other three are. If the two levels of evaluation "Highly significant" and "Significant" are combined as "Significant", it can be seen that law making activities is of highest concern (95.6%), followed by decisions of national importance (87.1%), oversight activities (86.7%) and meeting with constituents (78.4%).

The fact that journalists pay less attention to the NA's meeting with constituents than they do to other NA activities shows that in reality this activity is not frequently conducted, which leads to less press recognition. The reason is that some of the NA's deputies are shy in front of the public either through means of mass media or face-to-face. Commenting on this, a high-profile official of the NA said: *"I think many deputies of the NA are still hesitant to communicate with journalists; they are reluctant because of not knowing what to say. Having no skills or speaking out something not true or being laughed at by the public or making work more troublesome..."* (In-depth interview report No.2; Male, age 70, Former high-profile official of the NA). Due to changes in regulations and conditions of meeting with constituents since the 11th and 12th term of office, deputies tend to hesitate to meet with

constituents more than before. Another former high-profile official said: “..., *the first period of the 13th Legislature was a bit unorganized; journalists did not have enough seats in the press room and they must have passage-way cards to get in. It’s really complicated and meeting with constituents is no longer easy; therefore the drawback is that deputies’ opinions or even the NA’s views could not be delivered to the public in time. Later, I learned that there was some efforts at fixing that but it was still not as freely comfortable as in the 11th and 12th Legislature.*” (In-depth interview report No.6; Male, age 67..., Former high-profile official of the NA).

- Evaluating the significance of press conference debriefing the contents of the NA’s sessions 15.2% of the people surveyed agree that press conference is highly significant; 73.5% of whom deem it significant; 3.8% consider it barely significant; 7.6% think it is insignificant. If “Highly significant” is combined with “Significant” as “Significant”, 88.7% of journalists participating believe that pre-session press conference is significant.
- Evaluating the significance of meetings with voters.

**Table 7: Ratings on the significance of meetings between voters and NA deputies.**

Significance of the meetings	Before the session	After the session
Highly significant	48.3	21.5
Significant	49.1	64.4
Barely significant	2.6	14.2
Total	100.0	100.0
N = 233		

According to journalists, meeting with voters before and after the session is significant and important. However, meeting with voters before the session is more important than after the session.

It is important to note that 97.4% of respondents said that NA deputies’ meeting with voters before the session was either “significant” or “highly significant”. Meanwhile, only 85.9% of respondents said that meeting with voters after the session is significant.

### 3.4. Forms of public opinion guidance on mass media

In the context of Vietnam, mass media reflect the viewpoints and leadership of the Party; through mass media, the system of policies and viewpoints, politics, socio-economy and all social activities in general are directed and adjusted. There are several activities that can guide public opinions on mass media, especially on television. However, in the subsequent part, we only focus on some prominent public opinions guiding activities and guiding tactics

such as: (i) High ranking leaders of the State and Party speaking on television; (ii) Official views of the relevant agencies; (iii) Opinions of the representatives of constituents expressed in the media; (iv) Expert views expressed in the media; (v) Combination of more than one channel of communication to convey the same message over a period of time (from 1-7 days).

**Table 8: Methods to guide public opinions on NA's activities *Ratio* (%).**

No.	Methods to guide public opinions	Frequency			Assessment		
		Frequently	Rarely	Never	Very important	Important	Unimportant
1	High ranking leaders of the State and Party speaking on television	<b>73.4</b>	23.2	3.4	25.6	68.7	5.7
2	Official views of the relevant agencies	<b>67.7</b>	21.1	11.2	48.2	46.0	5.8
3	Opinions of the representatives of constituents expressed in the media	<b>67.7</b>	21.1	11.2	41.7	52.2	6.1
4	Expert views expressed in the media	<b>64.8</b>	26.6	8.6	<b>40.3</b>	<b>54.0</b>	5.8
5	Combination of more than one channel of communication to convey the same message over a period of time (from 1-7 days)	<b>56.5</b>	25.7	17.8	33.8	57.8	8.4

As illustrated by Table 8, in terms of frequency, of the five forms of guiding public opinions on mass media, “High ranking leaders of the State and Party speaking on television” receives the highest rating from the media (73.4%); The second highest rating is *Official view of the relevant agencies*: 67.7%; Ranking the third is *Opinions of the representatives of constituents expressed in the media*: 67.7%; The fourth rank is *Expert views expressed in the media*: 64.8%; The fifth rank is *Combination of more than one channel of communication to convey the same message over a period of time (from 1-7 days)*: 56.5%.

The frequency of the five communication methods on mass media is assessed differently by journalists. Meanwhile, the tactic of combining two communication channels in covering the same messages is not as frequent as others. This proves that mass media is currently overlooking the effectiveness of strategic communication action. The strategic communication action proposed by J. Habermas states that the simultaneous coverage of one

issue on many communication channels is more effective than the coverage of that issue on several channels in different periods.

Assessing the importance of five above activities gives us another picture of forms of covering messages. Journalists rate “Official view of the relevant agencies” the most important (at the very important rate): 48.2%; The second most important is “Opinions of the representatives of constituents expressed in the media”: 41.7%; The third rank is “Expert views expressed in the media”: 40.3%; Ranking the fourth is “Combination of more than one channel of communication to convey the same message over a period of time (from 1-7 days)”:33.8%; The fifth rank is “High ranking leaders of the State and Party speaking on television”: 25.6%. When the level “Very important” is combined into “Important”, we obtain quite similar results (above 90%) for all five types of activities. Meanwhile, the rate “Unimportant” accounts for only under 9%.

We can come to the conclusion that the five forms of activities need to be covered frequently on mass media because they are considered important. The dual and multi-channel communication strategy is highly valued and essential in the current communication phase.

### 3.5. The role of mass media in guiding public opinions on NA’s major functions

#### 3.5.1. The role of mass media in guiding public opinions on NA’s law-making

**Table 9: Ratings on the importance of media coverage to guide public opinions on NA’s legislative activities *Ratio (%)*.**

No.	Stage	Assessment		
		Very important	Important	Cannot decide
1	Drafting of bills	71.2	26.2	2.6
2	Appraising bills	44.0	50.9	5.2
3	Deliberating bills	47.6	42.5	9.9
4	Publishing laws	53.6	36.5	9.9

Mass media coverage to guide public opinions on NA’s legislative activities is of great importance (above 90%). However, when assessed at two levels “Very important” and “Important”, each activity holds different significance. At the level “Very important”, respondents said that *Drafting of bills is the most important: 71.2%*; The second most important activity is *Publishing laws: 53.6%*; Ranking the third is *Discussing bills: 47.6%*; The fourth rank is *Appraising bills: 44.0%*.

However, when considering the level “Important”, we see that the assessment of respondents changes. On this scale (The level “Important”), *Appraising bills* receives the highest rating: 50.9%; The second highest rating is *Discussing bills*: 42.5%; The third rank is *Publishing laws*: 36.5%; The fourth rank is *Drafting of bills*: 26.2%.

We can conclude that drafting of bills is very important because NA is the law-making agency. Moreover, in the context of a rapidly developing country, the social need for laws is very important, because if laws are not enacted in a timely manner, the social development will be hindered. Outdated laws are ineffective in social management, and they can even contribute to social disorder. Therefore, drafting of bills becomes urgent in the current phase. Likewise, it is necessary to publish and well enforce laws in the exciting social life of Vietnam. For laws to be well enforced in life, it is essential to have a synchronized and effective communication mechanism; hence, the public can get access to laws in a timely manner and observe the laws. In all law-making forms, drafting of bills is the most-covered issue by media people.

### 3.5.2. The role of mass media in guiding public opinions on NA’s supreme oversight

The function of mass media is guiding the public on NA’s activities in general and directing the public to better understand NA’s supreme oversight activities in particular. To understand the nature of the media’s guidance in terms of NA’s supreme oversight function, we asked the journalists: “Please rate the frequency and importance of each stage of media coverage to guide public opinions on NA’s oversight activities”. The results are shown in table 10.

**Table 10: Ratings on the frequency and importance of media coverage of NA’s stages of supreme oversight activities. Ratio (%).**

No.	Stage	Frequency			Assessment		
		Frequently	Sometimes	Never	Very important	Important	Never
1	Draft annual oversight program	56.7	39.9	3.4	28.2	68.7	3.1
2	Appraisal of reports	50.0	43.5	6.5	31.6	59.6	8.8
3	Oversight at the NA	60.8	27.6	11.6	42.1	49.1	8.8
4	Post-oversight	57.3	29.7	12.9	33.3	50.4	16.2

**N = 233**

In the column with the highest frequency “Frequently”, “oversight at the NA” ranks the first (60.8%), followed by “Post-oversight” (57.3%), “Draft annual oversight program” (56.7%) and “Appraisal of reports” (50.7%).

With the second level “Sometimes”, there is a change of order: “Appraisal of reports” accounts for the highest percentage: 43.5%, followed by “Draft annual oversight program” (39.9%). It is worth noting that 12.9% of interviewees have no interest in “Post-oversight”. Similarly, 11.6% of interviewees do not pay attention to “Oversight at the NA”.

With respect to the importance of media coverage to guide public opinions on NA’s oversight activities, it is important to note that 96.9% of respondents said that “Draft annual oversight program” was either “important” or “very important”. Similarly, the combined “Appraisal of reports” and “Oversight at the NA” results account for 91.2%.

The data in Table 10 indicates that interviewees highly appreciate the importance of NA’s oversight activities but underestimate the importance of media coverage to guide public opinions on those activities. There exists a contradictory perception of the importance of oversight activities and the importance of coverage of those activities. Journalists have not emphasized the frequency of the media’s guidance on NA’s oversight activities due to a certain underlying and hard-to-explain reason or political sensitivity.

As a consequence, to improve democracy and publicity of NA’s oversight activities, mass media need to increase the frequency of coverage of messages about NA’s oversight activities.

### **3.5.3. The role of mass media in guiding public opinions on NA’s decisions on issues of national importance.**

During the survey, the author examined the NA’s decision-making process on major issues through four main stages which are: (i) Proposals for issues of great importance; (ii) Appraisal of reports; (iii) Discussion in the NA sessions; and (iv) Declaration of decisions. They are four stages of issuing a decision on certain affairs such as social security, social assistance, construction investment, poverty alleviation, and anti-corruption, among others.

**Table 11: Ratings on the frequency and importance of media coverage of NA's decisions on issues of national importance. Ratio (%).**

No.	Issues to be covered	Frequency			Assessment		
		Frequently	Sometimes	Never	Very important	Important	Unimportant
1	Proposals for issues of great importance	<b>71.2</b>	26.2	<b>2.6</b>	29.8	61.0	9.2
2	Appraisal of reports	51.7	40.9	7.3	33.0	61.2	5.7
3	Discussion in the NA sessions	69.4	19.4	11.2	42.3	51.5	6.2
4	Declaration of decisions	60.3	26.7	12.9	32.2	53.3	14.5

N = 233

71.2%, 26.2% and 2.6% of journalists respectively say that they frequently, sometimes and never cover “proposals for issues of great importance”. A certain percentage of journalists rarely or never cover issues of national importance because they are political sensitive issues such as corruption, territory sovereignty, or political crimes. Publishing articles of sensitive topics is a challenge to journalists; hence, 40.9% of respondents say that they sometimes cover “appraisal of reports” for fear of displeasing some people. Similarly, 26.7% of respondents sometimes cover “declaration of decisions”.

With respect to the importance of “Making decisions on major issues of the country”, when two answers “Very important” and “Important” are combined into “Important”, the following results are obtained:

- 94.2% of interviewees consider “Appraisal of reports” important.
- 93.8% of interviewees consider “Discussion in the NA sessions” important.
- 90.8% of interviewees consider “Proposals for issues of great importance” important.
- 85.5% of interviewees consider “Declaration of decisions” important.

Consequently, journalists appreciate the importance of NA's “decisions on major issues of the country”, yet the frequency of their coverage of these activities is not high. We see the contradictory action of journalists again when it comes to issues of political sensitivity.

To rectify this situation, it is necessary to have a safety mechanism for journalists in terms of politics. Thus, they can become more active and creative in their profession. The Law on Journalism needs to be more specific and explicit about mechanism providing political security for journalists.

### 3.5.4. Journalists' methods of reflecting public opinions on the NA's activities

Journalists use five methods of reflecting public opinions on the NA's activities: (i) Publishing opinions of constituents over the media, (ii) Interviewing constituents on the NA activities, (iii) Covering constituents' opinions on the issues of interest to them, (iv) Presenting in the form of recommendations by the civil society (Veterans' Association, Women's Association, Fatherland's Front) and (v) Dialogues between constituents and NA deputies over the mass media.

**Table 12: Journalists' methods of reflecting public opinions on the NA's activities**  
*Percentage (%)*.

No.	Methods	Frequency			Assessment		
		Frequently	Rarely	Never	Very important	Important	Unimportant
1	Publishing opinions of constituents over the media	67,0	30,0	3,0	35,2	58,1	6,6
2	Interviewing constituents on the NA activities	66,4	29,7	3,9	37,8	51,7	10,4
3	Covering constituents' opinions on the issues of interest to them	<b>69,5</b>	22,3	8,2	<b>45,2</b>	48,7	6,1
4	Presenting in the form of recommendations by the civil society (Veterans' Association, Women's Association, Fatherland's Front)	62,2	30,5	7,3	39,6	48,7	11,7
5	Dialogues between constituents and NA deputies over the mass media	67,4	22,3	10,3	42,4	45,4	12,2
N = 233							

With regards to the NA's activities, the tripartite relationship among communicators, the NA and constituents is an inseparable dialectical one because the NA's basic functions are law enactment, oversight and settlement of major issues of the country. Therefore, all of the NA's activities are to serve its people and citizens. However, it is unfeasible for people to be directly informed of the NA's activities; hence they need information provided by communicators. Communicators receive information from the NA or directly from conferences, interviews with deputies, the NA's news reports, announcements, official correspondence or NA dedicated programs (as through VOV). Communicators become

opinion leaders and the bridge between the NA and its constituents. They are capable of guiding the public in various ways to deliver the content of the NA's activities to the public. Simultaneously, mass media demonstrates the public's thoughts, aspirations as well as evaluations and judgements on the NA's activities. Thus, the process of communication on the NA's activities has three stages: from the NA to mass media, from mass media to the public and from the public to the NA.

Table 15 exhibits the relationship among communicators (journalists), the public and the NA through five methods found in mass media.

In the "Frequently" column, we can see the order of frequency of using these methods:

- "Covering constituents' opinions on the issues of interest to them" is at 69.5%. This is the most regular way in comparison with the four methods of reflecting public opinions below.
- "Dialogues between constituents and NA deputies over the mass media" accounts for 67.4%. Media agencies' establishing direct or indirect dialogues via means of mass media connects the constituents with the NA's deputies. Then, the NA can acknowledge the constituents' aspirations and expectations while the constituents can inquire for deeper understanding of the NA's activities and its role.
- "Publishing opinions of constituents over the media" ranks third at 67.0%. This method helps deputies of the NA conduct timely policy adjustments and law amendments and gain access into people's real life better than research papers written on desk.
- The fourth method is "Interviewing constituents on the NA activities" at 66.4%. Through these interviews, journalists send indirect messages to the NA as well as related agencies.
- "Presenting in the form of recommendations by the civil society (Veterans' Association, Women's Association, Fatherland's Front)" covers the least percentage (62.2%) of all five methods of reflecting public opinions. Nonetheless, recommendations from political-social organizations are of utmost significance for the NA's activities, especially the NA's oversight activities. This is because the reflections and counter-arguments from those organizations, particularly the Fatherland's Front, would equip the legislative, executive and judiciary bodies with the function of policy scrutiny. Journalists' publishing less articles on activities of political-social organizations such as the Fatherland's Front, Women's Association, Veterans' Association indicates that to some extent, these organizations' activities could not capture the attention of the media.

It can be said that the frequency of journalists' reflecting public opinions is moderately high but no method exceeds 70.0%, which is about two-third of their reflecting activities. Meanwhile, the level "Rarely" already accounts for nearly one-third of activities presenting the relationship between public opinions and the NA's activities.

In particular, 10.3% of the respondents report that they do not publish about "Dialogues between constituents and NA deputies over the mass media". The reason for rarely publishing about "Presenting in the form of recommendations by the civil society (Veterans' Association, Women's Association, Fatherland's Front)" is because they consider those recommendations less important than other methods (An example: "Covering constituents' opinions on the issues of interest to them" is most important at 93.9%). 12.2% of respondents even deem "Dialogues between constituents and NA deputies over the mass media" as unimportant.

Accordingly, the journalists' awareness of the importance and necessity of publishing about public opinions, the NA's deputies' meetings with constituents, interviews with constituents about the NA's activities and recommendations from political-social organizations is positively correlated to, and by no means contradictory to, their action of publishing articles. This is due to the fact that this kind of activity is not as sensitive as oversight activities and settlement of the NA's major issues are.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Results of the survey on articles written before, during and after the 10<sup>th</sup> session of the 13<sup>th</sup> NA show that there is a fundamental difference between the reporting strategies of the two newspapers Nhan Dan and Tuoi Tre.

Journalists cover the most articles throughout the time of the session and this number gradually declines in November (post-session). However, the number of articles published during and after the session is still much higher than that in the month before the session.

Post-modern media have narrowed the world in which we are living, in both dimension of space and time, through various platforms, especially television. To improve the efficiency of communication on the NA, the dedicated NA Television channel (VOV) needs to uphold its strengths to facilitate in-depth communication on the NA's topics. Nevertheless, other channels also are obliged to assist collaboratively so that the television channel focusing on the NA can work its best.

The reality proves that communicators publishing about the NA's activities pay much attention to the time frame 13:00-18:00 and 19:00-24:00 in order to transmit the messages to the public most effectively.

Topics such as "Oversight of Government's activities" and "Oversight of activities and eligibility of NA deputies" also are sensitive matters about which journalists are most concerned and shied away.

The number of articles published about the 10<sup>th</sup> session of the 13<sup>th</sup> NA objectively reflects issues of public interest. Journalists are considered opinion leaders; through their articles, journalists demonstrate the NA's activities and simultaneously guide the public to access knowledge about these activities.

In fact, meetings with constituents are found in small number since some deputies of the NA are still hesitant to be in contact with the public, either through mass media or face-to-face. Journalists believe that meeting with constituents both before and after the session is important and significant. Nevertheless, pre-session meeting with constituents is more important than post-session.

This empirical study shows has shown that the frequency of using the four methods: "High ranking leaders of the State and Party speaking on television", "Official view of the relevant agencies", "Opinions of the representatives of constituents expressed in the media" and "Expert views expressed in the media" is high because they are assessed as important.

With reference to communication strategies, it is found that the dual and multi-channel communication strategies are highly valued and essential in the current communication stage. As to communication on legislation, the study finds that drafting of bills is found in highest number of articles published. In addition, to promote the democracy and transparency of the NA's oversight activities, media agencies need to increase the frequency of conveying messages about these activities. In the process of communication, journalists are faced with certain challenges in covering politically-sensitive issues. Therefore, it is recommended that there should be mechanisms in place to ensure security and protection for journalists.

The tripartite relationship between the media, the NA and the public is dialectical and continuous in the communicative campaign consisting of three stages: the NA to mass media, mass media to the public and the public to the NA.

The journalists' awareness of the importance and necessity of publishing about public opinions, the NA's deputies' meetings with constituents, interviews with constituents about the NA's activities and recommendations from political-social organizations is positively correlated to, and by no means contradictory to, their action of publishing articles. This can be explained by the fact that this kind of activity is not as sensitive as oversight activities or settlement of the NA's major issues are.

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