

**Setting the agenda on Vietnam – how foreign mainstream media  
coverage relates to a country's reputation**

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## ABSTRACT

Images of war victims and references to the wars that ended more than 40 years ago still dominate Vietnam's international news coverage. The country, to some extent, is perceived as a damaged one, in spite of its significant economic and social development (World Bank, 2017). In fact, few people have direct experience with foreign countries and world events. Mainstream media then become the main source of information for many people, setting the agenda for what they should think about (McCombs, 2014). This has led to concerns that mainstream media organisations and journalists influence people's perceptions about a nation (Lippmann, 1922) and that tourism and investments can be affected in the wake of extremely negative headlines (Go & Govers, 2011). This study sought to investigate how foreign mainstream media relates to a country's reputation, using the case study of Vietnam. The reasoning behind the study, therefore, is that a country's reputation is potentially at risk depending on how it is represented by international news organisations.

To achieve the objective stated above, I adopted the mixed-methodological approach in this research project, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses, with a suitable set of analytical tools including quantitative media content analysis, framing analysis and in-depth interviews.

The findings in the case study of Vietnam show that there is a relationship between mainstream media and general attitudes of survey respondents in the Country Brand Index (CBI) toward Vietnam in both analysed periods of 2012-13 and 2014-15 in terms of general tones and topics of interest. The mainstream media coverage of Vietnam, mainly focusing on safety and security, business environment and the socio-

environmental issues of the country, was negative. Their articles revolved around these issues, in spite of the reality of the events taking place in Vietnam. The CBI's respondents also expressed their negative attitudes on these issues.

Furthermore, the findings of the study indicate that the media coverage of the war in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s had a huge impact on changing the whole situation when people around the world were firmly against the war conducted by the United States (US). This agenda-setting appears to continue many decades later, as the war is consistently referred to. Vietnam, therefore, appears to have an image problem when it comes to its past conflicts. There is a need for the country to be seen in a new and more positive light if it wishes to expand its trade, economy and tourism. And, as is seen in my quantitative and qualitative analysis, a gradual shift in media coverage and people's common perceptions of the country seems to be occurring.

The steps in which the salience of issues and changes in them move from the media agenda to public agenda reflect the agenda-setting process. My findings support the view that agenda-setting plays a powerful role in selecting not only objects for attention but also attributes for characterising those objects (McCombs, 2004) and how the news media "can actually bundle different objects and attributes and make these bundles of elements salient in the public's mind simultaneously" (Guo, Vu & McCombs, 2012, p. 55).

The research has contributed further knowledge about how foreign media set the agenda when it comes to covering the nation of Vietnam, how this relates to the country's image, and whether it adequately reflects the nation and the improvements that have taken place in the last few decades.

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## ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Finally, I note that the research obtained the approval of Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on November 14, 2018, No. 18/388.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

“The COUNTRY is controlled by LAWS

LAWS are controlled by POLITICIANS

POLITICIANS are controlled by VOTERS

VOTERS are controlled by PUBLIC OPINION

PUBLIC OPINION is controlled by the MEDIA & EDUCATION

so. whoever controls MEDIA & EDUCATION, controls the COUNTRY.”

--William J. Federer--

### 1.1. Background and context of the research

Few people have direct experience with foreign countries and world events. The mainstream media has, therefore, often been the only source of this type of information for many people. This study investigates the potential relationships between of foreign media coverage and a country’s reputation – but to provide context we only need to take a look at the history of the news media to understand its power. The very beginning of the history of the media started with regular correspondence among elite members in communities, which consisted of descriptions of the latest public events or particular occasions (Droste, 2019). These newsletters were considered to be an effective way to maintain their relationship and share their common understandings about social and political issues. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, this type of news correspondence became popular among other community members, not only elites. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the news, in the form of hand-written newspapers started being publicly sold in Northern European countries, especially in Germany. These newspapers were released irregularly.

After the printing revolution, the first printed newspapers appeared on a weekly basis in 1605 (Droste, 2019). Since then, thanks to technological advances, the other mass media forms such as radio, television and online media have been brought to life. Germany and the United States are among the biggest media markets in the world in terms of the development and distribution of media, with the strongest film studios, printing houses and broadcasting stations (Bosch, 2015). Updating information from mainstream media has become people's daily routine and a necessary demand. According to Bosch (2015),

the significance of the media can hardly be overestimated. They transmit, create and store information and in so doing influence perception, knowledge and memory. They put their seal on politics, economy and culture and are an important part of free-time activity and daily discourse. (p. 1)

The figures for newspaper circulation or television and radio audiences partially show how much people depend on the mainstream media to catch up with the world's events or developments. According to the World Association of Newspapers *World Press Trends* report in 2012, more than half the world's adult population read a newspaper: over 2.5 billion in print and more than 600 million in digital form (Ponsford, n.d., para. 2). The last report in 2018 also stated that there was a higher number of at least 640 million paying news users in that year and many millions using free products (Nevill, 2019, para. 3). In addition, the number of readers/viewers of the leading news networks, such as BBC, CNN, MSNBC or Fox News, is huge. Specifically, an average of around 438 million people world-wide were reached by BBC News every week and this number is expected to be 500 million by next year ("BBC Reaching Highest Ever Global Audience," 2020, para. 2). Fox News witnessed an average of 3.6 million views of their news channels, MSNBC 2.2 million and CNN 1.8 million (Johnson,

2020). The numbers from Statista showed that many people in the world spend an average of more than 7.5 hours a day with media. Statista also showed that Americans tend to spend more time on average than most: more than six hours with traditional media, along with another six hours with digital media. Around 40% of them often get news from TV and 60% do so sometimes. Meanwhile, 30% get newspapers and do so often. Half update news from radio sometimes and nearly 20% often do it (Watson, 2020).

The words of Lippmann in 1922 still ring true today in raising concerns about journalists' ability to influence our perceptions about a nation (Lippmann, 1922). In fact, with "only a tiny and unrepresentative portion of the world [seen] through its window, the media may help to create the very world it seeks to reflect" (Anastasio, Rose & Chapman, 1999, p. 152). Many countries, especially developing ones, are often ignorant of the impact of the news media and are too passive in their dealings with the international media (Anholt, 2010) to the extent that McCombs proposed the theory that the media set the agenda. He stated that "What we know about the world is largely based on what the media decide to tell us. The result of this mediated view of the world is that the priorities of the media strongly influence the priorities of the public" (McCombs, 2014, p. 2).

The hypothesis for this study, therefore, is that a country's reputation is potentially at risk depending on how it is represented to the public at large by international news organisations. Tourism and investments can fail to materialise in a country's economy in the wake of highly negative headlines (Go & Govers, 2011).

The US can be mentioned as a recent case when then-President Donald Trump was condemned in the media world-wide during his presidential term and the negative

impacts on the country's image and decline in tourism as a result could be witnessed. Specifically, Trump was notoriously figured on global media such as *USA Today*, the BBC, *Financial Times* or *The Guardian* for his racist language and disputed decisions and policies. Negative headlines for articles about him became popular. For example, "Donald Trump clung to 'birther' lies for years, and still isn't apologetic" (Barbaro, 2016) in *The New York Times*; "Trump orders wall to be built on Mexico border" (2017) on the BBC; "Trump has got the locker-room culture wrong" (Le Saux, 2016) in *The Straits Times*; and "The Trumpian threat to the global order" (Stephens, 2016) in the *Financial Times*. Such repeatedly negative articles have affected the US image. The US News and World Report published its annual ranking of Best Countries, based on how thousands of people around the world perceived other nations in 2017. In the report, the US received poor marks for respect for human rights, business friendliness and educational quality. And also, after the 2016 election, 75% of respondents said that their respect for the US was lost. Similar results were also seen in other ranking reports, including Forbes' or Pew's, which showed the decline of the image of the US in the world. Consequently, in 2017, according to experts, the US would receive 4.3 million fewer visitors in the year than in 2016. The decreasing number is a response to Trump's immigration policy which made tourists feel unwelcome. "Each ranking drop in a country's reputation (on the Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index) is associated with a decrease in export volume of 2 percent" (Korschun, Dimitrova & Yotov, 2017, para. 20).

India is also an example of how mainstream media coverage put the image of a country at risk, affecting the travel or investment decisions of foreigners. After an incident of a female tourist gang-raped in India in December 2012, international media

repeatedly covered this issue and the label of a “culture of rape and violence” was attached to the country as Hundal (2013) wrote in her article “India’s Bitter Culture of Rape and Violence,” published in *The Guardian*. Significant articles about this issue in India were published by leading news organisations such as BBC, CNN, *The New York Times*, *Les Echos* and *The Guardian*, and they highlighted how dangerous it is when travelling in this country. These can be listed as a group of articles: “Rape in India” (Ravi, 2013), “India’s Bitter Culture of Rape and Violence” (Hundal, 2013), “India’s Rape Problem and How Men See It” (Giridharadas, 2013), “Victims Blamed in India’s Rape Culture” (Gupta, 2013). After this wave of reports, “visits to India by female tourists dropped 35 percent in the first three months” of 2013 in comparison with the same period of the previous year, according to the article “India Scrambles to Reassure Tourists Shaken by Recent Attacks on Women” published in *The New York Times* by Bagri and Timmons in June 2013. In Bagri and Timmons’ article, tourists expressed their worries about travelling in India and Indian people who were earning their living from tourism blamed “the international media for hyping recent cases when crimes occur in any country.” Meanwhile, foreign tourism earns the country US\$18 billion a year.

Similarly, in the case of Vietnam, images of napalm victims and references to the wars that ended more than 40 years ago have tended to dominate its international news coverage. In many respects the country is still perceived as a damaged one, in spite of its significant economic development, rising to become the world’s 50<sup>th</sup> largest exporter in 2016 (World Bank, 2017).

The mainstream media’s products are intended to serve their target audiences – the target public, whose opinions are very important in determining their travelling and

investment decisions. When discussing the concept of public opinion, Davison (1998) defined it as “an aggregate of the individual views, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, expressed by a significant proportion of a community” (para. 2).

This means that public opinion could be considered as a sum of views (the collective view) on issues, countries or people. These views can be similar or different (Davison, 1998). According to Cooley (1918), public opinion is a result of the whole process of interaction and information exchange among community members. Important factors influencing public opinion consist of socio-environmental factors and mainstream and social media.

Davison (1998) highlighted: “The influence of public opinion is not restricted to politics and elections. It is a powerful force in many other spheres, such as culture, fashion, literature and the arts, consumer spending, and marketing and public relations” (para. 2).

The process in which media set an agenda for the public, who then make decisions based on this agenda, is called agenda-setting. While agenda-setting theory has been widely examined in the contexts of the media focusing attention on political issues and candidates, there have been only a few instances where the theory has been applied in the context of a country’s reputation (see Kiouis & Wu, 2008; Wanta, Golan & Lee, 2004). But, even in these studies, the emphasis has been on the US, its mass media’s international news coverage and the American public’s perceptions of foreign countries. For example, Wanta et al. (2004) examined whether US news coverage of foreign nations was able to influence US public perceptions of those countries. Kiouis and Wu (2008) also found a strong link between US media coverage and American public attitudes toward foreign countries. Anholt (2007) also emphasised the

importance of brand management at the country level, in which a country strategically manages its reputation, through mainstream media tools, to achieve an attractive and competitive brand.

The focus of my study is to see how international news media have covered Vietnam and how the media coverage relates to the country's reputation. In this case study, it is possible to examine how agenda-setting by foreign mainstream media relates to public perceptions of other nations.

My academic and professional experience as a communications researcher with the media research institute Media Tenor puts me in good stead when it comes to journalism research. I have analysed information about people, countries, universities, companies and places published on international media to work out strategies to manage and promote their reputation. I have statistically evaluated media data in order to determine what reality is reflected (agenda-setting) and what reality is not reflected (agenda-cutting), and then compared these results with external statistics (poll results, consumer behaviour reports or various indices) and further researched the media's effects on public perception and behaviour. Thus, I was responsible for analysing the impacts of mainstream media on organisations and companies. I worked out communication strategies for them to handle their information crises, successfully deliver their messages to target people and promote their images. I developed and implemented brand and category strategies for them, based on their purposes. Working at Media Tenor, a leading international media research institute, I once did a data analysis on Vietnam's representation in US coverage in the period 2012-14 to see how it was covered and how it could use media as an effective tool to boost the country's business relations with the US I became interested in this topic and planned

to dig deeper into it with research questions asking whether there is any relation between country reputation and mainstream media (more specifically, mainstream media agenda-setting) and, if there is, how it is formed. This is the solid ground leading me to this PhD thesis.

Earlier, I worked at the *Viet Nam News* newspaper, the founder of Asia News Network and national English language daily, for nearly eight years. I conducted a number of interviews, and carried out research and investigations for my stories. I covered the political and social issues of Vietnam and other Asian countries. This built up my knowledge about the world and Vietnam's situation and general image. Critical thinking and writing are the skills I am familiar with.

From this research background and with the interests mentioned above, I conducted my thesis on the agenda-setting function of foreign media in its reporting of stories about Vietnam. My role in this thesis is as a researcher and, while personal background work and knowledge help to inform one's research, at the same time I am mindful of the need to resist any bias in my work, particularly from being used to working at Media Tenor, which coded international media reports. I feel that this strengthens my skills in conducting this research – but I acknowledge the need to be transparent about my past experience.

In this chapter, I introduce the various aspects of this thesis – first, further expanding on agenda-setting theory, and then addressing the methodological approach, thesis perspectives, aims and structure.

## **1.2. Theoretical approach**

The agenda-setting process takes place when the salience of an issue or a topic as determined by mainstream media causes that issue or topic to be important among

the public. “What the press emphasizes is in turn emphasized privately and publicly by the audiences of the press”, according to McCombs (1976, p.3). Perse (2001) and Dearing and Rogers (1996) also asserted the power of media’s agenda-setting in setting up the importance of issues in the public’s mind.

According to McCombs (2004), mainstream media communicate signals to indicate which issues or topics they focus on via their journalistic practices. For print journalism products, these cues can be listed as repetition of an issue, positions of stories such as top stories on the front page or even fonts of texts or sizes of the photos. For television or radio channels, the importance of an issue can be measured by the timeframe within which the issue is broadcast. Cohen (as cited in Dearing & Rogers, 1996) asserted that “The world will look different to different people, depending on the map that is drawn for them by writers, editors, and publishers of the newspaper they read” (p. 12).

It should be acknowledged that journalists have particular audiences or publics they aim at when writing stories. It can be argued that the growth of media organisations depends largely on the viewership: the more viewers they have, the more profits they will earn through advertising investment and the sales of their journalism products. The configuration of audiences depends on various factors at macro and micro levels, such as social codes, the goals and policies of each media organisation, and journalists’ priorities and meetings. So, imagined audiences are different for this media organisation compared to the others, for this channel compared to the others, and for this journalist compared to the others. Journalists’ thoughts and decisions relating to their stories are led by their imagined audiences (Hartley, 2002).

The factors influencing the agenda-setting process of the mainstream media come from both mainstream media and audiences. They consist of journalism practices, mainstream media subsidisation forces, the need for orientation (NFO), audience exposure to mainstream media, and the personal characteristics of audiences (McCombs, 2004).

In agenda-setting studies, the major methodological approach applied is based on making a comparison between the results of content analysis of mainstream media and the public perception of the importance of issues measured during the same period. The result of content analysis is collected through the frequency of appearance of objects in news articles. The public agenda is then measured via their respondents or public opinion polls. When a correlation between these two data sets is found, this suggests the mainstream media has a role in setting the agenda.

This approach was initially used in the 1968 Chapel Hill study on media coverage of the US presidential election programme and public opinion of it, by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. Since this initial study of media agenda-setting, many studies on relations between news media and public agendas have been conducted by scholars in the US and many other countries such as Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain and Taiwan (Weaver, 2008).

However, the main criticism of agenda-setting theory results from the fact that agenda-setting scholars only apply quantitative analysis to prove their hypotheses on the influences of media on public opinions, according to Manning (2001). I have sought to address this question by including qualitative work in my study as well.

### 1.3. Methodological framework

I employed a mixed-method approach, consisting of: quantitative content analysis of foreign media coverage of Vietnam, which was then compared with the index of public perceptions of the country; framing analysis; and thematic analysis of in-depth interviews. This was intended to investigate the international reputation of Vietnam from a media perspective and the relationships between international media coverage and a country's reputation, if any.

The first phase consisted of three stages: media content analysis, Country Brand Index (CBI) analysis and a comparative study of these two sets of data. Media content analysis consists of analysing stories about Vietnam on 40 opinion-leading news outlets during 2012-15. The research then used the CBI, a comprehensive data set on public perceptions of countries (Go & Govers, 2011), including Vietnam. The index studies perceptions of around 100 countries in the world and ranks them according to strength of perception across association dimensions. The comparison of these two types of data, reflecting an approach conducted by McCombs and Shaw (1972), Weaver (2008) and many other scholars, was designed to test whether there is any correlation between foreign media coverage and public perception of Vietnam.

The second phase consisted of the qualitative analysis stages: a framing analysis of four media stories and thematic analysis of six in-depth interviews of trade experts from foreign embassies in Vietnam and a non-government organisation. Framing analysis provides more insight into how stories are shaped and what goals journalists set for their stories (Scheufele, 2000).

Semi-structured interviews were expected to convey personal opinions and experiences (Patton, 2002) about the media. These interviews aimed at exploring

people's views about mainstream media, social network sites and news stories about Vietnam, popular means which audiences use to update information about Vietnam, and the potential impacts of that information on their business, investment and travelling decisions with regard to the country.

There has been no comprehensive research so far to address the relationships that exist between agenda-setting and the international public's perceptions of foreign countries. Previously, there have been quantitative studies on how the US media cover particular countries and how the coverage impacts on US opinions toward those countries. They were limited to the US, involving US media and participants, not world-wide media and participants. Moreover, Vietnam has yet to be the focus of comprehensive research on how the foreign media cover it and how the international media coverage relate to its reputation. So, Vietnam was considered to be a case study. The mixed-method approach was expected to help answer my main research questions, which are:

**RQ1: What do foreign mainstream media cover in relation to Vietnam?**

**RQ2: How does their agenda-setting relate to Vietnam's reputation?**

#### **1.4. Research perspectives and aims**

My study contributes to knowledge about how the reputation of Vietnam relates to the media coverage of the country not only through examining the agenda setting of foreign media when reporting stories about this nation, but also in considering country reputation indices for the country.

This research also contributes to the third level of agenda-setting theory: network agenda-setting. The first two levels of agenda-setting theory focus on the effects of the media agenda on the public agenda regarding the salience of the objects and the

salience of the attributes of these objects (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014). The first and second levels answer the questions: “What are the pictures about?” and “What are the dominant characteristics of these pictures?” respectively. The third level, which is discussed in more detail later in this thesis (section 3.5.3), is a recent addition to agenda-setting research (Guo et al., 2012) and therefore my study offered a further opportunity to test it. Overall, this study builds on agenda-setting theory as it emphasises the applicability of using foreign countries as ‘objects’. It empirically investigates not only the first and second levels of agenda setting (in this case, Vietnam as ‘object’ and Vietnam’s ‘attributes’) but also the third level which identifies the interconnections between the various attributes of Vietnam. This network agenda-setting model is concerned with how the news media “can actually bundle different objects and attributes and make these bundles of elements salient in the public’s mind simultaneously” (Guo et al., 2012, p. 55). When representing a country, media agencies put their focus on covering particular issues with a particular tonality or frame. These issues, with their attributes interconnected with each other and bundled in audiences’ minds, have formed a picture of the country. For example, in the research, various protagonists and topics of Vietnam and their relationships are analysed, ranging from key persons, economy, diplomatic ties and big corporations to traffic accidents, traffic victims, wars and natural disasters. In that analysis, the top issues and protagonists, with their interconnections which frame the picture of Vietnam, are identified.

In addition to this, there is further significance in this study regarding the management of a country’s reputation. The findings of this study are expected to help not only governments but also institutes, universities and other organisations to understand

the relations that foreign news coverage has with their reputation, particularly since it has already been acknowledged that many countries, especially developing ones, are too ignorant, passive and reactive in their dealings with the international media (Anholt, 2010). Based on the findings of my research about Vietnam, it is intended that this study will offer a springboard for these further studies to address the causal relationships that exist between agenda-setting and the international public's perception of foreign countries. This may serve to acknowledge the importance of international news coverage in managing a country's image, so as to enhance that country's reputation in ways that will benefit its international trade and tourism.

Furthermore, my study introduced qualitative analysis alongside quantitative media content analysis, which has provided further insights into the relations between the foreign media coverage and a country reputation by asking: if there are any relations, how are they formed?

### **1.5. Thesis structure**

Following this introductory chapter identifying the issue and discussing the context, research questions and significance of this research, Chapter 2 reviews the literature relating to the definition and importance of country reputation, and the existing relevant material that motivated the research questions addressed by this thesis. Furthermore, Chapter 2 presents Vietnam as the case study of this thesis, providing a brief history alongside a discussion of its current political and economic situation. It also indicates that Vietnam has made great progress in these areas yet is still struggling to be acknowledged in the world's media. According to the World Bank's (2017) report on the fields of economy and trade, Vietnam exported US\$185 billion, becoming the 24th largest exporter in the world in 2015. As of September 2016, Vietnam has built up

diplomatic relationships with 188 nations in the world.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical positioning of this thesis by outlining various aspects of agenda-setting theory, including the origins and definitions of agenda-setting, reasons for the existence of agenda-setting, factors affecting media agenda-setting functions, agenda-setting levels and the availability of agenda-setting theory in the Internet age. The chapter then reviews the relationship between media agenda-setting and country reputation.

Chapter 4 is a detailed explanation of the mixed-methodological approach adopted in this research project, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses, and employing a suitable set of analytical tools including quantitative media content analysis, framing analysis and in-depth interviews.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the first phase of analysis of this study involving a quantitative approach to agenda setting. More specifically, I present the findings of my analysis of foreign media coverage of Vietnam during the four-year period 2012-2015 which focuses on how visible Vietnam was in the media, the tone of the articles about Vietnam, the most frequent topics and the most visible protagonists that dominated international news stories about Vietnam.

Chapter 6 first provides information about the CBI which examines and ranks country reputation, based on a proprietary research methodology. Then, most importantly, I look specifically at the CBI data during 2012-15 relating to Vietnam's image in respondents' perceptions, such as what they know about Vietnam and how they think about the country. The chapter then presents the comparison of media content data and CBI data about Vietnam, to see whether there is any relationship between what and how the foreign media covered about Vietnam and what international businesses

and travellers' perceptions toward the country were during that period, as documented by CBI data.

Chapter 7 presents my framing analysis of four articles, with top topics, obtained from the media content analysis. The findings in the story framing analysis contribute to seeing whether the content of mainstream media stories consistently corresponds with the CBI.

Chapter 8 provides the thematic analysis of six semi-structured interviews with representatives from the embassies of Austria, Argentina, Denmark, Venezuela and New Zealand and from the Central and Eastern European Chamber of Commerce (CEEC) in Vietnam. The interviews focused on how the representatives and people in their countries view mainstream media, social network sites and news stories about Vietnam and the impacts this had on their business and travel decisions in Vietnam during 2012-2015

In Chapter 9, I discuss the overall findings of this research in terms of the research questions, and with reference to the literature review, to identify the significance of this research in the light of previous research findings, in order to enhance understanding of the relationships of the agenda-setting of foreign media and country reputation. The chapter also summarises the study's key findings, and presents limitations and suggestions for future research.

## **1.6. Summary**

In summary, this chapter has introduced the issue to be studied – the relation of foreign media coverage to a country's reputation, using Vietnam as a case study. I have outlined the background and context of the topic, laid out the methodological approach to be adopted, and explained the structure of this thesis. The study consists

of eight further chapters, which present my study and its findings with the aim of answering the research questions about foreign media coverage of Vietnam and its relation to the country's reputation. Based on the case study of Vietnam, my research may contribute to understandings about how agenda-setting research might be applied to other nations and the investigation of their reputations.

The next chapter examines the key studies that work as a platform for the research.

## CHAPTER 2

# COUNTRY REPUTATION: A KEY ASSET IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

### Introduction

This chapter discusses the concepts of the public, public opinion and country reputation to illustrate how they are formed and their importance for the economy, tourism and international co-operation. I look into different views in earlier studies on public opinion its formation and its power, to see how it changes national policies or investment decisions. I then compare and discuss the difference in understandings between a country's reputation and its image and brand. The importance of country reputation to the progress and prosperity of countries is then discussed to highlight the necessity of countries' acknowledgement of how their reputation is formed and impacted. Recent country reputation research is then discussed to overview the focus of researchers in this field, and the best-known models of country reputation measurement are presented.

Lastly, as Vietnam is the focus of this study, the country's brief history and current situation, facts and figures and development limitations are reviewed in the chapter. Vietnam's trading and diplomatic ties are mainly with its traditional partners, and it does not reach into new markets such as Latin America or Africa. Business people, tourists and students from other countries are still reluctant to experience Vietnam.

### 2.1. Public and public opinion

The mainstream media's news serves the public, whose opinions are very important in determining their travelling and investment decisions. When discussing the concept of public opinion, Davison (1998) defined it as "an aggregate of the individual views,

attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, expressed by a significant proportion of a community” (para. 2).

This means that public opinion could be considered as a sum of views (the collective view) on issues, countries or people. These views can be similar or different (Davison, 1998). According to Cooley (1918), public opinion is a result of the whole process of interaction and information exchange among community members. It is not necessary for individuals to reach some agreement on particular issues.

Key factors affecting public opinion consist of socio-environmental factors, and mainstream and social media (Davison, 1998). Socio-environmental factors, such as families, friends, schools, local communities or workplaces, form a base in the formation and development of individuals’ opinions. Individuals are usually influenced by people around them. They adjust their opinions by themselves to fit where they belong. Mainstream and social media play an important role in affirming and spreading opinions and inducing people to make some adjustment in their opinions. The media are also a platform for political and other leaders to access a large number of audiences and help individuals notice others’ attitudes about some issue. Consequently, public opinion is formed and exchanged with no limitation in space and time (Davison, 1998).

In addition, other factors such as interest groups or opinion leaders can exercise some impact on public opinion. Interest groups form, nurture and spread individuals’ opinions on issues relevant to their organisations or groups. Similarly, opinion leaders define popular issues and influence individual opinions on those issues (Davison, 1998).

Davison (1998) highlighted that “The influence of public opinion is not restricted to politics and elections. It is a powerful force in many other spheres, such as culture, fashion, literature and the arts, consumer spending, and marketing and public relations” (para. 2). Sharing the same idea at a business and economics event in London, Greg Medcraft, director of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Directorate for Financial and Enterprise Affairs and former Australian Securities and Investments Commission chairman, affirmed that the power of public “is now enormous”. He explained by saying: “the power of the crowd is going to be the most powerful force influencing business over coming years. ... If you do the wrong thing by the general public, illegal or not, they may desert you” (Thomas, 2018, para. 13). He said that public trust cannot be legally regulated but companies “have to earn it” (para. 13). It is the same with countries that wish to expand their business activities and attract more foreign investment.

Various studies on the power of public opinion in regard to changes in national policies or investment decisions have been conducted. James Stimson, the Raymond Dawson Professor of Political Science at the University of North Carolina, wrote in an opinion article published by *The New York Times* in 2014 in which he said that “The systematic evidence of broad opinion movements and government policy-making shows a strong connection between them. When public opinion changes, demanding for example more or less government, government responds in the demanded direction. And it does so quickly” (Stimson, 2014, para. 2). This assertion was drawn from his study on the US presidential election in 2008. Stimson found evidence that Barack Obama was supported for his initiatives on a jobs-producing stimulus and healthcare reform and, after the election, the Affordable Care Act was enacted (Stimson, 2014).

This can also be seen in the case of New Zealand with its recent changes on immigration policies, which came just a few days after protests by the public, specifically migrant workers, and petitions signed by thousands of people. Accordingly, Immigration Minister Kris Faafoi announced that families of healthcare workers in New Zealand on temporary visas would be allowed to apply to join them in the country. After that, a debate on immigration visa delay process and other relevant issues was held in Parliament (Cooke, 2021).

Rasmussen, Mader and Reher (2017) also asserted the power of public opinion in policy advocacy success after analysing a data set of public opinion, advocacy positions and 50 policy issues in five European countries, namely Sweden, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark. Their analysis provided evidence that public support impacts on the success of policy advocacy.

Furthermore, the public proved its influence in the Arab Spring in 2010, which were initiated by the young protesters. They took advantage of social media to “exercise freedom of speech and as a space for civic engagement” (Brown, Guskin & Mitchell, 2012, para. 2) in a stand against oppressive regimes and low living standards, starting with protests in Tunisia which then spread to five other countries. Accordingly, leadership changes were made and foreign interventions were initiated to end the struggles for power (Brown et al., 2012).

We define a social problem as a putative condition or situation that is labeled a problem in the arenas of public discourse and action. Blumer (1971) argued, instead, that a “social problem exists primarily in terms of how it is defined and conceived in society” (p. 300). According to Hilgartner and Bosk (1988), “social problems are projections of collective sentiments” (p. 58), which are framed and grow in public

arenas. These arenas can consist of government agencies, the news media, the courts, political campaign organisations, social action groups, research communities, religious organisations, professional societies, private foundations, movies and even books. In these areas, “social problems are discussed, selected, defined, framed, dramatized, packaged, and presented to the public” (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988, p. 58).

These different public arenas share two important characteristics: a carrying capacity, limiting the issues it can host at a time, and a set of selection rules, according to which, some issues, in competition with others, can get space in specific arenas (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). Social problems are raised and developed through feedback loops among different arenas. Through a complex set of linkages, activities in each arena propagate throughout the others. The issues that “gain widespread attention and grow into celebrities can come to dominate not just one arena of public discourse but many” (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988, p. 58). When the issues develop in one public arena, they are likely to be formed and to grow in other areas.

Accordingly, once issues of and topics about a country are discussed and become prominent in public arenas, a common sense or perception will develop about the country. The next section presents the concept of country reputation and its interrelationship with country image and brand.

## **2.2. The interrelationship of country image, reputation and brand**

Country image, country reputation and country brand are important concepts, not only in the field of communication science but also in business studies, social psychology and political science. However, although these three terms seem interrelated, they are usually differentiated in each field (Buhmann, 2016).

Country image was defined by Kotler (1991) as the sum of beliefs, attitudes, and impressions that an individual or a group has of a country. These publicly communicated images then become important as they assemble to build up the global reputation of a country. Reputation was defined by Fombrun (1996) and Jain and Winner (2013) as the overall opinion of a country held by all its stakeholders. This means that reputation is not an individual's attitude, but the public opinion of a country. Agreeing with this, Emler (1990) stated that it is more than just "an aggregated image"; it is based on "social, not individual judgements" (p. 181). In other words, country reputation is not the sum, but "the emergent synthesis of multiple individual attitudes about a country" (Buhmann, 2016, p.39) as the result of complex communication processes in modern media societies. Country reputation forms in the international environment of a country when evaluations of that country are publicly shared (mainly via mainstream media) by outsiders (Buhmann, 2016).

Sharing the idea of country reputation, Mercer (1996) asserted that a country's reputation indicates how the country is perceived, no matter whether the country actively tries to control its image or not. Jain and Winner (2013) suggested that "a country's reputation is described by the collective beliefs of people about its image and identity, which represents or predicts its future behaviour and performance" (p. 111). Wang (2006) also asserted that the country reputation includes the "collective judgments of a foreign country's image and character" (p. 91).

According to Martin and Erdgu (1993), country reputation is formed through repeated behavioural and symbolic interactions, such as personal or second-hand experiences, and information learned from the media. For example, a person can travel to a country and have some experiences of it, which they can then share it with their friends who

will share with others. Or a mainstream media channel keeps reporting on one or two topics about a country, which means that audiences who have never been to that country will automatically form their first impressions or perceptions about it based on the information provided by the channel. These audiences can then talk about it with others. The circle keeps going on. Passow, Fehlmann, and Grahlow (2005) introduced six dimensions that relate to a country's reputation: emotional appeal (attractiveness, respectfulness and trustworthiness), physical appeal (beauty and likeness), financial appeal (overall good economic environment), leadership appeal (charismatic leadership), cultural appeal (cultural heritage, history and entertainment) and social appeal (social responsibility as a member of the global community and the manifest support for good causes).

While both country reputation and nation brand are manifestations of what people think about a country, brand is a term describing the idea of how reputation is observed, valued and managed (Anholt, 2010). Also, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2013), brand is "a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (p. 255). So, a country brand is regarded as "a product of strategically communicated information of a nation-state about itself" (Buhmann, 2016, p. 40). Moreover, a nation brand originates from the culture of the country, not simply a logo or an advertising campaign. "The nation brand is defined as the unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences" (Dinnie, 2008, p. 15). Nation brands are not the sole responsibility of brand managers or companies, but are the concern of all citizens of the nation.

According to Chernatony and McDonald (2003), marketing agencies initiate the branding process. But it is the consumers or audiences that shape a real vision or image of the product, company or country – the brand. The vision can be different from and even irrelevant to the initial intention of the sellers or marketing agencies. This means that when the existing brand of a country resides in consumers' minds, it is not easy to change. Kotler and Keller (2011) and Temporal (2010) shared the same idea as De Chernatony and McDonald. So, the brand-building process requires a long-term strategy, not a short-cut. A nation branding strategy needs to focus on its heritage, culture and current living trends so that outdated visions of the nation do not occupy audiences' minds but are replaced by updated images of a modern society (Dinnie, 2015). Unbranded nations have difficulty in attracting international attention, so identity management is a key to the nation's brand. Reputation is an essential part of a nation's strategic equity. "Nation branding can also help erase misconceptions about a country and allow the country to reposition itself more favourably with regard to target audiences" (Dinnie, 2015, p. 6).

Various scholars such as Potter (2009, as cited in Zhang and Meadows, 2012) also considered nation branding to be a form of soft power. The instruments of soft power may be intellectual, communicative, creative, persuasive, spiritual and cultural, as first described by Joseph Nye, a Harvard academic. They are tangible and measurable (Anholt, 2010).

Thus, according to Anholt (2003),

a national brand strategy determines the most realistic, most competitive and most compelling strategic vision for the country, and ensures that this vision is supported, reinforced and enriched by every act of communication between the country and the rest of the world. (p. 11)

The importance of place branding is also affirmed by Olins (1999), who explained that it takes a very long time and a lot of effort for past stereotypes to disappear from public opinion after countries change.

### **2.3 Why a country's reputation matters**

Today, the world is one market, where globalisation pushes a country, a city and a region to compete with others for its share of the world's commercial, political, social and cultural transactions. In such an environment, country reputation has become ever more critical, providing a vital short-cut to an investing, buying, travelling or studying decision. Anholt (2008) suggested that the reputation of countries is equally important to the progress and prosperity of those countries because of their influence on the opinions, decisions and actions of each country's target audiences such as foreign investors, tourists, consumers, students, entrepreneurs, trading partners, the media, other governments, donors and international agencies. Passow et al. (2005) emphasised that a country's reputation is a valuable asset and a source of its competitive advantage. They cited some reasons for the necessity of a country managing its reputation, such as a country operating within a competitive world and being dependent on resources and supportive behaviour; obeying a financial logic; having to attract to audiences; having a vision and a strategic concept; and recognising that the significance of social responsibility is even greater for a country than it is for a company.

Anholt (2008) asserted

countries, cities and regions that are lucky or virtuous enough to have earned a positive reputation find that everything they or their citizens wish to do on the global stage is easier: their brand goes before them like a calling card that

opens doors, creates trust and respect, and raises the expectation of quality, competence and integrity. (pp. 31-32)

On the contrary, also according to Anholt (2009), for countries labelled with a reputation for being backward, unsafe, under-developed and uncultured, there are more obstacles to opening up and extending diplomatic and business relationships, and attracting foreigners. So, they have to strive to prove that they are not as others are picturing or framing them. This scholar also pointed out the different treatments international media give to countries from different backgrounds. In particular, for a country with a reputation for being rich, safe and stable, international media give positive reports on its policy, despite it being unchanged from previous policy. However, for a country, with a negative image, foreign media ignore or even criticise its ground-breaking policy. Similarly, a tourist site in a highly-reputed country can easily gain foreign media coverage while it is really hard for beautiful areas of unspoiled wilderness in a country with a weak image to gain attention from foreign media.

Concurring with the idea about the importance of a country's reputation, scholars including Gudjonsson (2005) and Nuttavuthisit (2006) agreed that, much like corporations, perceptions of countries can significantly affect their decisions and willingness to travel to, invest in and purchase products from a particular country (Jain & Winner, 2013). People commonly associate countries with a set of attributes that "significantly affect the success of their business, foreign investment and tourism initiatives, as well as diplomatic and cultural relations with other nations" (Jain & Winner, 2013, p. 111). Go and Govers (2011) agreed with this assertion and reaffirmed that the foreign public perception of a country makes a key difference to the success of

its business, trade and tourism efforts, as well as diplomatic and cultural relations with stakeholders.

“We live in a world in which reputation counts for a great deal. The importance of reputation, in fact, tends to increase as societies become larger, more diffuse and more complex.” This is due to the fact that trust is a solid base on which relationships and transactions within societies are, for the most part, established and develop (Anholt, 2010, p. 20).

#### **2.4. Country reputation research**

The scholarly literature arising from research into the reputation of nations only emerged in the 2000s and it is interesting to note that the concept of reputation was first applied mainly to companies, rather than countries, around the 1990s (Emler, 1990; Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Kotler, 1997). Reputation is seen as a key concept, describing long-lasting impressions and perceptions of the public toward an organisation or company which are built on various corporate images and actions (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). More recently, reputation researchers have introduced the dimensions of a country’s reputation and built up their own models to measure the reputations of countries in the world.

They have developed methods involving indices and their application in various studies in the place-reputation field. According to Go and Govers (2011), “indexing is a vital tool for measuring external and internal perceptions – an essential aspect of building a place reputation” (p. 2). An index can be seen as a useful and impartial guide for stakeholders, such as country brand managers in tourism, public affairs agencies, investors or businesses, who have some interest in understanding the comprehensive impressions of a country from a global perspective so as to be able to make their own

business decisions.

The best-known country reputation studies, using indices to measure and compare countries' reputation, include *Anholt–GfK Roper Nation Brands Index*, *Country RepTrak*, *Country Brand Index (CBI)*, *East West Communications Nation Brand Perception Indexes and Reports*, and *The Global Peace Index* (Go & Govers, 2011), and more details on these indices are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summary of popular country reputation studies**

<b>Country Reputation Studies</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Indices</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Country RepTrak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Country Reptrak Model, connecting country reputation to its antecedents and consequences, developed by Reputation Institute.</li> <li>- A multivariable model with two sets of dimensions: a measure of the overall appeal of a country (Country Reptrak Pulse); and a measure of the dimensions that drive overall evaluation.</li> <li>- 35 countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Three dimensions: effective government, advanced economy, and appealing environment.</li> <li>- 13 attributes.</li> </ul>	45,000
Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Nation Brand Hexagon, measuring the power and attractiveness of each country's brand.</li> <li>- NBISM score: an average of the scores from six indices. There are between three and five ratings questions for each index. Ratings are based on a scale 1-7 with 7: highest and best, 1: lowest and worst.</li> <li>- 50 countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Six dimensions: exports, governance, culture and heritage, people, tourism, immigration and investment.</li> </ul>	20,000 in 20 countries

Country Brand Index (CBI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hierarchical Decision Model, examining the country brand strength before a decision is made, from awareness to familiarity, associations, preference and consideration. The model measures people perceptions across these dimensions.</li> <li>- 100 countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Five dimensions: value system, quality of life, good for business, heritage and culture, and tourism.</li> <li>- 26 attributes.</li> </ul>	<5,000
East West Communications Nation Brand Perception Indexes and Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advanced text analysis tools, looking at mentions of a country in hundreds of publications, and comparing variations in perceptions between the media in Europe and America, comparisons with perceptions of other places of interest. The reports identify which words improve perceptions, and which are damaging, and the relative impact of sectors on overall perception of a country.</li> <li>- 200 countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advanced text analysis.</li> </ul>	
Global Peace Index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The index ranks the nations by their peacefulness and identifies potential drivers of peace. The index uses metrics that combine both internal and external factors (indicators).</li> <li>- 149 countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Three thematic categories: six measures of ongoing conflict, ten measures of societal safety and security, and seven measures of militarisation.</li> <li>- 23 indicators.</li> </ul>	

*Note.* Source: Go and Govers (2011).

Specifically, six dimensions of a country's reputation introduced by Passow et al. (2005), mentioned earlier, are the base for the Country RepTrak, a model measuring country reputation with 11 attributes, organised into three dimensions, from which a country can create a strategic platform to communicate with its stakeholders. The three dimensions consist of effective government, advanced economy, and appealing environment (see Table 1). This measurement model of country reputation was developed by Reputation Institute. Each survey assessed the perceptions of around

45,000 respondents toward 35 countries (not including Vietnam).

The Anholt–GfK Roper Nation Brands Index was formed in 2008 to “offer a unique barometer of global opinion” (Feinberg & Zhao, 2011, p. 63), basing on the collaboration between Simon Anholt, an expert in nation brands, and GfK Roper Public Affairs and Corporate Communications, which has had expertise in public affairs research for nearly a century. It provides governments “with a one of a kind resource for the actionable insights needed to manage a country’s reputation” (Feinberg & Zhao, 2011, p. 63). The index measures the power and attractiveness of each country’s brand by using the Nation Brand Hexagon, which consists of six dimensions of national competence: exports, governance, culture and heritage, people, tourism, immigration and investment. The index annually measures the images of 50 nations and the score is an average of the six indices, listed above (see in Table 1). In doing so, interviews are conducted annually with around 20,000 people who are 18 years old or older, from 20 countries.

The CBI was developed to measure perceptions of country brand strength across multiple dimensions (see in Table 1). The index is one of the most comprehensive data sets on public perceptions about countries (Go & Govers, 2011), including Vietnam. The index, which first appeared in 2005, surveys thousands of travellers from all five continents about the performance of around 100 countries in the world and ranks them according to strength of perception across association dimensions. The five key dimensions measured consist of Value System, Quality of Life, Good for Business, Heritage and Culture, and Tourism. An independent, third-party research company conducts the quantitative work, based on 20-minute surveys. This research was finally tested by leading experts around the world (Adams, 2011). According to Adams (2011),

the index is a useful tool for country brand managers; however, but it should be noted that

it is clearly not an absolute measure of the tangible and intangible assets of a country, and should be used as a part of a toolkit of independent research and information sources to understand the full breadth of complexity presented by nations. (p. 101)

Nation Brand Perception Indexes, built on the media content analysis, are presented by “score and volume of mentions” (Go & Govers, 2011, p. xliii). These have been produced since 2008 by country reputation researchers of East West Communications and Perception Metrics, a division of the Social Science Automation company specialising in the development of advanced text analysis tools (see Table 1). According to their explanation, many people read reports and articles about or relevant to a place which are written by journalists whose views of this place are communicated to many others, thus magnifying the potential impact of their views on this place. The mainstream media serve as “perception magnifiers of place brands” (Go & Govers, 2011, p. xii).

The Economist Intelligence Unit collects and collates data for the Global Peace Index. The indicators of the index are divided into three key thematic categories, which consist of: six measures of ongoing conflict, such as the number of conflicts fought and number of deaths from organised conflict; ten measures of societal safety and security such as the number of displaced people, potential for terrorist acts, the number of homicides or the number of jailed population; and seven measures of militarisation, such as military expenditure, the number of armed services personnel or ease of access to small weapons (see Table 1). All the indicators are marked on a scale of 1–5, and qualitative indicators in the index are scored by the EIU’s country analysts. The

overall score is weighted 60% for internal peace and 40% for external peace. The closer the score is to '1', the more peaceful the country is. Peace can be considered as a tool for describing an interrelated set of structures, which create an environment that is most ideal for development of human potential. The index informs the world generally speaking, and more specifically it informs the goals of a range of stakeholders. Governments use this tool to structure policy considerations, tourism promotion and country branding.

Beside these comprehensive indices measuring countries' world-wide reputations and making comparisons among them, some recent research focused on particular countries, cities or places to analyse their reputation. For example, Passow et al.'s (2005) study on the reputation of Principality of Liechtenstein was conducted from April to December 2002. Liechtenstein is a small European country with the area of 160 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of nearly 40,000; it is not comparable with other countries and is not included in the popular indices. So, the researchers developed a new measurement instrument, which allowed the particularities of a country to be incorporated. The survey instrument, called the 'Fombrun-RI Country Reputation Index' (CRI), consists of 20 attributes which are grouped in six dimensions for data analysis purposes, allowing the country's reputation to be measured.

Also in the place reputation field, Magala (2011) measures cities' reputation by measuring their reputation using indicators focusing on cultural identities, that is, the major culture-related phenomena, activities, or institutions with which city dwellers and visitors identify cognitively and emotionally. The researcher specifically studied the urban societies, such as Poznan, Rotterdam, Valencia and Warsaw, which are different in terms of key cultural traits, to analyse their complex identity formation

process, and then apply the appropriate techniques in order to minimise marginalisation and unexpected consequences that may negatively affect a city's brand reputation (Magala, 2011).

From a different perspective, according to Braun (2011), a place's historic values or heritage is very useful and important in assisting governments, local authorities or agencies who manage the place during their process of constructing a meaningful place brand reputation. Braun stated that important developments in the past are closely linked to place branding today. He argued that the idea of a clean sheet is one of the regular mistakes that cities make their efforts to develop their place brands. The researcher studied the case of Rotterdam, showing that it is very difficult to move its brand to a different direction as the city's port is a dominant feature in the minds of internal and external audiences. Even if there is significant evidence that the economic structure has really changed, the strong association with the port is still a very important element forming the reputation of Rotterdam among domestic and international publics (Braun, 2011).

Ind and Todd (2011) proposed that creativity is best nurtured by an organic and dynamic approach to place branding such as significant events that are tied to a country. Their study assesses the relationship between the Edinburgh Festival Fringe as an open-access arts festival and its stakeholders' expectations of self-determination and governance of creativity. The findings give an insight into stakeholders' perceptions of the Fringe as a 'strong', 'innovative' and 'creative' festival brand. According to the researchers, the festival promotes the reputation of the city with nearly two million tickets being sold for more than 40,000 performances each year.

Similarly, Schreiner and Go (2011) looked at the 2010 FIFA World Cup competition and questioned whether and to what extent it added value to the reputation of host country South Africa. The emerging economy of South Africa was in dire need of improved education, healthcare and social services at this time and a critical assessment of the cost–benefit impacts of the 2010 FIFA World Cup was required to justify the holding of this event. By comparing media analysis with survey results, they suggested that the competition has contributed to improving South Africa’s reputation (Go & Govers, 2011). Hosting the event earned the economy nearly US\$7 billion, made South Africa’s reputation more positive, and created a favourable environment to attract more foreign investment and foreign tourists, according to Frank Blackmore, a KPMG senior economist. This month-long sporting event contributed around 0.5% to South Africa’s annually gross domestic product growth. “One does not have to be an economist to know that things went well,” he said at a KPMG post-2010 World Cup panel discussion in Johannesburg (Prinsloo, 2010, para. 2).

It is also necessary to mention the research regarding the formation and measurement of brands. Anholt (2002, 2007) highlighted the importance of brand management at the country level, in which a country strategically manages its reputation to achieve an attractive and competitive brand. The nation brand is commonly defined as “the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences” (Dinnie, 2008, p. 15). These publicly communicated images in turn become important as they accumulate to form the global reputation of a country (Rusciano, Fiske-Rusciano, & Wang, 1997). So far, studies on nation branding are strongly influenced by the leading scholars in this field, such as Anholt (2006a), Gilmore (2002) and Olins (2002), who

have a focus on the target group of tourists and business people (Morgan, Lugosi, & Ritchie, 2010; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000) and are often quantitative (Gertner, 2011). There is some research measuring and evaluating the success of nation branding strategies, such as Papadopoulos's (2004) study which focused on the notion of place-based marketing: the power of developed nations coordinated with country branding campaigns, resulting in more fierce competition among these countries and a more disadvantageous situation for weaker and unbranded ones. There is also some other research developing instruments to track the development and change of nation brands (Loo & Davies, 2006).

After all, however, it should be noticed that these country reputation studies mainly focus on how to measure the dimensions of the reputation of a country. These models are limited in their applicability to different stakeholder groups because their dimensions depend strongly on the focus of responses from specific groups, mainly consumers or tourists. The need for more differentiated and comparative analyses of country reputation among different groups (like politicians, foreign political publics, skilled workers and experts, journalists, and students) is still waiting to be met.

Also, the formation of countries' reputations and factors impacting them has yet to gain enough attention from researchers. Comparative analyses relating to countries' reputation rankings, the factors contributing to a reputation, and the more generic attributes and content of the construct needed for comparative analyses, are widely disregarded in research on country reputation. The lack of research on the reputation of countries that are small in terms of area, like Liechtenstein, or the countries with a developing or under-developed economy, like Vietnam, is apparent too. Among the

five highly valued indices mentioned above, only the CBI has measured small countries like Vietnam.

In turning to the country of focus in this thesis, i.e., Vietnam, it is important to provide historical context in order to understand how this history may tie in with its international reputation.

## **2.5. Vietnam's history, and economic, social and diplomatic advancements**

### *2.5.1. A brief history of Vietnam*

A history of Vietnam is important in order to be able to contextualise this research, because a country's history can impact greatly on its reputation and how it is perceived, and this is indeed the case of Vietnam which has been a site of conflict since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. Vietnam, a South East Asian country that borders China, Cambodia and Laos by land and Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand by sea, has suffered conflict and consecutive wars waged by powerful nations such as the US, France, Japan and China. The country has experienced a number of wars in gaining independence from these powerful countries since its early beginnings 2,000 years ago. This explains why the image of Vietnam is closely attached to war and conflict issues.

People in North Vietnam began growing rice in the Red River Valley. Together they formed a kingdom called Van Lang (now Vietnam). In the 2nd century BC, the Chinese conquered the area. The Chinese ruled northern Vietnam for more than 1,000 years. In 938, the Chinese were defeated and Vietnam became an independent state. However, in the early 15th century China tried to regain control of Vietnam. In 1407 they occupied the country but their rule was resisted (Asia for Educators, n.d.).

In the late 19th century, Vietnam became a French colony. The French built infrastructure such as the Saigon to Hanoi railway. They also built roads and bridges. Their construction was funded by heavy taxation. Vietnamese wanted independence. Nguyen Ai Quoc (later named Ho Chi Minh), a young Vietnamese person, founded the Revolutionary Youth League which then, in 1930, became the Vietnamese Communist Party. The Communists spearheaded the struggle for independence. In 1940, Japan forced the French Government to allow Japanese troops to occupy French Indo-China, including Vietnam. The Vietnamese communists fought the Japanese and by 1945 they controlled parts of North Vietnam. Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945. On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh declared the independence of Vietnam. However, the great powers ignored that declaration ("Vietnam Profile," 2018).

The French army soon returned and took control of the south of Vietnam. In the north, Chinese troops moved in. Ho Chi Minh decided to sign a treaty with the French, which said that French troops should replace Chinese troops in North Vietnam for five years. In return, the French promised to recognise Vietnam as a 'free state'. However, it then became clear the French had no intention of giving up power in Vietnam and fighting broke out between them and the Vietnamese communists. For eight years the Vietnamese communists fought a guerrilla war against the French. Finally, in 1954 they surrounded a French army at Dien Bien Phu. After a siege lasting 57 days the French were forced to surrender. By then it was clear that the French could not win the war and both sides met at the Geneva Conference to end the war. They agreed that Vietnam would be temporarily divided at the 17th parallel and elections would be held by July 20, 1956. However, no elections were held and the division of Vietnam became permanent.

In the meantime, the US gradually became involved in the Vietnam War. As early as 1950, the US sent military advisers to South Vietnam. They also financially supported the French and later the South Vietnamese Government. In 1964 two US ships were supposedly subject to 'unprovoked' attacks by the North Vietnamese. The Americans then bombed the north and the US Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, allowing the president to take 'all necessary measures' to prevent 'further aggression'. By the end of December 1965, nearly 200,000 US soldiers were sent to Vietnam and by the end of 1967, this number had tripled. Vietnamese communists continued their guerrilla war. In January 1968, the Vietnamese communists launched the Tet offensive in towns and cities across South Vietnam. They suffered heavy losses but afterwards the Americans gradually withdrew from Vietnam. In January 1973 they signed a ceasefire and the remaining American troops withdrew. The South Vietnamese continued to fight the Vietcong alone. However, in the early months of 1975, South Vietnamese resistance collapsed and on April 30, 1975, the North Vietnamese captured Saigon. Vietnam was reunited under the leadership of Vietnamese Communist Party, which still exists today (Dang, 2018).

Though Vietnam has struggled throughout its history, economic, political and social improvements over the years suggest that its reputation has been deserving of a better international reception.

#### *2.5.2. Vietnam's economic and social achievements during 2012- 2015*

In 1986 the Vietnamese Government introduced market reforms (named *Đổi Mới*). Dollar (1994) asserted that agricultural reforms and price liberalisation are the key tools of this programme:

The removal of price controls in Vietnam was complete in the agricultural sector and nearly as comprehensive in industry and services. ... The regime for foreign trade and investment was liberalized. Restrictions on imports and exports of important products, such as rice, were relaxed. (p. 361)

As a result, the Vietnamese economy began to grow rapidly. In 1994 the US lifted an economic embargo on Vietnam and in 1995 diplomatic relations were restored. Today, the Vietnamese economy is blooming and Vietnam is becoming more and more prosperous. Tourism is an important industry in Vietnam. Furthermore, a stock exchange opened in Vietnam in 2000. Foreigners could take part in trading the shares. "The country's economy is accelerating, even as the rest of South-East Asia slow." ("Changing gear: Decent reforms are enriching the Vietnamese; the future looks fine" 2005, para. 2).

According to World Bank's (2017) reports, Vietnam is transitioning to a market-based economy. Vietnam's development record over the past 30 years is remarkable. Economic and political reforms, launched in 1986 under *Đổi Mới*, have spurred rapid economic growth and development and transformed Vietnam from one of the world's poorest nations to a lower middle-income country. Vietnam has enjoyed strong economic growth. Growth has been equitable, with a dramatic reduction in poverty; social outcomes have improved significantly. Vietnam has made significant advances in the provision of basic services. Access to basic infrastructure has also improved substantially.

However, Vietnam's biggest achievements in terms of economy, diplomacy and society have been recorded during the period 2012-2015. In the field of economy and trade, in 2015, Vietnam exported US\$185 billion, making it the 24th largest exporter in the world ("Vietnam's biggest socio-economic achievements" 2015). During a five-year

period, the exports of Vietnam increased at an annualised rate of 18.6%, from US\$77.3 billion in 2010 to US\$185 billion in 2015 (“Vietnam’s biggest socio-economic achievements” 2015). The most recent exports are led by broadcasting equipment, which represent 16.3% of the total exports of Vietnam, followed by integrated circuits, which account for 5.81%. Vietnam is the 50th most complex economy according to the Economic Complexity Index (ECI). In 2015, the GDP of Vietnam was \$193 billion and its GDP per capita was \$6.03k. Vietnam’s GDP per capita growth was among the fastest in the world, with GDP expanding by 6.68% in 2015 (“Vietnam’s biggest socio-economic achievements” 2015).

When it comes to Vietnam’s social achievements, the proportion of the population living below the national poverty line (the GSO-WB poverty line) fell to 13.5% in 2014 – down from close to 60% in 1993. Infant and under-five mortality rates have been significantly reduced in the last 20 years, down to 19 and 24 mortalities per thousand births in 2012, respectively. Life expectancy at birth is now 76 years, an improvement from 71 years in 1993. Access to basic infrastructure has also improved substantially. Significant progress was charted from 1993 to 2012. For example, at least 99% of the population now use electricity as their main source of lighting compared to 14% more than 20 years ago. More than 67% of the rural population now enjoy access to sanitation facilities, and more than 61% have access to clean water, compared to only 36% and 17% respectively two decades earlier.

### *2.5.3 Development of diplomatic relationships*

As of September 2016, Vietnam maintained diplomatic relationships with 188 nations throughout the world, including permanent members of United Nations Security

Council. Vietnam's ties with its partners, especially traditional ones including the US, Japan and the EU have made great progress (Ly, 2016).

#### *With the US*

The earlier relationships between Vietnam and the US were turbulent due to war and conflict. Yet, the two nations appear to have made amends and their relationship has changed remarkably. The US has become an important partner for Vietnam in various fields. In the past five years, the relationship between Vietnam and the US has reached a new high level. According to the U.S. Relations with Vietnam (2021) by the U.S Department of State's Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs, in 2015 the US and Vietnam marked the 20th anniversary of diplomatic relations and, in May 2016, President Obama visited Vietnam to celebrate the Comprehensive Partnership between the two countries. US relations with Vietnam have become increasingly cooperative and comprehensive, guided by the 2013 US-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership, an overarching framework for advancing the bilateral relationship, the 2015 bilateral Joint Vision Statement, and the Joint Statement issued during President Obama's visit to Vietnam in May 2016. The partnership facilitates the cooperation of the two countries in various fields such as political and diplomatic relations, trade and economic activities, education, science and technology, health and environment, defence and security, culture and tourism.

Many of these topics are also discussed in annual bilateral defence discussions. In May 2016, the US lifted its ban on the sale of lethal weapons to Vietnam and continued helping Vietnam with maritime security issues.

#### *With traditional partners: Japan, ASEAN and the EU*

According to Vietnam's Diplomatic Relations: Promising Progresses (2015), Vietnam-EU relations have been furthered. The two sides signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) and officially began negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement in June 2012. The multifaceted cooperation between Vietnam and top EU partners such as France, Germany and Italy has been accelerated. Italy officially recognised Vietnam's market economic status, showed its desire to establish a strategic partnership with Vietnam, and invited the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam to pay a visit Italy in the first quarter of 2013 on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Vietnam has closely cooperated with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) members to draft and compile many documents to protect the bloc's interests and its national interests as well. Some of these documents are the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD), the Action Plan to realise the Bali Declaration on ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations, the declaration to initiate negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and the ASEAN-China Joint Statement on the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Declaration on the Conduct (DOC) of Parties in the East Sea.

Regarding the ties with Japan, during the official visit to Japan of President Truong Tan Sang, as a state guest in March 2014, Japan and Vietnam upgraded the relationship to an "Extensive Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia". Based on this framework and mutual trust, cooperation between the two countries in fields such as security and defence, agriculture, science and technology, education and training, culture, sports, tourism, environment, in local-level exchanges, and in people-to-people exchanges, has been developing in substance, intensity and scope alike. This

initiative started in 2003 to improve the business environment in Vietnam. High-ranking members of the Japanese Government, including Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and President of the House of Councillors Yamazaki Masaaki paid official visits to Vietnam.

### *With China*

Tensions with China over the East Sea issue have escalated and drawn international media attention. Regional tension over claims to islands and resources in the East Sea flared in 2012. For centuries, China has declared sovereignty over the sea and many of its islands, including the Paracel and Spratly Islands, which are rich in oil and gas reserves and fish. However, Vietnam has also laid claim to the Paracel and Spratly island chains, and the Philippines say the Spratly Islands are within their territorial claims. In particular, in 2012, China placed naval vessels in the South China Sea and stopped other countries from conducting oil and gas exploration in this maritime area (“China accused by Philippines of Spratlys intrusion” 2012).

At the same time, Vietnam and the Philippines have been more aggressively dispatching ships – both military and civilian – to the sea. There was little hope that the nations could solve the problem diplomatically, with China saying it would only negotiate bilaterally and Vietnam and the Philippines both insisting that the US and the ASEAN mediate the dispute.

In 2014, tensions increased between China and Vietnam when Vietnamese officials reported that their vessels had been hit by Chinese ships. “On May 4, Chinese ships intentionally rammed two Vietnamese Sea Guard vessels,” said Foreign Ministry official Tran Duy Hai, during a news conference in Hanoi, Vietnam. “Chinese ships, with

air support, sought to intimidate Vietnamese vessels” (“Vietnam accuses China” 2014, para.3 -4)

The situation intensified three days later when Vietnamese ships confronted Chinese ships. The Chinese vessels were placing an oil rig off the coast of Vietnam when the confrontation occurred. The placement of the rig also led to protests throughout Vietnam and some of those protests turned violent. On May 14, anti-China protesters set fire to at least 15 foreign-owned factories throughout Vietnam, according to state media. Protesters also destroyed and looted the offices of manufacturing companies owned or managed by Chinese people. At least one person died in the protests (“Vietnam anti-China protest” 2014).

#### *2.5.4. Political developments*

Vietnam has been a one-party state since its reunification after the Vietnam War. The Communist Party of Vietnam is the party in power in the country. The party holds a national congress during which policies and candidates are decided. The Central Committee of the party passes resolutions, which then become laws. All important government positions are held by members of the party (“Communist Party of Vietnam” 2011).

According to the Vietnamese Government, Marxism-Leninism and Hồ Chí Minh Ideology form the party’s ideological foundations. They are the key guidance for the party’s activities, promoting the nation’s traditions and learning from other nations. The party has worked out programmes for a better living standard for people, a stronger nation and an equitable, democratic and civilised society (“Communist Party of Vietnam” 2011).

Vietnam is one of very few countries in the world that has its political foundations within communism that has led to a one-party state. Other countries with similar political systems are China, Cuba and North Korea. Brooker (1995) asserted that these are types of countries where one political party maintains complete power all other institutions. This status as a one-party state possibly explains the country's popular image in international publics.

## **2.6. Vietnam's relationships limited to traditional partners**

Vietnam's products have appeared on 19 import markets reaching a turnover of over US\$1 billion. However, Vietnam's trading or diplomatic activities mainly operate with traditional partners, not extending to new ones such as Latin American or African countries. Business people, tourists and students from other countries are still reluctant to experience Vietnam.

For example, the top export destinations of Vietnam are the US (US\$38.1 billion), China (US\$19.2 billion), Japan (US\$15 billion), South Korea (US\$9.6 billion) and Germany (US\$8.71 billion). The top countries of origin for imports are China (US\$49.8 billion), South Korea (US\$26.6 billion), Japan (US\$13.1 billion), other countries in Asia (US\$9.9 billion) and Thailand (US\$8.51 billion) ("Top exports of Vietnam" 2021). In the tourism field, until 2020, tourists coming to Vietnam were mainly from Asian countries, France, Germany, England, Holland, Italy, Russia, New Zealand, Sweden and Canada (Data of Vietnam's Tourism, 2020).

## **2.7. Conclusion**

The chapter situated the thesis by discussing the importance of countries establishing a good reputation internationally as this plays a key role in their economic, political and social development. Recent research into country reputation was then discussed

to provide an overview of the main interests of researchers in this field, such as Passow et al. (2005), Adams et al. (2011), Magala (2011) and Braun (2011). In particular, I laid out different methods that have been applied when it comes to measuring country reputation. Some limitations were noted such as the lack of attention paid by researchers to countries, like Vietnam, which can be considered smaller in terms of economic and political status, and which have received little comparative analysis to help identify the factors affecting their reputations.

In my research, Vietnam was chosen as a case study because there is a lack of studies about the country's image and little information provided in terms of its current economic figures and diplomatic activity. Through the case study of Vietnam, small countries can learn and improve their own reputation. The chapter also presented the disadvantages Vietnam faces in the world when its image is attached to wars and other conflict.

This discussion leads to Chapter 3, which details agenda-setting theory and the relationship between agenda-setting and country reputation which is the focus of this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### MAINSTREAM MEDIA SETTING THE AGENDA: SALIENCE OF ISSUES TRANSMITTED FROM MEDIA TO PUBLIC

#### Introduction

The mainstream media has become the key source of information for many people when they do not have direct experience of foreign countries and world events. Figures for newspaper circulation or television and radio audiences partially show how much people depend on the mainstream media to catch up on the world's events or developments. The World Association of Newspapers *World Press Trends* report 2012 indicated that more than 50% of the world's adult population read a newspaper to update on the news (Ponsford, n.d., para. 2). People's reliance on media for information leads to queries about the media's ability to influence our perceptions about a nation (McCombs, 2004).

This chapter focuses on discussing agenda-setting theory, its definition and its origins in communications research. The chapter also provides discussions about where agenda-setting first emerged and how it developed as a theory. It may be noted that events and situations take place at the same time, and constantly, in small places, not to mention across this whole big world. So, when it comes to hard copy publications or broadcast programmes, where time and space are limited, agenda-setting can occur. Accordingly, the agenda-setting process that is laid out in this chapter points to how the salience of an issue changes based on the media agenda and the public agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1996).

The chapter then presents methodological approaches to the investigation of agenda-setting by researchers, and the factors affecting the agenda-setting process of the

mainstream media. The factors come both from the producers of the news, i.e., the mainstream media, in their practices and business models, and from the consumers, in their characteristics and exposure to the media.

Following these sections, the three levels of agenda-setting are identified and discussed, namely object agenda-setting, attribute agenda-setting and network agenda setting. This discussion aims to acknowledge how the news media are likely to shape and reshape the audience's associative memory network from separate objects, the interconnections inside the attributes of each object, to the interrelationships among the attributes of different objects.

The chapter finally presents some of the more recent agenda-setting studies, takes a look at agenda-setting theory in the Internet age, and probes some of the limitations of the theory.

### **3.1. Origins and definitions of agenda-setting**

The influence of the news media has been a point of discussion by many. Theodore White, an American political journalist who covered presidential elections from 1960 to 1980, stated that "No major act of the American Congress, no foreign adventure, no act of diplomacy, no great social reform, can succeed in the United States unless the press prepares the public mind" (cited in McCombs, 2004, p. 7). Cohen (1963) pointed out three main roles of the press in the field of foreign affairs: being an observer of foreign policy news, being a participant in the foreign policy process, and being a catalyst of foreign news.

Walter Lippmann, in his book *Public Opinion*, published in 1922, suggested that the mass media were the principal connection between events that occur in the world and the images of these events in our heads. In other words, according to the *Cambridge*

*Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus*, it was suggested that the media 'set the agenda', as in deciding "what subjects other people should discuss and deal with" (Semetko & Valkenberg, 2000). However, it was over half a century later before any empirical investigations were implemented to study the influence of the media on how people envisioned the news (McCombs, 1976). Besides Lippmann, during that early period, academics such as Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee (1954) and Arnold and Gold (1964) studied the effects of the mainstream media on the public's agenda, although no particular reference was made to agenda-setting theory. The investigation by Berelson et al. (as cited in McCombs, 1976) found that the concerns of voters in Elmira City of the USA were in line with the issues reported in the news during the 1948 presidential campaign. While Arnold and Gold, in a study of an Iowa reapportionment referendum (as cited in McCombs, 1976), found correlations between the proportion of the vote in favour and the population of those counties where local newspapers helped make the issue salient to voters.

Influenced by Lippmann and other predecessors, 50 years later, Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw first introduced the term 'agenda-setting' in 1972. They carried out a study to assess the role of mass media in the 1968 USA presidential campaign in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. During their study, one hundred undecided voters were chosen as the respondents. These voters were interviewed in a three-week period between September and October 1968, prior to the election. The researchers also analysed local and national media coverage of the election, quantifying the focus put onto certain issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The voters' public agenda of campaign issues was measured, based on their responses to only one survey question asking them to name the key issues of the day as they saw matters. This question was

repeated for the whole three-week period. Their replies reflected the issues most prominent in the press, in spite of various topics being emphasised by the three presidential candidates in 1968. There were strong correlations between the issues highlighted in the news media and what the respondents regarded as key issues in that election campaign (McCombs, 1976), which included foreign policy, law and order, economics, public welfare, and civil rights. In other words, the salience of five key issues among these undecided voters was virtually identical to the salience of these issues in the news coverage of those three weeks.

McCombs (1976) suggested that agenda-setting is a process in which “audiences take note of the saliences of the news media, what is emphasized, what receives heavy play, and incorporate a similar set of weights into their personal agendas” (p. 3). In other words, the salience of an issue or a topic determined by mass media causes that issue or topic to be important among the public. The media actually function in not only bringing an issue or a topic to some level of awareness in the public, but also in turning the priorities of the press into the public’s priorities to some degree. “What the press emphasizes is in turn emphasized privately and publicly by the audiences of the press”, according to McCombs (1976, p. 3).

Following the 1972 study by McCombs and Shaw, researchers have found a good deal of support for agenda-setting theory. Funkhouser’s (1973) study of the major issues of the 1960s, for example, found a close connection between news reports and national public opinion, suggesting that the media agenda sets the public agenda as topics or issues highlighted in the news reports become important for the public over time. Dearing and Rogers (1996) reviewed more than 100 studies confirming the agenda-setting hypothesis where there is strong evidence of a causal connection between

news prominence and public salience. These two scholars asserted that “The salience presented on the media agenda signify audiences what to think about” (p. 8).

Perse (2001) also affirmed the power of media agenda-setting to structure the importance of issues in the public’s mind. However, he assumed that agenda-setting is not a kind of power that takes effect immediately after just one item of news coverage and advised: “Instead, salience emerges in the public’s mind because of consistent coverage of certain issues over a period of time” (Perse, 2001, p. 99). In fact, McCombs (2004) believed that two investigations of the timeframe for agenda-setting taking effect showed that it takes a period of one to eight weeks for certain issues or topics to be accumulated in mass media and then reflected in the public’s responses and in their minds (McCombs, 2004).

### *3.1.1. Salience cues*

According to McCombs (2004), mass media “communicate a host of cues” (p. 2) to show the emphasis they place on certain issues or topics on their daily journalistic practice. While repetition is the most important sign for the salience of an issue or a topic, according to Dearing and Rogers (1996) and Perse (2001), consistency across media in covering an issue or a topic is the second key signal for its salience. There is remarkable consistency in the top stories among most media outlets when together they highlighted certain issues or topics at the same time. Meanwhile, each form of mass media such as newspapers, news websites, radio or television owns a different set of cues (McCombs, 2004). For example, for newspapers, the use of the front page versus inside pages, the use of a large size of headlines versus smaller ones, the positioning and layout of a story, or the length of a story, reveal the salience of topics or issues to audiences. Perse (2001) suggested that the most important stories are

those that are reported at the beginning of a bulletin, are positioned on the front page, account for the most space in the newspaper or take a large amount of the broadcasting time in a bulletin. McCombs (2004) suggested that: "The public uses these salience cues from the media to organize their own agendas and decide which issues are most important" (p. 2).

These noticeable and peripheral signals for the salience of an issue or a topic have also been demonstrated in the studies of scholars such as Brosius and Keplinger (1990), Funkhouser (1973), Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder (1982) and McCombs and Shaw (1972), in which they simply counted the number of stories about an issue as a measure of the media agenda. Other scholars such as Watt, Mazza and Snyder (1992, 1993) measured the salience of a news story by its proportion of the total news, story placement, headlines, photos, column inches for print media, and videotape and static visuals for television news (Perse, 2001).

The issues highlighted in the mainstream media over time have been shown to hold key positions in the public agenda. The agenda of the news media becomes, to a considerable degree, the agenda of the public. As a result, the news media set the public agenda. Establishing this salience among the public, placing an issue or topic on the public agenda so that it becomes the focus of public attention and thought and, then, action is the initial stage in the formation of public opinion (McCombs, 2004).

Therefore, it is understood that "an agenda is a set of issues that are communicated in a hierarchy of importance at a point of time" (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p. 2). The heart of the agenda-setting process is when the salience of an issue changes on the media agenda and the public agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Scholars have affirmed that this transfer is the key to the theory of agenda-setting: "The degree of emphasis

placed on issues in the news influences the priority accorded those issues by the public” (McCombs, 2004, p. 68).

However, McCombs (2004) explained that this does not mean the public is programmed by the mass media, but “agenda-setting does assign a central role to the news media in initiating items for the public agenda” (p. 6). The reason lies in the fact that different people, according to Van Dijk and Kintsch (1983), look at the same events differently, then update information and build up a mental representation about them in different ways, depending on their existing knowledge, previous experiences and cognitive presuppositions. The cognitive factors include beliefs, opinions or attitudes toward the events or individual goals, motivations or specific tasks in processing the information about them. Actually, people have three kinds of data in mind: information from the events themselves, the situation or context, and their cognitive presuppositions. These kinds of information may be combined in various orders (Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).

### *3.1.2. Reasons why the media set the agenda*

Questions are raised as to the reasons why media set the agenda or whether journalists are even aware that they are doing it. However, the life of journalists is one that is pressurised and demanding. Many events take place consecutively, minute by minute. As a result, there are not enough journalists to cover all of these events and space on the publications and time on broadcast programmes is limited as well. Even now, in the digital age, with mobile devices and social media communication, the seemingly unlimited space available on news websites to upload stories, and with access to citizen journalists and other sources, copious amount of content can be overwhelming for journalists. So, those events or situations “compete” for journalists’

attention. As a result, the news media may “present a limited view of the larger environment, something like the highly limited view of the outside world available through the narrow-slit windows of some contemporary buildings” (McCombs, 2004, pp. 21-22).

Rogers and Dearing (1996) also explained that “there are too many problems popping up so every social system must have an agenda to prioritize or arrange the problems based on their salience” (p. 1). They define the agenda-setting process as a competition among issue proponents to grab the attention of media professionals. The potentially conflictual nature of an issue helps make it newsworthy as proponents and opponents of the issue battle it out in the shared ‘public arena’, which, in modern society, is the mainstream media. This two-sided nature of an issue is important in understanding why and how an issue climbs up an agenda.

McCombs (2004) agreed and asserted that the creation of a pseudo-environment is not a deliberate action but one that is necessary one to make it possible to select and highlight a few topics in news reports as the most salient news of the moment. The events and situations of each day are refracted through the professional lens of news organisations (McCombs, 2004).

Gallup Poll surveys in the US during the unsettled decade of the 1960s evidenced the effects of media agenda-setting in structuring the pictures in the public mind. Americans as respondents were asked to name “the most important problem” facing the country (McCombs, 2004, p. 21). Vietnam, race relations and urban riots, campus unrest and inflation were the most common answers and these issues topped the public agenda. These were the issues actually emphasised in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *US News and World Report* during the decade. There was a strong correlation between

the salience of the issues determined by mass media and the concerns of the public. The correlation between the news agenda and the public agenda was relatively high, with a correlation statistic of +0.78. This statistic precisely summarises the degree of correspondence between the ranking of issues on the media agenda (which issues received the most news coverage) and the ranking of those same issues on the public agenda (which issues most members of the public regarded as most important, second most important, third most important, etc). The range of scores for the correlation statistic is from +1.0 (perfect correspondence) through 0 (no relationship at all) to -1.0 (perfect inverse relationship).

In addition, to prove that this high degree of correspondence was not random or inaccurate and both the mass media and the public were not simply responding to the current world outside, Ray Funkhouser looked at the chronological structure of the events that really happened, based on official data from the Statistical Abstracts of the United States (McCombs, 2004). For example, regarding the Vietnam War, the salience of this issue rose to a peak on mass media a year or two earlier than the events relating to this issue, such as number of troops mobilised, reached a climax. This means that the mass media and the public both had shown their greatest concern about the Vietnam War issue at a point in time before this issue actually peaked in seriousness. So, the media agenda and public agenda had a correlation with each other, but not with the outside world. Funkhouser (as cited in McCombs, 2004) concluded that “the patterns of media coverage did not have a one-to-one relationship to the realities of any of the issues” (p. 22).

Repetitions in television evening news programmes strengthened the connection between news coverage, not realities and issue salience. When participants watched

news reports during a week that highlighted stories about US defence preparedness and pollution, they rated those issues more important than participants who had seen news reports providing only minimal coverage of those issues. Meanwhile, these problems did not peak at that time (Perse, 2001, p. 99).

This shows the powerful effects of media agenda-setting on public opinion, as it refutes the criticism that news reports and public concerns are reflections of realities in the world. McCombs (2004) argued that “The media construct and present to the public a pseudo-environment that significantly shapes how the public views the world” (p. 23). This assertion shares the same description that Lippmann used: that mass media play a primary role in providing sources to map the details of “the pictures in our heads” – a pseudo environment (McCombs, 2004, p. 68).

Cohen (as cited in Dearing & Rogers, 1996) asserted:

The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. ... The world will look different to different people, depending ... on the map that is drawn for them by writers, editors, and publishers of the newspaper they read. (p. 12)

The next section introduces methodological approaches in agenda-setting, to illustrate the base that earlier studies relied on to prove the role and process of agenda-setting.

### **3.2. Methodological approaches to agenda-setting investigation**

The main methodological approach applied in agenda-setting studies since the very first one at Chapel Hill is based on making a comparison between the results of content analysis of mainstream media and the public perception of the importance of issues measured during the same period. The 1968 US presidential election marked the first empirical test of agenda-setting theory, conducted by journalism professors

Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. This approach investigated the ability of the mainstream media to tell the public what to think about rather than what to think (Weaver, 2008). McCombs and Shaw tested the agenda-setting hypothesis in the presidential campaign of 1968 that the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the voters' attitudes toward the salience of political issues. Undecided voters in Chapel Hill were chosen as the focus of their study as they were "the most open or susceptible to campaign information" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 178). The researchers interviewed 100 respondents and simultaneously made a content analysis of the mass media serving these voters including five newspapers, two magazines, and two television network evening news broadcasts. Respondents were asked to name the major problems in the country. Their replies were grouped into 15 categories. The news media content covering the election was also divided into these 15 categories by amount (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The authors concluded that these data suggested a strong relationship between the focus put on certain campaign issues by the media and the voters' opinions on the salience of those campaign topics ((McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Since this initial study of media agenda-setting, several hundred studies have been conducted by scholars in the US and many other countries such as Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain and Taiwan (Weaver, 2008). Most of these studies have focused on the relationship between news media and public agendas (media ranking of issues via amount and prominence of coverage, and public rankings of the perceived importance of these issues) at the aggregate and individual levels. They have also investigated single issues over time at these both levels (Weaver, 2008).

According to McCombs (2004), there are four different approaches in agenda-setting studies, consisting of entire agenda (multiple issues), aggregate level; entire agenda (multiple issues), individual level; single issue, aggregate level; and single issue, individual level.

The first most common approach examines the competition among different issues for media and public focus. The 1968 Chapel Hill study applied this approach, which is used to investigate the ability of the news media to draw the public's attention to a particular issue (Weaver, 2008).

The second most common approach is applying the accumulated data to examine media coverage and public concern about single issues over time. This perspective is intended to track the rise and fall of media and public attention given to particular issues, and whether increased media attention precedes, coincides with, or follows an increase in public concern; to explain – this is essential information for inferring a causal relationship (Weaver, 2008).

The third approach is to use individual-level public data to study a single issue over time, called the cognitive portrait by McCombs (2004). Examples of the cognitive portrait approach include experimental studies in which the salience of a single issue for each individual person is measured before and after exposure to news programmes where the amount of exposure to various issues is controlled (Weaver, 2008).

The fourth approach has been the least studied and used. It involves comparing entire rankings of issues for each individual person with various media rankings of issues (Weaver, 2008).

Most agenda-setting studies have focused on investigating the correlation between public attention and media coverage. These studies failed to investigate the role of

mainstream media in the formation of public opinion and their cognitive preferences (Son & Weaver, 2000). However, some effects research (Davidson & Parker, 1972; Katz, 1980; Weaver, 1991; Zajonc, 1968) revealed that the focus of mainstream media on particular issues results in the cognitive salience of the issues for the public. According to Zajonc's (1968) exposure theory, repeated exposure to an object often results in a positive attitude toward that object. For example, Davidson and Parker (1972) found that increased media coverage was linked with a positive evaluation of the US Congress, and Weaver (1991) found that the increased perceived salience of the federal budget deficit issue was related to the strength and direction of opinion regarding a possible solution to the issue.

To fully understand the depth of agenda-setting studies, the factors that need to be considered about the agenda-setting process of mass media, and the different levels of agenda-setting that researchers have developed, are discussed in the next sections.

### **3.3. Factors affecting the agenda-setting process of mainstream media**

McCombs and Reynolds (2009) used the metaphor of "peeling an onion" (p. 12) to explain various factors that affect the agenda of the mainstream media. The layers of the onion represent the numerous influences structuring the media agenda, which is at the core of the onion. "Like an onion, the influence of an outer layer is, in turn, affected by layers closer to the core of the onion" (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009, p. 12) (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Main factors affecting agenda-setting process**

The main factors determining the agenda-setting power of mainstream media lie in both mainstream media and their audiences, ranging from journalism practices and mainstream media subsidisation forces to NFO, the exposure to mainstream media of audiences, and the personal characteristics of audiences (see Figure 1).

### *3.3.1. Journalism practices*

Deep inside the onion, according to McCombs and Reynolds (2009, p.13), are “the interactions and influence of various mass media on each other, a phenomenon commonly called intermedia agenda-setting”. These interactions strengthen the social norms and practices of journalism. In the meantime, the professional values and practices are “the layer of the onion surrounding the core, the layer that defines the ground rules for the ultimate shaping of the media agenda” (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009, p. 13). Regarding the relationships among news organisations, the larger a news agency, the bigger its influence becomes on media agenda. Sharing this idea, Severin

and Tankard (2001) affirmed that the elite media, such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, are likely to set the agenda for other media.

Danielian and Reese (1989) found evidence that the prominence of the drug issue in mass media in 1985 and 1986 was actually a result of intermedia agenda setting, not the increase in the drug problem in society in reality in these two years. They studied statistics which showed that, in fact, actual drug use did not rise in 1985 and 1986. Nonetheless, mass media coverage of the issue did. They found that there was an intermedia agenda-setting influence transmitted from *The New York Times* which initiated a series of stories on the drug issue in other media. And earlier, Timothy Crouse (1973) in *The Boys on the Bus*, reporting on press coverage of the 1972 presidential campaign, also discussed on the process of intermedia agenda setting ( as cited in Severin & Tankard, 2001). He documented that other media decided the content of their own stories about the election campaign based on the lead of the news stories of R.W. (Jonny) Apple, Jr., a leading writer of *The New York Times* ( as cited in Severin & Tankard, 2001). Similarly with the role of an elite but, in another case, *The New Yorker* of 21 and 28 October, 1996, likened *The Washington Post* to “a whale” in terms of politics and the media agenda, and that

no other newspaper dominates a city the way the Post dominates Washington. ... Nothing seems to have diminished the influence that the Post holds over the nation’s political agenda; and nothing has diminished the paper’s almost mystical importance to the city’s permanent population of malcontents, leaders and strivers. (as cited in McCombs, 2004, p. 7)

McCombs (2004) also offered further suggestions on journalism practices that influence what they write about. For example, they are under pressure of deadlines and other time constraints, space requirements in a publication, rules for writing

different types of stories such as the inverted pyramid structure for a news story, news values, the standard of objectivity, the reliance on official sources and the relationships with other sources in setting the media agenda (McCombs, 2004).

According to Sissons (2006), a news story has to be interesting to attract audiences, and has to be accurate to be “a quality product” as “journalism is about telling real-life stories and explaining the world beyond a person’s direct experience” (p. 17).

In processing a story, journalists collect all the facts of the story. They then decide which elements they will include and which to discard and then how they frame the story, such as its structure, word choices and source references. During this process, they always need to keep in mind their target audiences. The obstacles affecting journalists’ practices can come directly from their working conditions such as interviews over the phone instead of at the scene, or a lack of articles to fill the space by the deadline (Sissons, 2006).

The story can be about events, people or ideas, but journalists must decide which is newsworthy – in other words, fresh and interesting. In deciding what is newsworthy and how it should be structured, journalists depend on factors such as the time span of the event, proximity, significance, continuity, meaning, whether it is person-centred or concentrates on an individual. However, it is journalists who can give news value to the events or issues. For example, on a day when there are not enough stories to fill the space in the newspaper, it is a must for journalists to add more elements to the story to make it newsworthy (Sissons, 2006).

Furthermore, the work routines of journalists, the need to meet deadlines and financial influences from the owner or advertisers have impacts on journalism practices. The work routines of journalists are formed to meet deadlines and fill the

space in published media products or the broadcasting time of a radio or television channels. For example, from particular established sources such as local councils, businesses or emergency services, journalists can obtain stories covering such predictable topics as courts, fires, accidents, disasters or business operations. Moreover, the requirement to meet deadlines can also result in the stories' use of stereotypes. For example, a news story covering a court case on television can start with the images of the accused, witnesses and lawyers and end with the image of the court board leaving the courtroom and the accused departing in a vehicle (Sissons, 2006).

These journalism practices can be impacted by owners, editors or advertisers, who want to control what is written, what appears in the media and what does not. Sissons (2006) took the example of Stuart Clarkson, a reporter for a small radio station, who said they need to report events, even very small ones, as ordered by their station's clients, despite the fact that these events have no news value, as "the main angle of a commercial radio station is the selling of air-time. ... I feel it devalues the station, as the news might not be trusted" (p. 38).

Thus, objectivity is an important principle for journalism practices. However, it should be noted that different journalists seeing and hearing the same event will have different ways of retelling the event through their choices of sources, interviewees, details and story structure. These selections express a journalist's personality and aims, without any words expressing their subjective opinions. For whatever the situation, "all journalists can make sure they balance their stories by explaining as many of the arguments involved as possible" (Sissons, 2006, p. 26).

### *3.3.2. Need for orientation (NFO)*

Research by Lippmann (1922), McCombs (2004) and McCombs and Weaver (1973) suggested that members of the public are not slaves to the media agenda. Their media use is certainly motivated by their needs, among which NFO is one of the most influential contingent conditions. Next to the layer of journalism practices, NFO, as an inner layer of the onion, is key to explaining the power of agenda-setting taking effect on the public's attitudes, opinions and behaviour. NFO describes individual differences among people in their demand to understand a new environment or situation by turning to the media. McCombs (1976) highlighted the point that "No one contends that agenda-setting is an influence process operating equally at all times and all places on all people" (p. 6).

Based on the concept of cognitive mapping suggested by Tolman (1932), studies of other utilitarian theorists such as Jones and Gerard (1967) and Berlyne (1960), and information-seeking studies including those by Westley and Barrow (1959) and Lanzetta and Driscoll (1968), the concept of NFO was introduced more than 40 years ago by Maxwell McCombs and David Weaver. Tolman (1932) defined the concept of cognitive mapping in noting that "each individual will strive to 'map' his [sic] world, to fill in enough detail to orient himself, to intellectually find his way around". And McGuire (1974, p.18) asserted that "Utilitarian theories view the individual as a problem solver who approaches any situation as an opportunity to acquire useful information or new skills for coping with life's challenges". McCombs and Weaver studied the data of voters in Charlotte, North Carolina, during the 1972 presidential campaign. They found that the use of mass media to catch up with campaign developments was in line with NFO. In other words, the higher the NFO, the greater the dependence on mass media for more knowledge and up-to-date information

about candidates, issues, topics and campaign activities becomes. As a result, the greater the NFO, the closer the correlation between the voters' agenda of most concerning issues and the issues prominent in the mass media (McCombs, 1976).

The concept of NFO was first presented by McCombs and Weaver to a wider academic audience in the April 1973 annual meeting of the International Communication Association in Canada. McCombs and Weaver (1973) detailed that NFO is defined as a combination of relevance and uncertainty (see Figure 2). Relevance refers to a person's interest in a subject. Uncertainty appears when people feel they do not have all the information they need about a topic (McCombs & Weaver, 1973). A high level of relevance in some issue or topic coupled with a high level of uncertainty regarding the issue or topic produces a strong NFO. Either high relevance and low uncertainty, or low relevance and high uncertainty, produces a moderate level of NFO. Finally, low relevance coupled with a low level of uncertainty (or a high level of certainty) produces a weak NFO. Accordingly, the relevance of particular issues and uncertainty about them leads to a higher NFO, and thus a higher likelihood of media use (Weaver, 1973). Their combination of effects is shown in Figure 2 where the different levels of uncertainty and relevance dictate different degrees of NFO.

		UNCERTAINTY	
		Low	High
RELEVANCE	Low	Low NFO	Moderate NFO
	High	Moderate NFO	High NFO

**Figure 2: Level of need for orientation (NFO)**

McCombs (2004) asserted that “The greater an individual’s need for orientation in the realm of public affairs, the more likely they are to attend to the agenda of the mass media” (p. 57). This idea also identifies unobtrusive issues as the ones that an individual has little or no experience in. These issues are most likely to be transferred from the media agenda to the public agenda. If members of the public are faced with unobtrusive issues, NFO will be moderate to high. Conversely, for obtrusive issues, NFO may be mainly met by personal experience. But there are cases in which personal experience is likely to create a need for more information and people will look for additional orientation through the mass media (McCombs, 2004). As a result, “need for orientation provides an explanation for the near-perfect match between the media agenda and the public agenda” (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009, p. 9).

In addition, NFO is closely linked to education. Education plays a role in drawing an individual’s attention to the news media and directing them to a wider range of issues in the news. In other words, the higher individuals’ education (particularly at level of college or higher), the greater their NFO (McCombs, 2004). However, higher levels of education do not raise individual’s cautious responses to the purpose of emphasis in the news. Well-educated individuals do not show any greater tendency than less-educated ones to erect psychological barriers against the acceptance of the media agenda (McCombs, 2004).

Since that early 1972 election study, there have been various investigations of NFO which mostly support it as a useful predictor of both frequency of news media use for information and different levels of agenda-setting effects (McCombs et al., 2014). However, McCombs and Stroud (2014), in a comprehensive analysis of the psychology

of agenda-setting effects, concluded that NFO is only one part of the answer to the question of why agenda setting occurs.

### *3.3.3. Exposure to mass media of audiences*

In the next layer out from the core of the onion, high exposure to mass media is another key conditional factor for the mass media to set the agenda. McCombs and Shaw (1972) conducted studies on “a positive relationship between amount of exposure to a news medium and the level of agreement with its agenda of public issues” (p. 7). These studies all showed that the greater the public’s accessibility to the mass media, the greater the power of agenda-setting effects on them.

In a study based on a survey on news habits, Wanta and Wu (1992) found that the more exposure individuals had to the news media, the more they become concerned about the five issues emphasised in mass media during that time. This means that the more individuals are exposed to the news media, the higher the level of issue salience for media issues (Severin & Tankard, 2001).

### *3.3.4. Personality characteristics*

At the next layer of the onion is the individuals’ experiences and social ideology which affect their decisions on “what’s news” in the media agenda and the public’s opinions (Gans, 1979). Supporting this idea, McCombs (2004) asserted that mass media not only influence what shapes individual attitudes and public opinions, but also individuals’ experience, culture and even existing attitudes decide their opinions towards certain issues and topics. For example, personal experience, which includes conversations with family, friends and co-workers, can partially or completely affect individuals’ selection of issues or topics to think about (McCombs, 2004). Meanwhile, individuals’ existing attitudes and opinions make them either refuse to access or be more open to

accessing information provided by mass media about certain issues or topics. In other words, “individuals minimize their exposure to non-supportive information and maximize their exposure to supportive information” (McCombs, 2004, p. 6). Van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) agreed with this idea by explaining that different people interpret the same events differently, based on their previous experiences with such events, which lead them to have different general knowledge about those events. In addition to this knowledge, different people also have different cognitive information, such as beliefs, opinions, or attitudes regarding such events in general, or motivations, goals, or specific tasks in the processing of these events. The salience of some types of issues on personal agendas is likely to show significant media influence while others show little or no such influence. Furthermore, interactions between types of issues and other agenda-setting variables are highly likely (McCombs, 1976).

#### *3.3.5. Mainstream media subsidisation forces*

At the surface of the onion are key external news sources. These include politicians, public officials and public relations practitioners (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). It is the public relations practitioners who are responsible for providing much of what the public knows about activities of governments, businesses and organisations both internationally and locally. As important sources, these people give information to the public via mass media based on the purposes of their organisations. “These communication professionals subsidize the efforts of news organisations to cover the news by providing substantial amounts of organized information, frequently in the form of press releases prepared in the exact style of news stories” (McCombs, 2004, p. 102). These external news sources really affect the agenda-setting process in terms of what is news and what is important.

Public relations professionals change the media agenda considerably in terms of news content and angle. Agenda-setting is an important part of what public relations is about because “Public relations influence on the media agenda is sometimes considerably more than a simple information subsidy to augment the routine work of journalists” (McCombs, 2004, p. 103).

Tiffen (1989), along with a number of other academics (Gandy, 1982; McCombs, 2004), argued that:

the routine productivity of news organizations is made possible by feeding upon the information which other institutions generate, of which many layers of government – its struggles for political dominance and over policy direction; and its social agencies from the police to schools, from taxation to tourism are the most prolific. (p. 50)

Moreover, Tiffen (1989) said that news organisations always value officially certified information, which is hard to access in a world where ambiguous and controversial information is plentiful. He called news a “parasitic institution, dependent on the information-generating activities of other institutions” (p. 50). He explained that where there are not regular channels of information disclosure, newsworthy events are more likely to pass undetected. However, numerous influences structuring the media agenda result in various effects of the media agenda on the public agenda, which are classified in three levels of agenda-setting. Section 3.5 discusses these levels.

The main factors discussed above show the existence and roles of audiences from the factor of journalism practices to the factor of NFO or exposure to mainstream media of audiences. It is necessary for journalists and news organisations to have their target audiences in mind. The next section discusses the concept of imagined audience and its impact on the content and framing of stories.

### 3.4. Imagined audience

Journalists need to write for a specific audience that is mainly 'imagined', based on the demographics of their readerships which may relate to age, ethnicity and ideological beliefs. While this reflects a certain business model of news organisations that are reliant on advertising support based on their readership – and, in the digital age, the number of 'clicks' identified through the data analytics on their websites – it also follows that the agenda they set in their writing may well influence what their imagined audience thinks about, and perhaps how they perceive another country and factors affecting the formation of potential audiences. With a clear picture of their audiences, media can set the agenda for particular publics.

In considering the role of the media in setting the news agenda and how this relates to a country's reputation, it is important to acknowledge that journalists write stories with a particular audience in mind. The objective of news organisations to be profitable businesses means that they need to attract viewership by reporting on stories that they will have wide appeal. Loyal audiences, in turn, will be used by organisations to attract advertising investment which is essential for their survival in the competitive world of news (Matthews & Al Habsi, 2018). News organisations were traditionally able to track their audience demographics through subscriptions or by employing market survey companies. But, in today's digital environment, it is not always easy to know who the audiences are. This section discusses more fully the concept that journalists are writing for particular targeted audiences, based on who they 'imagine', and how this significantly influences the choice of topics and the angles on stories.

### *3.4.1. Definition of imagined audience*

The concept of imagined audience has attracted the attention of a number of scholars for more than a century, such as James (1890), Goffman (1959), Schlenker (1980), Baldwin and Holmes (1987), Fridlund (1991), Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998), Hartley (2002), Harrison (2006) and Litt (2012). Litt (2012) defined the imagined audience as “a person’s mental conceptualization of the people with whom he or she is communicating” (p. 330). Imagined audience is used to define a group of people who are unspecified but share their same interests in media use. Imagining or “naming an audience usually involves homogenising it, ascribing to it certain characteristics, needs, desires and concerns” (Hartley, 2002, p. 11).

Differences in audience are likely to lead journalists to different angles on the same story or event. It is then necessary for journalists and news organisations to picture their audiences before framing their stories. Sissons (2006) took the example of a radio station which decided that “their typical listener was a 33-year-old female[; they] had a photo of such a woman in the studio and instructed all presenters to talk to her while they were on air” (p. 37). Based on the imagining of target audiences, journalists and news organisations find stories or angles on the same stories that their imagined audiences will be attracted to, and the ways the stories should be reported (Sissons, 2006).

Litt (2012) highlighted the point that the concepts of the imagined audience lay a base for journalists’ daily activities to produce media content. Their thoughts, decisions and practices relating to their stories are structured by their imagined audience. This idea shares Cottle’s (2000) thoughts, emphasising that the imagined audience directs journalists’ selection of particular news stories, angles, details and characters. Baldwin

and Holmes (1987) and Fridlund (1991) acknowledged the influence of the imagined audience on journalists' thoughts and behaviours.

The imagining of an audience, as a result, helps news organisations access and interact with a large number of audiences via their media products (Litt, 2012). An imagined audience is also assumed to contribute to popularising media products among the target audience in reality. Audience popularity, too, means increases in market share, which attracts sponsors and investment for private news organisations, and offers a competitive advantage for the public news organisations which helps build up their professional reputation and status. News organisations regularly update their market ratings (Cottle, 2000).

Hartley (2002) agreed with Cottle in highlighting that the construction of an imagined audience is for the sake of media organisations' aims, which are to draw in advertising deals and realise their publicly entrusted tasks. For a commercial media channel, audiences are the door to attracting advertising money. Meanwhile, public service channels care about audience numbers, as they assure the existence and development of the channel. The larger the audience they attract, the more successful their media products will be and the more money they will get. If news organisations and journalists shape an imagined audience which is different from the actual audience accessing their media products, they will fail to meet the demand, interests, preferences and expectations of those actual audiences. All this may result in a low viewership/readership, and falling market ratings and market shares (Litt, 2012).

Therefore, getting to know the audience through their viewing or reading habits and attitudes is essential. "Knowing the audiences' preferences helps news program-makers to make decisions about the feasibility of launching news initiatives and

changing the style of news presentation” (Harrison, 2006, p. 164). Hagen (1999) asserted that a transparent image of the audience assists journalists and programme producers with story content and topic, lessening their feelings of uncertainty in respect of what they are producing or writing about. Studies of audience reception, interpretation, experience, identification and use can provide useful information.

The important role of the imagined audience requires an understanding of the conditions for its formation (Litt, 2012), which is discussed in the following section.

#### *3.4.2. Factors affecting the form of imagined audience*

Imagined audiences are based on both macro-level factors, such as social norms, roles, and technological infrastructure, and micro-level factors, such as the background characteristics of journalists. These two levels of factors, according to Hagen (1999), are “complementary and mutually dependent” (p.133).

Regarding social factors, Litt (2012) assumed that social norms partially help define who could be one’s imagined audience. For example, official meetings, informal discussions, interviews about media content ideas and even research reports can give journalists ideas about their potential audience.

In the present media environment, technological tools contribute to providing and limiting cues about who is the actual audience to help journalists imagine their audience. “These forces influence the imagined audience by providing cues and cognitive shortcuts to help users, whether consciously or unconsciously, imagine their audience” (Litt, 2012, p. 335). For example, some websites encourage users to communicate by using their real names and information about themselves, and some social network sites target specific users. All of these help reflect actual potential audience and signal their target imagined audience to journalists. The audience

feedback can result from analytic tools or sites providing data on website visitors and comments left by online users (Litt, 2012). New technology, actively offering new platforms such as user-generated websites and social networks (blogs, Twitter, Facebook), plays a part in shaping new types of 'audience orientated' news (Deuze & Paulussen, 2002). With the assistance of new technology, journalists can engage in new interactions and exchanges with various audiences so as to have their own imagined audience (Matthews & Al Habsi, 2018).

Regarding individual factors, Hartley (2002) argued that "the audience is a construction motivated by the paradigm in which it is imagined" (p. 11). Journalists make selections of configurations of imagined audiences according to their own research and political priorities. Hagen (1999) added that the image that media professionals hold of the audience will be based on different types of experience and knowledge. Journalists develop their image of the audience within institutions and/or get information from outside sources such as companies that provide audience data. Conceptions of the audience held by producers and journalists are also often stereotypical, based on accidental meetings on the bus or train, or in their own canteen, or are based on their relatives or their neighbours.

Studies on the television industry have revealed that journalists draw on "their experiences with audiences from previous programs, their personal projections about who their audience is, and their knowledge of the industry they work in" to form their imagined audience for new programmes (Espinosa, 1982, p. 85). In his study, Gans (2004) found that professional journalists often list their supervisors as their imagined audience. And attracting the audience to their stories is not their goal; rather, the goal is "pacifying the people in charge of their careers: their bosses" (Litt, 2012, p. 338).

### 3.4.3. Recent studies of imagined news audiences

*Imagining* one's audience lays a base for news makers to think about, visualise and then produce their news stories in ways that may appeal to their readers – or, at least, attract their attention. Key ideas about news formation originate from the configurations of the imagined audience in conjunction with journalists' practices, news organisations' rules and social, political and cultural contexts (Cottle, 1993).

Matthews and Al Habsi (2018) also affirmed that forms of news or media products are shaped or differentiated in conformity with the different imaginings of audience which journalists use. These two scholars took *Al Jazeera* as a useful example of the application of imagined audience into a media organisation's news production process. The broadcaster from the beginning defined a different construction of the Arab audience as voiceless and oppressed in comparison with the other existing news programmes, leading to the production of its 'liberal commercial' news form. This reporting form purposefully goes against the existing 'traditional government-controlled' national reporting in the Arab region (Ayish, 2002). It also focuses and encourages the participation of different Arab politicians and ethnic and political views, which have never taken place in the work of other news producers in the Arab world (Matthews & Al Habsi, 2018). Specifically, journalists concentrate on reporting various important issues and presenting different opinions and voices as part of a unique effort to meet the 'cultural rights' that many Arab people are blocked from accessing. *Al Jazeera's* practices, which aim to report 'truths' that have no visibility in the Arab region (Krichen, 2006), also purposefully differ from local journalists' existing perspectives, the dominance of government policies and the media agendas of western democratic countries which have historically been rooted in the Arab region. To realise its goals, *Al Jazeera* developed an imagined audience representing

oppressed peoples in the Arab world. The news organisation cares greatly about and highlights the prominent characteristics of the Arab audience: “a heterogeneous character and origins, a common mindset and a general voicelessness” (Matthews & Al Habsi, 2018). The imagining of an audience initially determined the operation of *Al Jazeera*, its core ideas about what issues are relevant or draw their audience’s interest, and the requirements for reported events (Matthews & Al Habsi, 2018). In an earlier study on the BBC children’s news programme “Newsround” Matthews (2008) indicated how it was carefully constructed with the audience in mind and pitched the news quite differently from adult news programmes. For example, when the news piece was about the Wimbledon tennis tournament, news workers found something relevant to their audience of children such as a young Wimbledon player or introduced children’s voices into the programme.

Harrison (2000) conducted a study on imagined audience with Fox News as his case study. According to the study, the story selection and editing of Fox turned stories into something “more palatable to right-of-centre tastes” (Harrison, 2000, p. 164)

Meanwhile, Cottle (2000) found that Japanese journalists include “imagined audiences” in their decisions about particular news forms. Top correspondents, reporters, editors and news desk staff inscribe audience considerations in the processes of story framing, and the selection of visuals, actors and contexts. The consideration of audiences is put into discussions on communication strategies. Audience considerations are evidenced as having an important place in the minds of news producers (Cottle, 2000).

Studies by Born (2004) and Harrison (2006) also show that the imagined audience plays an important role in the development strategies of news organisations. Some

broadcasting organisations are utilising the imaginings of audience as a tool to deal with the economic and technological changes directly affecting them. Audience needs and preferences are being utilised in revising the content and style of their news to boost their market positions (Matthews & Al Habsi, 2018).

Writers' imagining of their audiences shapes not only the operations of news organizations, genres, presentations and content of stories but also a new form of journalism: online journalism is a predominantly technology-driven, audience-oriented and service-minded branch of today's media sphere (Deuze & Paulussen, 2002).

### 3.5. Levels of agenda-setting

The three different levels of agenda-setting emerged over time from 1968 through to 2012. After McCombs and Shaw's 1968 Chapel Hill study, numerous researchers worldwide have investigated the two first levels of agenda-setting effects – namely object agenda-setting and attribute agenda setting (Guo et al., 2012, p. 54). The third level – network agenda setting – is the newest approach to be developed, as recently as 2012. In the following sections, each level of agenda-setting is briefly described.

The intellectual father of agenda-setting, Walter Lippmann proposed the concept of "pictures in our heads" in his book, *Public Opinion*. In his terms, the first level of agenda-setting answers the question: "What are the pictures about?" The second level of agenda-setting answers the question: "What are the dominant characteristics of these pictures?" And the third level answers the question: "How do the characteristics of these pictures connect to each other?"

According to McCombs et al. (2014), the effects of the media agenda regarding the salience of objects on the public agenda is the first level of agenda setting. Meanwhile, the effects of the media agenda on the public agenda regarding the attribute salience

of these objects is the second level of agenda setting. Network agenda-setting, the impact of the networked media agenda of objects or attributes on the networked public agenda of object or attribute salience, is the third level of agenda setting (McCombs et al., 2014). In fact, objects, their attributes and the attributes of the attributes interact with each other and connect together, although these links are not easy to recognise in stories on mass media, in conversations or even in the public's thoughts and opinions. These sets of relationships among elements of the media and public agendas lie at the centre of the third level of agenda-setting. Nonetheless, they used to be mentioned as separate elements of the agenda-setting process in both theory and analysis (McCombs et al., 2014).

#### *3.5.1. First level of agenda setting: Object agenda-setting*

Reflecting on Lippmann's notion of "pictures in our heads" mentioned earlier, the first level of agenda-setting answers the question: "What are the pictures about?" According to McCombs et al. (2014, p. 782), the effects of the media agenda on the public agenda regarding the salience of objects is the first level of agenda-setting, or object agenda-setting. It was introduced and tested in the 1968 Chapel Hill study by McCombs and Shaw (1972), where they suggested that there is a correlation between the media agenda and the public agenda. McCombs (2004) asserted that "The influence of the media agenda of objects on the public agenda is the first level of agenda-setting effects" (p. 70).

McCombs (2004) defined the 'object' as "that thing towards which our attention is directed or the thing towards which our attention is directed or the thing about which we have an attitude or opinion" (p. 69). Objects on the media and public agenda used to be considered just to be public issues. However, in fact, the types of objects are

various and limitless. Nonetheless, objects can set agendas in the mass media and their saliences are then transferred to the public. The transmission of the salience of objects from the media agenda to the public agenda is the centre of the first level of agenda-setting (McCombs, 2004).

### *3.5.2. Second level of agenda-setting: Saliency of attributes*

The second level of agenda-setting answers the question: “What are the dominant characteristics of these pictures?” Here, agenda-setting plays a powerful role in selecting not only objects for attention but also attributes for characterising those objects. Central to the second level of agenda-setting, therefore, is the transmission of attribute salience, whereby the salient attributes of an object change over time (McCombs, 2004).

Like an agenda of objects can be defined by the frequency of their appearance in the media and in public, there is also an agenda of attributes for each object based on their frequency of appearance. The attributes on each agenda are rank-ordered, based on this frequency. These ranks are used to measure the correlation between the media agenda and public agenda (Guo et al., 2012). “The correspondence between the media agenda of attributes for an object and the public’ attribute agenda for that object is the second level of agenda-setting effects” (Guo et al., 2012, p. 53). The correlation between the media attribute agenda and the public attribute agenda describes the strength of the agenda-setting effects.

Attribute agenda-setting was investigated during the 1976 US presidential election by Weaver et al. (year). The study presented evidence that increased media emphasis on certain attributes of each subject over time results in the increased salience of these attributes. Each object on the agenda has numerous attributes that describe its

characteristics and traits (McCombs & Estrada, 1997). But the media and the public normally focus on certain attributes of various objects when discussing them. For example, the attributes of the Iraq War in news coverage and in people's conversations included military operations, international public opinion, and domestic political support or opposition. Or, in a national election campaign, economics is usually considered to be a key issue mentioned by candidates, and the attributes of this object normally include budget balance, financial deficit, national debt or interest rates (Severin & Tankard, 2001).

The difference between the first level – object agenda-setting – and the second level – attribute agenda-setting – lies in their focus. The focus of the first level is on drawing attention to certain objects while the focus of the second level is on improving comprehension of those objects (McCombs, 2004, p. 70). “Explicit attention to the second level of agenda-setting further suggests that the media not only tell us what to think about, but that they also tell us how to think about some objects” and evaluate their merits (McCombs, 2004, p. 71). Attention shifts to attribute agenda-setting as an additional influence where “the concern is literally with the pictures in our heads” (McCombs, 2004, p. 72). The use of the selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration of particular attributes is applied in attribute agenda-setting to provide context so that audiences can acknowledge what the picture of an object is (McCombs, 2004). When a particular attribute of an object is emphasised on the media agenda, there may be a direct impact on the salience of that object among the public. Certain ways of describing an object may be more compelling than other ways in creating object salience among the public (McCombs, 2004).

### 3.5.3. Third level of agenda-setting: Network agenda-setting

The third level of agenda-setting answers the question: “How do the characteristics of these pictures connect to each other?” Referred to as network agenda-setting, this most recent level to be developed by agenda-setting theorists has emerged since 2012. McCombs (2004) interpreted Lippmann’s concept of “pictures in our head” by referring to the news media as “our windows to the vast world beyond direct experience, determin[ing] our *cognitive maps* of that world” (p. 5).” But Guo (2013) more recently expanded on this, stating that “The world is networked. So is the human mind” (p. 112). Therefore, to talk of network agenda-setting suggests that “individuals’ cognitive representation of objects and attributes is presented as a network-like structure where any particular node will be connected to numerous other nodes” (Guo et al., 2012, p. 55).

To demonstrate the difference between this and the other agenda-setting levels, we can think about when a person talks about a political candidate, he or she depends on the orders of attributes ranked by their importance to describe the candidate. This means that a human’s cognitive representation mainly runs in a linear model. But, with the concept of third-level agenda-setting, to describe a political candidate, a person constructs a network-shaped picture composed of various attributes which are connected to each other in his or her mind (Guo et al., 2012). During the 2008 presidential election campaign, for example, voters made a link between Barack Obama’s racial identity and his policies to care about people of colour. According to Campo-Flores (2010), a poll hosted by *The New York Times* in 2010 then showed that more than two-thirds of respondents said illegal immigrants were the cause of the weakening economy, while others argued that a struggling economy needs immigrants. These replies suggested that a human’s cognitive representation stores

numerous associative networks, including interlinked objects, such as the economy and immigration, and interconnected attributes, such as political candidates' origins, personality and key policies. "The question is how these networks are built in our minds" (Guo, 2013, p. 112).

The network agenda-setting model is concerned with how the news media "can actually bundle different objects and attributes and make these bundles of elements salient in the public's mind simultaneously" (Guo et al., 2012, p. 55). In other words, the more likely it is that the news media mention two elements in tandem, the more likely it is that the audience will perceive these two elements as interconnected.

Based on the information-processing model, the network agenda-setting model suggests that news media are likely to create the connections among agendas, thereby forming the central positions for certain agenda elements in the public's mind. As salience or retrievability can be defined as the centrality of an attribute on the public agenda, it is the news media that are able to connect new information with the audience's existing associative network memory and firm up the connections by "frequently activating pairs of constructs in tandem" (Guo et al., 2012, p. 56). Therefore, the news media are likely to construct new nodes on a network or control the strength of the existing relationships among different constructs to shape and reshape the audience's associative memory network. "The salience of the interrelationships among constructs – or the associative network regarding a certain topic – can be transferred from the media agenda to the public agenda" (Guo et al., 2012, p. 57).

The more recent studies on network agenda-setting have been conducted since 2011. Two of the studies focused on topics relating to the characterisation of politicians in

Austin, Texas. In the first study, Guo and McCombs (2011) compared the content analysis of news stories with data collected from random telephone interviews with local people asking them to list the attributes they associated with the politicians. In the second study a similar comparison was conducted, though the data collected from participants involved a mind-mapping exercise and participants were asked to fill in the top five apparent descriptions of each of the two political candidates' qualifications and character. The respondents then drew links among each pair of attributes if they thought there were any connections (Guo et al., 2012). The results of the network analysis for both these studies indicated a significant correlation between the media and public agenda networks, thereby supporting the network agenda-setting theory.

A third study was conducted on the content analysis data collected by the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) and public survey data collected by Gallup. The study examined relationships between the media agenda, measured in a content analysis of the top major issue categories (economy, health, wars, politics, national security, social disorder, education, environment and immigration) covered in the news, and the public agenda measured in 36 Gallup polls over three years: 2009, 2010, and 2011 (Guo et al., 2012). The more frequently any two issue categories co-occurred in the PEJ's weekly reports or the polls, the stronger their relationship. The results demonstrated significant relationships between the public network agendas and the media network agendas in all three years. The salience of network relationships in the news media can be transferred to the public's mind (Guo et al., 2012).

These three studies suggest the validity of the network agenda-setting model for analysing the elements that define the media agenda and the public agenda, and demonstrate how this new model moves beyond the traditional approaches to

agenda-setting theory in which “the audience perceives news agenda elements in a linear logical fashion and objects and attributes are transferred separately.” Instead, “the news media have the capability to construct a more integrated picture of the outside world to people’s heads,” which moves a step closer to Walter Lippmann’s (1922) picture metaphor (Guo, 2013, p. 129). But what of agenda-setting theory when it is applied to looking at a country’s reputation?

### **3.6. Relationships between media agenda-setting and country reputation**

A number of studies have already indicated the existence of a strong relationship between media agenda-setting and country reputation. Various researchers, including McNelly and Izcaray (1986), Salwen and Matera (1992), Semetko, Brzinski, Weaver, and Willnat (1992), and Wanta, Golan, and Lee (2004), found that international media coverage exerts agenda-setting impacts on public opinion of foreign nations. Specifically, McNelly and Izcaray (1986) asserted that a foreign country’s positive or negative image in the US media can have a considerable influence on public attitudes toward that country.

A study by Salwen and Matera (1992) found correlations between foreign news coverage and public opinion, and concluded that international news coverage does indeed have an agenda-setting effect. According to the study, a content analysis of the international stories in the print and broadcast media available in Dade County, Florida, in the US, was carried out. The media outlets, including the three evening network news broadcasts ABC, CBS and NBC, the national edition of *The New York Times*, and the daily *Miami Herald* were analysed for a nine-week period (February 27 – May 1, 1989). International stories, which were defined as stories mainly about events in or about foreign nations, were examined. These stories may have involved

the US, but at least one other foreign nation had to be included. When the content analysis concluded, a survey began with 629 residents in Dade County interviewed via phone. Respondents were asked four questions: which country they believed is America's best friend, America's worst enemy, the most reported foreign nation in the news media, and the most dangerous country in which to live. This study was intended "to link how foreign nations were reported in the news media with how the nations were subsequently evaluated by the public" (Salwen & Matera, 1992, p. 627).

After analysing the content of US television news within a six-month period, Semetko et al. (1992) found that there is a strong relationship between the visibility of foreign countries in the media and public opinion. In a larger scale study, Wanta and his colleagues (2004) examined whether US news coverage of foreign nations can influence public perceptions of other nations, and whether the tonality (positive or negative) in news reports causes any impacts on evaluations of the countries. They found that the increased negative coverage of a nation results in more negative attitudes toward the country (Wanta et al., 2004).

More recently, some studies involving a triangulation of media, public opinion, and US foreign policy have proved that there are connections between the salience of foreign affairs in the media and in public opinion. For example, Kioussis and Wu (2008) found that media coverage was correlated with US public attitudes toward foreign countries. The US public forms greater negative perceptions of a country due to increased negative media coverage.

More recently, another empirical study on the triangular relationship between media agenda-setting, country reputation (the public agenda about a country) and the policy agenda (Zhang & Meadows, 2012). This study found that the salience of foreign

countries in the media leads to an increased perceived importance of those countries among the US public. In addition, there is a strong positive relationship between salience of the countries in media coverage and in presidential public papers. Regarding second-level agenda-setting effects, a correlation exists among the negative tone in news coverage, presidential public papers, and public opinion. However, the study could not find any correlation with positive tone among these agendas. This result is similar to previous research, which showed the lack of evidence of impacts on public opinion from positive media coverage. This means that the influence of bad news on public opinion is strongly tested and proved while the effects of good news remain an open door to more research (Zhang & Meadows, 2012).

Based on the limitations of time and space, news gatekeepers often select some nations as more newsworthy than other nations (Golan, 2006). For decades, researchers have pointed out a lack of balance in news flow and coverage (Masmoudi, 1979) because a select number of nations are consistently covered while most other nations receive limited to no coverage (Chang, 1998). However, what is deemed to be 'newsworthy' is an important consideration.

According to Wu (1998), there have been more than 50 studies into the determinants of international news coverage conducted during the past few decades. Several determinants of international news coverage include deviance (Shoemaker et al., 1986), relevance (Chang, Shoemaker, & Brendlinger, 1987), cultural affinity (Hester, 1973), and location in the hierarchy of nations (Chang, 1998) or the world system (Kim & Barnett, 1996).

Besides these determinants, Golan (2006) suggested that inter-media agenda-setting (involving the relationships between media organisations) might have some degree of

influence on the likelihood of international news coverage. Golan's (2006) study indicated that the majority of international news stories in both the network news (ABC and CBS) and *The New York Times* focused on a relatively small number of nations. This means that a limited number of nations are identified as more newsworthy than all other nations in the world combined. The study also showed that the international news agendas of all three networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) were very similar to the news agendas of *The New York Times*. *The New York Times* is published in the morning and the television broadcasts during the evening so *The New York Times'* coverage somehow influences network coverage of international affairs.

### **3.7. Media agenda-setting theory in the Internet age**

Since the first Chapel Hill study by McCombs finding that the issues emphasised in news coverage become prominent in the public agenda, hundreds of studies in different settings (elections, public affairs, education, etc), conducted not only in the US, but also in Europe, Asia, Latin America and Australia, have obtained the same finding. These studies on agenda-setting effects go further on the conditions and the stages of public attention for the transfer of the salience of issues from the media agenda to the public agenda. Furthermore, these studies range from traditional news media types (print, radio and broadcasting) to the new media (online newspapers and social networks) (McCombs, 2005).

The development of the Internet, which facilitates the formation of social media networks and digital connections between people and the world has triggered significant challenges for agenda-setting theory, as it has been changing the information update channels and communication methods used by people around world. In the present media environment, there are many agendas available to the

public virtually: online newspapers, chat rooms, social networks, websites and even emails, “representing every ideological, commercial and personal niche” (McCombs, 2005, p.544). This means that individuals not only rely on mainstream media for information updates but also various other agendas, built up from unaccountable online news and information. This shift from mass broadcasting to large audiences toward niche media reaching more narrowly targeted and attentive audiences is commonly referred to as audience fragmentation, and is threatening the long-held ability of the mass media to shape the public agenda. This fragmentation occurs when audiences narrow their focus on specific content and do not attend to other messages (Tewksbury, 2005). It is assumed to occur as a result of technologies that “allow and even encourage people to narrow the focus of their media consumption to pursue their individualized interests and needs” (Tewksbury, 2005, p. 332).

The growing number of people who report getting their news through social media is a typical example (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). A 2020 survey by the Pew Research Center found that two-thirds of US adults say they get news at least sometimes from news websites or apps (68%), or search engines such as Google (65%). About half (53%) say they get news from social media. Thus, agenda-setting is predicted to come to an end by many social observers, according to McCombs (2005). These observers assume that public attention is affected and scattered by the diversity of agendas and that the public agenda is hard to synchronise with the mainstream media agenda. However, without preliminary data, these assumptions are arguable (McCombs, 2005).

The key reason for this assumption is that the current situation is totally different from the past when the public had only one channel of news media for updating their information. For example, the Chapel Hill study showed that there was a high

correlation (0.71) in the focus of nine news media, the main sources of information about the presidential election, and the prominent attention of undecided voters. Over the years, other agenda-setting studies found similar patterns of homogeneity among the news media. This high degree of similarity existed despite the diversity of these news media.

There is a hypothesis that many people use the Internet for news, information and commentary by surfing various websites. People's attention is no longer directed to focus on some specific issues by mainstream media (Trigueros & Lacasa-Mas, 2018). However, according to McCombs, in an interview with Trigueros and Lacasa-Mas (2018), "the new media are part of the overall media. If the new media are reasonably within the mainstream, they are applying essentially the same values" (p. 65). McCombs used a metaphor of windows to illustrate his opinion, that "they are all looking out the same window, and they more or less see the same thing" (Trigueros & Lacasa-Mas, 2018, p. 65). Moreover, people, especially journalists, also tend to look around to see what other journalists are writing about. Furthermore, there is evidence produced by James Hamilton (2004) that the five largest American newspapers, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and *The Washington Post*, account for 21.5% of the circulation among the top 100 daily newspapers, while the top five newspaper websites, which include three of those newspapers, *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*, in addition to *The Detroit News* and *The Seattle Times*, make up 41.4% of the total links to the top 100 newspapers found on the Internet. Attention on the Web is even more concentrated than in the print. The same finding is also observed in cable television, where most people have access to dozens and dozens of channels, but concentrate

their attention on a very small number of them.

There is another hypothesis which suggests that there is a greater variety of agendas set on the Internet that are influencing people than in traditional news media. Jason Yu (2005) compared three different pairs of online news sources: *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* representing online newspapers, CNN and MSNBC representing online television, and Yahoo News and Google News representing online news services. Comparing their issue agendas across two weeks during 2004, he found a pattern of homogeneity. For all news on the opening page of the sites, the correlations ranged from 0.51 to 0.94, with a median correlation of 0.77. Limiting the comparisons to the top three news stories on these sites during that two-week period yielded similar correlations, a range of 0.53 to 0.99 with a median of 0.82. The basic agenda-setting effects of the news media continue in much the same fashion as in previous decades (Yu, 2005). Most of the widely-accessed news sites are online versions of traditional media (newspapers, magazines, television and radio). The agendas of online sites show considerable resemblance to each other, and match the agendas of traditional news media (McCombs, 2005).

Besides, the Internet, particularly social media, has facilitated mainstream media agenda-setting effects. The social sharing of information through social media might help to offset some of the consequences of audience fragmentation, and informational selectivity in particular, and therefore help to distribute the mass media agenda to the broader public (Feezell, 2018). Social media may not only enable incidental exposure to political information, but additionally provide a forum through which politically interested people can easily share information among a perhaps less-interested public. The digital sharing of political information, therefore, is similar to the two-step flow of

communication that Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) described in the broadcast era: mass media produce information, opinion leaders share it by posting links on social media, and less attentive citizens enjoy low-cost information shared by the opinion leaders in their social networks. In this way, social media platforms may help to disseminate the mass media agenda to a broader audience through online opinion leaders and incidental exposure, just as opinion leaders did in person before the Internet. The psychological explanation for the transfer of issue salience from the media to the public agenda can be found in one's NFO (Matthes, 2006; McCombs, 2004; McCombs et al., 2014; Weaver, 1977).

Sharing the same idea with the findings of Feezell (2018), Roland Schatz (personal communication, April 10, 2018), the founder of Media Tenor, has also asserted that those who criticise this view should share the data proving that social media has replaced the opinion-leading media. These data do not exist on a general basis, only here and there, with anecdotal proof.

The existence of social media would not replace the agenda-setting theory, as it would only exchange old opinion-leading media which have lost the agenda-setting function with new ones. But people remain social animals who base their opinion-building process on a few sources from which they take their information – no matter if this is TV, radio, newspapers or online sources. Research shows that, even among online sources, people prefer going to media versions online rather than other sources (personal communication, April 10, 2018). The growth of social media helps in “as much as a lot of people are left out of the conversation”, according to McCombs in the interview with Trigueros and Lacasa-Mas (2018, p. 67).

### 3.8. Limitations of agenda-setting theory

In spite of contributing to communications and policy studies, agenda-setting theory faces some critiques of its limitations, according to Manning (2001), Gooch (1996) and Adams et al. (2014).

Manning (2001) claimed that agenda-setting scholars such as McCombs and Dearing only conduct quantitative studies to prove their hypotheses on the influences of media on public opinions. These studies are not sufficient enough to evidence that audiences' judgements or opinions are influenced by the agenda set by the media. He explained that these quantitative studies generally use large accumulated categories, such as economy, defence or environment, but "to explore the cognitive processes through which news audiences make sense of and analyse the news world around them, a finer, more nuanced set of categories should be considered" (Manning, 2001, p. 216). In other words, when the public thinks about political or social issues, makes some judgements or draws inferences about the implications of a media-defined problem for their own lives, it is impossible for them to just sit somewhere and decide whether economy should be ranked higher than environment and defence. This kind of situation rarely happens. So, most quantitative agenda-setting studies which have categorised lists of issues and required respondents to rank them are not employed a sufficient method to understand the ways in which audiences process information in the media and think about the news. According to Manning, it is necessary to conduct "a finer, more sensitive and detailed, analysis" exploring the ways in which audiences actually construct their interpretative frameworks, instead of an analysis based "on large samples of public opinion and mounds of content analysis" (Manning, 2001, p. 216).

Gooch (1996), too, has added some criticism, suggesting that studies of agenda setting fail to answer crucial questions on factors that encourage particular sections of the news audience to rely more heavily upon the news for some issues but not others, or the extent to which a news issue inserts itself into people's daily lives and makes a difference. Meanwhile, Adams et al. (2014) do not accept this theory as a critical knowledge because it fails to explain ideologies within it, but investigates one specific truth of the communication process.

In response to the criticism of Manning (2001), Gooch (1996) and Adams et al. (2014) and the failure to address other factors such as audience interpretation or the effects of agenda-setting in a wider context, my study adopts both quantitative and qualitative methodologies which are discussed in the next chapter on my study design.

According to Takeshita (2005), there are three current and critical problems that agenda-setting research has been facing recently: the problems of *process*, *identity*, and *environment*. These problems are critical because each has implications that might call into question the value of agenda-setting theory. The *process* problem concerns the nature of the agenda-setting process, specifically, the degree to which the agenda-setting process is automatic and unthinking. The *identity* problem asks whether the concept of attribute agenda-setting will become indistinguishable from framing or traditional persuasion research. The *environment* problem asks if the development of communication technology and the subsequent growth in the number and variety of news outlets will minimise the impact of media agenda-setting at the social level, leading to a fragmentation of the public agenda.

### 3.9. Conclusion

This chapter focused on discussing the origins of agenda-setting theory in communications research and the definitions of the term agenda-setting. According to that analysis, the agenda-setting process means the salience of an issue changes on the media agenda, the public agenda and then the policy agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). The reason for the existence of agenda-setting is also analysed in the chapter. In the world, a country or even a small location, many events and situations take place at the same time. There are not enough journalists to cover all of these events and when it comes to hard copy publications or broadcast programmes, space and time are limited.

In consideration of the role of the media in setting the news and public agenda, and how this relates to a country's reputation, the chapter discussed the importance of journalists writing stories with a particular audience in mind. Based on the perceptions of imagined audiences, journalists frame their stories and set the agenda.

The chapter then looked into methodological approaches to agenda-setting investigations and factors affecting the agenda-setting process of mainstream media. The factors come from both mainstream media and audiences, ranging from journalism practices and mainstream media subsidisation forces to NFO, exposure to mainstream media and the personal characteristics of audiences.

Following these sections, the levels of agenda-setting, namely object agenda-setting, attribute agenda-setting and network agenda setting, were discussed. The chapter finally presented some of the most recent agenda-setting studies, analysed agenda-setting theory in the Internet age coupled with some discussions of the limitations of the theory.

Discussions on the relationships between agenda setting and country reputation made in this chapter now lead to the methodology chapter, Chapter 4, where I discuss my application of agenda-setting using mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis based on the critique of agenda-setting research and its solely quantitative focus.

## CHAPTER 4

# RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

### Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological criteria and tools used for the empirical part of this thesis, to help answer two main research questions:

**What do foreign mainstream media cover in relation to Vietnam?**

**How does their agenda-setting relate to Vietnam's reputation?**

First, the chapter justifies the methodological approach selected to investigate media agenda-setting in the case of Vietnam and the decision to investigate news media content. The choice of a comparative study of news media content about Vietnam and public opinion of the country over specific time periods is justified by drawing on the previous methods used in agenda-setting studies and the media image, and social and economic features of Vietnam.

Following this, the chapter delves into each of the steps of the method used to conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis. In the first phase, quantitative content data analysis of foreign media coverage on Vietnam is discussed, coupled with the data regarding audience opinions of the country. The comparison of these two types of data, mirroring an approach conducted by McCombs and Shaw (1972), Weaver (2008) and many other scholars, aims to identify any relationship between foreign media coverage and public perception of Vietnam. In addressing criticism of the limitations of agenda-setting analysis, this study also incorporates qualitative analysis (as a second phase) of: first, a selection of media stories to examine how journalists frame topics; and, second, a thematic analysis of interviews conducted with key embassy staff and their perceptions of Vietnam. The framing analysis of media texts and the thematic

analysis of in-depth interviews with trade experts from foreign embassies in Vietnam and a non-government organisation provided more depth to my investigations of the relationship between foreign media coverage and public perception of a country. Framing analysis promoted an understanding of how stories were structured and what journalists aimed to achieve in their stories (Scheufele, 2000). In-depth interviews with foreign trade experts from selected embassies in Vietnam and a non-government organisation were employed to gather data on individuals' personal opinions and experiences (Patton, 2002) of the media.

Previously, in Chapters 2 and 3, I have discussed how the media set an agenda on the public and how the media agenda-setting might influence public opinion, decisions and behaviour (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990; Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Funkhouser, 1973; Iyengar et al., 1982; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948; McCombs, 1976, 2004; Perse, 2001) and the link between media agenda-setting and a country's reputation, i.e., foreigners' comprehensive perceptions of a country (McNelly & Izcaray, 1986; Salwen & Matera, 1992; Semetko et al., 1992; Wanta et al., 2004). I then outlined how this relationship has remained under-explored, and discussed the limitations of previous media agenda-setting studies, which have proposed the process of agenda-setting as the transfer of salience from the media to the public, but have yet to explain how this occurs.

I argued for the necessity of investigating the relationship between foreign media coverage and a country's reputation from a broader perspective, one not limited to the US or US media, but taken from many countries with different interests. It is necessary, too, when a study of this nature is specifically in relation to a country such as Vietnam which is getting enough attention from foreign media and is in a stable position in terms of global politics, economy and tourism. I have also argued that such

a research objective requires a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses, with a suitable set of analytical tools including quantitative media content analysis, framing analysis and in-depth interviews.

#### **4.1. Rationale for a comparative study and Vietnam as a case study**

The broad aim of the empirical part of this thesis was to see how international media represented Vietnam and how the media coverage related to the country's reputation by applying the theory of agenda setting. As discussed in Chapter 2, Vietnam has achieved remarkable developments and gained a stable position in the world in terms of economy, investment, tourism and politics (World Bank, 2017), so I was interested to find out how foreign media responded to these changes. Vietnam was also within the awareness threshold of the world public, ranked 15<sup>th</sup> most covered Asian country by the world mainstream media (Media Tenor, 2017). Despite its relationships with traditional partners, however, Vietnam had yet to gain success in improving trading and tourism relationships with new partners (World Bank, 2017). Vietnam was chosen as a case study in the research because it meets the two conditions for a research country set out by Roland Schatz (2012). The first condition is that a country surpasses an awareness threshold, whereby at least five media stories about it appear on a daily basis every month. This marks a minimum level of activity from which the public can form perceptions about that country. In other words, only when the country gets enough international coverage does its media image form. The second condition is that the country does not possess world-wide popular brands and is not influential in world politics and economy like countries such as the US, UK, China, Japan or Singapore. This is to ensure that the public are not familiar themselves with the country, but that they mainly access the image of the country via mainstream media.

This case study was intended to contribute to the investigation of agenda-setting so a comparative approach was applied. As the approach most widely-used by media researchers in agenda-setting (Wu & Coleman, 2009), a comparative approach to examining the relationship between foreign media coverage and a country's reputation allowed their differences and similarities or correlations to emerge (Funkhouser, 1973; McCombs, 1976; Severin & Tankard, 2000). Specifically, this comparative approach consisted of two parts: a content analysis of news and a public opinion survey (Wu & Coleman, 2009). The comparative approach followed that used by the hundreds of other empirical studies investigating different dimensions of agenda-setting effects (McCombs, 2005) which emerged following the seminal study of agenda-setting by McCombs and Shaw (1972). These two scholars used the open-ended question: *"What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?"*, originating from Gallup Poll in the 1930s and well-established in public opinion research (Barbosa e Silva, 2008). Participants' responses to this question were then compared with the mainstream media content to explore the correlation. According to McCombs (2005), this type of comparative study is the most suitable and commonly-used tool in the agenda-setting scholarship, studying how media coverage relates to public perception of some issue, topic, person or place. Neither statistical analysis, nor correlation analysis, are considered suitable in my research for the following reasons. According to Brooks (2022, para. 3), statistical analysis is "the process of collecting and analyzing data to identify patterns and trends". As the time period for analysis in my research is four years, I did not feel that this provided sufficient time enough to identify any significant patterns and this was not an objective for this research. Janse et al. (2021) suggest that correlation analysis is used to quantify the degree to which two variables are related and how much one variable changes

when the other does. Again this was not the focus of my research which was an investigation into identifying any relationship between the two data sets of media coverage analysis and CBI, not the strength of their relationship.

## **4.2. Research methods: Quantitative analysis of media content – Framing analysis – In-depth interviews**

In the following sub-sections, I first lay out the agenda-setting study framework for the quantitative analysis. This involved the content analysis of foreign media stories about Vietnam between 2012 and 2015, which was then compared with a public opinion poll that covers the same time frame. That sub-section is followed by discussion of the qualitative analysis that I conducted in the textual analysis of media texts using framing analysis, and a thematic analysis of interviews with key personnel in foreign embassies.

### *4.2.1. Quantitative analysis – Comparison of content analysis of news database with public opinion survey about Vietnam*

Content analysis provided a numerical description of the content of a media text over time (Berelson, 1952) and offered a prediction of the effects of the text or the trends in media content (Rose et al., 2015). As this approach promoted perspectives on a protagonist, it was considered the most useful tool for a comparative study of foreign media coverage of Vietnam and the public perceptions of the country. As outlined earlier in this chapter, a comparative study is the best way to let similarities (and differences) emerge. Content analysis, in this sense, is the methodological tool used to reach this aim. In particular, a numerical description of media content (Gunter, 2000) makes it possible to investigate how Vietnam is generally represented in foreign media and is then compared with CBI – a comprehensive data set on the public's perceptions about various countries (including Vietnam) to explore whether there is any

relationship between foreign media representations of Vietnam and foreign public perceptions of the country.

Among the quantitative analysis methods available in media research, content analysis, used by media researchers since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was employed in this study as a research technique for “the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). There were four reasons for using content analysis to investigate the first research question, which asks what foreign media was reporting about Vietnam.

Firstly, content analysis enhanced the balance, objectivity and validity of the results. This analysis provided a systematic, numerical description of the written, spoken or visual content from three main platforms of mainstream media texts: print (newspapers, magazines), television and radio (Berelson, 1952).

Secondly, content analysis offered the ability to investigate both the content and the format of a text: what was being reported and how it was reported (Schreier, 2012). Further, content analysis gives structure to open-ended and less structured text data (Rose et al., 2015). This method allowed the coding of text data into sub-categories which were then described via statistics (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Furthermore, quantitative content analysis was applied to investigate both the explicit and the implicit content of each text (Berelson, 1952; Schreier, 2012). Explicit content includes the visible and countable elements of the message while implicit content is what lies in between words and needs analysing in terms of the whole context. More specifically, explicit content depends on the presence and value of clearly judgemental or evaluative language (e.g., good, bad, ominous, brilliant); meanwhile, implicit content should not be considered in the root definition of a given term, but the context of real

situations. With this method, it was possible a look at the comprehensive and broad description of media content.

Thirdly, the goals and intentions of media producers and the possible impacts of media on audiences' opinions and actions could also be detected via content analysis (Berelson, 1952).

Fourthly, content media analysis, conducted with the assistance of a computer and coding books, promoted the balance and objectivity of the results. Meanwhile, some other popular approaches in media research unavoidably deliver biased results (Gunter, 2000).

The data resulting from the content media analysis was compared to the CBI. This index resulted from surveys asking thousands of people about countries world-wide, including Vietnam, in terms of general situation, social order, stability, economy, life value, culture and tourism. The survey is the most popular approach when researchers intend to collect public opinions about some issue (Gunter, 2000). The CBI was explained in more detail in section 2.4.

#### *4.2.2. Qualitative analysis – Framing analysis and in-depth interviews*

Framing analysis and in-depth interviews, as qualitative media analysis approaches, are also used in this thesis to provide more depth to the research and support the investigations of the research question – by which means the similarities (or relationships) between foreign media coverage and public perceptions of Vietnam emerge.

Due to its popularity, framing analysis has been widely used in media studies (della Porta, 2014). Framing analysis is applied to understand how stories are structured (Scheufele, 2000). It looks into frame packages (including a core frame, framing devices

and reasoning devices), to identify how authors, by creating particular vocabularies, using particular sources and arranging the details, form their articles to influence public opinion (Winslow, 2018). The core frame is “the implicit cultural phenomenon that defines the package as a whole” (Van Gorp & Van de Goot, 2012, p. 131), such as a value or an archetype. And the frame manifests itself in media content through various framing devices, such as word choice, metaphors, exemplars, descriptions, arguments, or visual images, all of which contribute to the rhetorical structure of a message (Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Reasoning devices form a route to causal reasoning (Van Gorp & Vercruyssen, 2012).

Beside framing analysis, there are many types of text analysis, such as textual analysis or discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is “concerned with the ways in which language constructs and mediates social and psychological realities” (Willig, 2013, p.341). Discourse analysts pay particular attention to the impacts of the choice of words used to describe an issue. They mainly focus on the properties of language. The process of discourse analysis consists of the investigation of texts to explore the ways in which objects or subjects are introduced, spoken about or written about, and which “shape the sense that can be made of the world and our experience of it” (Willig, 2013, p. 341). That is to say, discourse analysis focuses on the authors’ word choices in texts intended to influence audiences’ views.

Meanwhile, textual analysis views texts in terms of the relationship of texts different cultures to understand the power of texts in these cultures. It is a methodology for researchers to gather information about how people in different contexts get to know about the world. The researchers analyse texts such as films, magazines, television programmes or advertisements to examine the ways in which the people of particular

cultures at particular points in time learn about the world or their surrounding environment. Textual analysis is popular in such fields as culture, media and mainstream communication, and even sociology and philosophy (McKee, 2003).

Framing analysis was applied in this study as it was the most suitable approach for analysing not only word choices, but also the structures of stories, choices of information sources and main characters. There are various approaches to framing analysis: quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods approaches, and descriptive and interpretive approaches. In this thesis, the choice has been given to a qualitative and interpretive approach to framing.

Framing, as a process of selecting, emphasising and presenting specific aspects of an issue (Entman, 1993), was analysed in this study to investigate how stories about Vietnam were initiated and structured and how the aims of authors affect the reported issues and set the media agenda. This approach recognises that “A frame can affect an individual by stressing certain aspects of reality and pushing others into the background—it has a selective function. In this way, certain issue attributes, judgments, and decisions are suggested” (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2012, p. 186). According to della Porta (2014), framing analysis is used in media research to discover how ideas are interpreted and presented in the media through which the world is perceived by audiences. Framing analysis investigates how objects, people or topics are framed in stories in the media, and the goals of or under-layered meanings in using those frames. As a result, framing analysis uncovers the effects which those frames have on the audience.

From the various approaches to framing analysis available, an inductive framing analysis (Van Gorp & Vercruyssen, 2012) was conducted in this research, as it identifies

“frame packages”, consisting of framing devices and reasoning devices, to explain how stories are structured. Framing devices comprise elements forming the structures of a message such as source, vocabulary and narratives (Kitzinger, 2007; Tankard, 2001). Reasoning devices involve signals identifying the causality (Van Gorp & Vercruyse, 2012); these emerged in this study, for example, when Vietnam and its protagonists were described or mentioned in a particular frame.

While framing analysis provided a close examination of samples of stories about Vietnam, in-depth interviews have been employed to investigate the second research question, which asks how agenda-setting relates to Vietnam’s reputation. Specifically, the interviews explored the access to and reception of the stories by the audience. In this research, in-depth interviews are ideal for gathering data on individuals’ personal histories, opinions and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored (Patton, 2002). In-depth interviews were considered to be the best tool to get to know how people view mainstream media, social network sites and news stories about Vietnam, the popular means which audiences use to update information about Vietnam and the degree to which that information affects their business, investment and travelling decisions with regard to the country. These interviews, which enhance the validity of the research results, were the most suitable tool at this stage of the study. Thematic analysis focusing on the main themes of the issue (Doody & Noonan, 2013) was then used to analyse the interviews.

The representatives of embassies and a chamber of commerce were invited to participate in these interviews. The reasons for doing this lie in the fact that the embassies and the chambers of commerce connect people (business people and travellers) in their countries to Vietnam and vice versa. Specifically, they supplied

information about the Vietnam market, industry sectors and investment environment; identified and created bilateral business and investment opportunities; organised events to promote trade and internationalisation (e.g. trade missions, exhibitions, seminars, future dialogues, innovation meet-ups, and showcase presentations); and hosted meetings and talks with their country's businesses, and between their country's businesses and Vietnam's government and businesses. In doing so, they also obtained information on the opinions of people about Vietnam via various surveys or reports.

This research comprised two phases. Each phase is described in detail in the next two sections.

### **4.3. Phase 1 – A comparative study: Media coverage of a country and public perception of a country**

Phase 1 involved three stages: media content analysis, analysis of the public perceptions of the country as reflected in the CBI, and a comparative study of these two data sets.

#### *4.3.1. Media content analysis*

When conducting media content analysis as the first stage of the research, my previous roles as an analyst at Media Tenor, the leading international media research institute, enabled me to access a comprehensive database of hundreds of media outlets with thousands of stories coded daily. During my time there, I built the coding manual for coding news stories about Vietnam. Accordingly, selection of the articles about Vietnam was based on the 'five-line/five-second' rule in which the stories are coded when they are described in at least five lines of standard column text about Vietnam in print journalism or five seconds of voice or image about Vietnam in radio and television journalism. Content analysis involved classification of the components

of a text through a coding application which works out the conclusions of a message's content (Rose et al., 2015). Besides, in the manual, I provided guidance on who, what and where is coded, in which situations or conditions they are coded, and how they are coded. These decisions were based on such considerations as: Who has great influence in the country? Which companies or institutes belong to the country? Who are the newsmakers? What are possible topics for each of them? Coding ID was then attached to these people, companies, institutes and specific topics. For example: Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc of Vietnam was listed in the coding manual with the ID 105307.

The Media Tenor database from which I gathered the raw data involved the coding of seven major fields (see Table 2). To ensure reliability of the coded data, examples from coded reports were checked by Media Tenor's a supervisory team. If any coding was questioned, the reports were sent back to analysts for checking and amending. All these amendments were double checked by a Media Tenor supervisor and sent to an independent advisory team at Media Tenor when necessary. It should also be noted that analysts were required to be tested monthly tests to ensure consistency of coding quality levels.

**Table 2: Major coding fields in stories about Vietnam**

<b>Field</b>	<b>Questions</b>
<b><i>Salience</i></b>	Which issues, countries, and protagonists dominate the news?
<b><i>Tone of coverage</i></b>	How are the protagonists covered in terms of tonality? How strong is the positive and negative tone on the protagonists and how salient are favourable and unfavourable circumstances?
<b><i>Topic structure</i></b>	Which topics are covered in the news, and which are reported only infrequently?

<b>Share of voice</b>	Whose voice dominates reporting: journalistic comment on the messages, protagonists or experts? Whose views are conveyed via quotes, op-eds and interviews?
<b>Framing</b>	How are the events framed in the news, for instance with regard to political conflicts, elections and policy debate? Do the media focus more on conflicts between the protagonists and dramatic developments or do they report more on policy issue solutions?
<b>State of the nation</b>	How do the media report economic and social development and the state of affairs with regard to political values?
<b>Opinion leadership</b>	Which media, journalists and economic experts are quoted most often in the media?

Among hundreds of media outlets, for my research, I just used the coding database about Vietnam from 40 opinion-leading news outlets (newspapers, magazines, radio programmes and television programmes) that are closely observed by other journalists and thus are able to set the news agenda for other media. Leading news outlets are also the ones attracting a large audience or a large number of viewers (Severin & Tankard, 2001), usually millions, in comparison with other similar media. The size of audiences of selected media outlets/TV or radio programmes is listed in Appendix 1. For example, the BBC One *Ten O'clock News* programme has an average audience of 4.6 million and CBS *Evening News* has an audience of 6.5 million.

After the selection of media outlets has been done, the time frame should be chosen (Gunter, 2000). I selected the time period of 2012-2015 for analysis. As I mentioned in the section on Vietnam in the literature review chapter (section 2.5), this is the period when Vietnam's biggest achievements in terms of economy, diplomacy and society were recorded (World Bank, 2017).

Once the selection of media outlets and the period of time for study was done, to extract the data correctly for my research purpose, I used an application SQL, which

allowed me to write commands (clauses). These commands included variables which refer to the 10 areas listed below, relating the research country Vietnam.

1. How is the visibility of Vietnam in the foreign media in comparison with other Asian countries during 2012-2015?
2. What is the general tone of foreign media when they cover Vietnam, in comparison with other Asian countries?
3. How is the visibility of Vietnam year by year? What is the general tone of foreign media about Vietnam year by year?
4. What are the main topics about Vietnam covered by foreign media for the whole period? What are the tones of foreign media about those main topics? Which media cover those most? Who are the writers?
5. What are the main topics about Vietnam year by year? What are the tones of those main topics year by year? Which media cover those most? Who are the writers?
6. Who or What are the main protagonists of Vietnam covered by foreign media for the whole period? What are the tones about those protagonists?
7. Who in Vietnam is covered most by foreign media? What do foreign media cover about them? What is the tone?
8. What do the foreign media cover about Vietnam's economy? What is the tone?
9. Which institutions/companies are covered by foreign media? What do foreign media cover about them? What is the main tone?
10. Which media outlet covers Vietnam most? What is its tone about Vietnam? What is the main topic about Vietnam covered by that media outlet?

The data I obtained were then divided into groups in numbers. An example of a 'data pull-out' is provided below.

To answer the two questions, *"What are the main topics about Vietnam covered by foreign media for the whole period?"* and *"What are the tones of foreign media about those main topics?"*, I listed the variables in these questions, including the foreign media set, Vietnam's topics and tone, and the time period, in a command. The command was written in the SQL application. All the ID numbers written in the command were the variables which needed extracting from the database. They were a part of the coded news structure of news stories and were stored in the data system. Part of the command is shown in Figure 3.

```
Case /*this case filters by media market, so this shows what the coverage is for media
in Germany vs. media in the UK, etc*/

when MediaMaster.MediaNo in ('21','22','23','25','26') then 'Germany'

when MediaMaster.MediaNo in ('20622','20624','20625','20626') then 'UK'

when MediaMaster.MediaNo in ('40179','40180','40181','40182', '4017411') then 'US'
```

**Figure 3: An SQL command to extract data about Vietnamese businesses**

The raw data result for the two questions consisted of topics and a number of reports on these topics, tones of topics (negative, positive and neutral/no clear tone) and number of topics. Regarding tones, Schatz (personal communication, 2020, Augst 27), a scholar in the agenda-setting field, asserted that tones must exist in the media context. Positive or negative tone in the data means that a statement conveyed information with feelings 'for' or 'against' a topic. The 'for' or 'against' can be seen through the visible and countable elements (explicit content) of the message while the

implicit content was what lies in between words and needs analysing in terms of the whole context. Explicit and implicit context is explained in section 4.2.1. For example, the use of the phrase “inflexible” could be considered positive if it is used in reference to commonly accepted aims. But if it implies that a religious leader has caused harm to his followers through his “inflexible” conduct, it would be negative. Regarding the meaning of the neutral tone, Schatz (personal communication, 2020) defined neutral tone in the data as meaning that a statement with one or more protagonists simply conveys information, without any “any feelings for or against a topic.” When audiences have no chance to witness or have direct experiences of events, they “have nowhere else to go than the media—the media’s tone must be assumed to be an important cue” (Hopmann et al., 2010, p. 391). Accordingly, positive and negative tones are counted. According to Druckman and Parkin (2005), the assumptions of audiences about characteristics of people or places tend to be automatically made from positive or negative descriptions in texts, not neutral ones.

An example of the results obtained is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** An example of topics about Vietnam covered by foreign media

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Topic	Negative	No clear to	Positive	Total	Overall tone	
2	Vietnam wa	98	66	16	180	-45.56	
3	Diplomacy	4	70	11	85	8.24	
4	Traffic acci	41	35	0	76	-53.95	
5	Internation	33	27	4	64	-45.31	
6	Economic s	10	25	23	58	22.41	
7	Weather Ca	36	20	0	56	-64.29	
8	State visits	1	44	8	53	13.21	
9	Trade agree	3	39	5	47	4.26	
10	Economic g	3	10	28	41	60.98	
11	Social unre	21	18	0	39	-53.85	
12	Foreign pol	4	29	2	35	-5.71	
13	Products in	3	23	8	34	14.71	
14	Armament,	2	26	3	31	3.23	
15	War in gen	17	12	2	31	-48.39	
16	investment	0	25	3	28	10.71	
17	Foreign dir	1	12	14	27	48.15	
18	Cooperatio	1	24	1	26	0	
19	Privatizatio	1	20	3	24	8.33	
20	export	1	22	1	24	0	
21	Locational p	0	19	3	22	13.64	
22	Internation	11	10	0	21	-52.38	
23	human righ	8	13	0	21	-38.1	
24	Investment	0	18	3	21	14.29	
25	Stock mark	3	9	8	20	25	
26	Currency m	10	7	3	20	-35	
27	Divestment	0	18	2	20	10	
28	History oth	7	8	3	18	-22.22	
29	Protection	8	9	0	17	-47.06	
30	internation	1	12	4	17	17.65	
31	Business Sit	2	12	2	16	0	
32	Vietnam wa	16	0	0	16	-100	

*Note.* The numbers shown in the table are the numbers of reports on each topic on Vietnam, the numbers of reports in each tone category for each topic, and the percentage of overall tone.

Content analysis itself is a purely descriptive form of research that cannot directly explain media effects (Gunter, 2000). Because the research aims to achieve deep insights into media processes and effects, it requires data from not only quantitative media analysis, to work out what the media are talking about and where the media put their focus, but also public opinion, which popularly consists of survey research and experiments, to have an idea of audience cognitive, emotional or behavioural reactions. Those data were used in defining the relationship between media coverage

and audiences' decisions, or to compare the effects of media coverage in the real world (Gunter, 2000; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Surveys are differentiated in terms of purpose, time period and form of administration. They are usually conducted in the following steps: questionnaire design, respondent selection and management, data collection and analysis (Gunter, 2000).

#### *4.3.2. Country Brand Index (CBI)*

This research used the findings from the content analysis to allow a comparison to be made with the CBI, one of the most comprehensive databases gathering information about people's perceptions of different countries (Go & Govers, 2011), including Vietnam. The index studies perceptions of around 100 countries in the world and ranks them according to strength of perception across association dimensions. Countries are perceived as the sum of their identity and reputation, and the strength or weakness of the perception of a country can influence people's decisions to choose them as places to visit, live or invest in (Adams, 2011). A country's brand is a competitive advantage for tourism, education and investment in a global market (Jain & Winner, 2013). Quantitative data for the CBI is collected from around 2,500–3,500 respondents from countries around the world including Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, UAE, the UK and the US. Respondents are selected based on such criteria as: aware of and familiar with all the countries covered, interested in travel abroad, have travelled internationally at least once in the previous year, and are between 21-65 years old. A country brand is measured in five key dimensions: Value System, Quality of Life, Good for Business, Heritage and Culture, and Tourism.

### *Description of CBI*

I communicated with Victoria Berry, the Strategy Director of the Index and got explained that the CBI, an overall country brand score, is calculated by using the hierarchical decision model, which measures overall country performance in the following areas:

- Awareness: Do key audiences know that the country exists?
- Familiarity: How well do people know the country and what it offers?
- Associations: What qualities come to mind when people think of the country?

The index looks at the measured perceptions of five key association dimensions: *Value System, Quality of Life, Business Potential, Tourism, and Heritage and Culture*.

A country's *Value System* is the foundation for its success and a fundamental component of brand strength. When a country is recognised as a place where people are free to live openly, where the rule of law is respected and upheld, where businesses can thrive and institutions are trusted, its brand is positioned to grow and prosper.

*Quality of Life* represents a country's capacity to offer gainful employment, affordable and comfortable housing, an accessible and competitive education, sufficient healthcare, and security to its citizens and residents. Linked to *Value System*, this dimension is about cultivating an environment that positions a country's people to thrive.

*Business Potential* evaluates a country's ability to offer a robust and attractive business environment to both citizens and international investors alike. As with *Quality of Life*, this is a dimension deeply tied to *Value System* because where the rule of law is upheld

and a sense of security and predictability is maintained, confidence in financial markets increases and brands perform at their best.

In addition, aspects of *Tourism and Heritage and Culture* are also measured in the following dimensions:

- Preference: How highly do audiences esteem the country? Does it resonate?
- Consideration: Is this one of the countries being thought about for a visit?
- Decision/Visitation: To what extent do people follow through and visit the country?
- Advocacy: Do visitors recommend the country to family, friends and colleagues?

There are two CBI reports, covering the years 2012-13 and 2014-15, that I have used for my comparison with my media content analysis period. As this index covers two years in a single report, I divided the media content analysis period in two, as presented in the previous section. The 2012-13 report studied 118 countries while the 2014-15 report focused on 75 countries. The difference in the number of countries in the two surveys resulted from the fact that the 2014-15 survey tested the hypothesis that not all countries qualify as “brands”, instead of only measuring the countries’ reputation, as in the 2012-13 and other previous years’ reports. They had reduced the number of countries to go further with the analysis of the brands of qualifying countries after the usual analysis.

I gathered the information about Vietnam from the index by using the data relating to Vietnam in terms of the opinion of respondents about the country in general, its topics, persons and the economy, and the preferences of respondents toward the country. The index used in the research covers the same period as the media content analysis data.

#### 4.3.3. Comparisons between media content analysis and CBI

The media content analysis and the index of public perceptions about Vietnam were compared in terms of General tones of Vietnam; Main topics of Vietnam; Tone of main topics; Main persons/companies/institutions of Vietnam and Tone of main persons/companies/institutions, as the saliences of the media agenda were considered in relation to the saliences of public opinion (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

I used the CBI percentage data and charts to see whether there was any relationship of the media content analysis data and people's opinions about Vietnam in those fields. The results are presented in tables. With these comparisons, partial answers can be given to the research questions: *“What do foreign mainstream media cover in relation to Vietnam?”* and *“How does agenda-setting by foreign mainstream media relate to public perceptions of other nations?”*

#### 4.4. Phase 2 – Qualitative analysis: Textual analysis of news stories and thematic analysis of interviews with embassy representatives

This second phase of the research was designed to improve the validity of the research results by including qualitative analysis as part of its mixed methods approach. This phase consists of two stages: (i) framing analysis of stories, and (ii) conducting in-depth interviews with trade experts from foreign embassies and a non-government organisation in Vietnam.

Once the coding of the agenda-setting analysis was completed, the frequencies and tones of topics and protagonists were calculated. To describe and interpret the results of the coding, it was necessary to go back to the original texts to identify the linguistic, narrative and rhetorical elements of frames and their salience. Meanwhile, the importance of frames lies in the elements composing them, and in the textual

expression of the public discourse into which they are inserted and through which they find their way to dominance or irrelevance (Speckman & Bichler, 1999).

The first stage of the qualitative analysis phase of this study aimed to investigate the discursive nature of frames, by delving into how specific frame functions are expressed in the texts, and which potential effects they can bring to the audiences when an issue was constructed into those specific frames. The stories for framing analysis were selected from those that were based on topics that the content analysis showed were most frequent and had highest audience numbers, i.e., the Vietnam War, the economy and tourism. This stage mainly focused on the identification, description and interpretation of two particular framing devices, namely the selection of sources and facts, and narratives.

The second stage of Phase 2 focused on conducting interviews with representatives of foreign embassies and the Central and Eastern European Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam, to investigate the channels through which foreigners get information about Vietnam and how they use them when considering investment or tourism. As explained earlier, embassies and the chamber of commerce are the bridges to connect their country's people, including business people and travellers, with Vietnam, and vice versa. They have comprehensive surveys, reports and updates about business projects and the travel trends of their country's people to Vietnam or their people's attitudes toward the country and the reasons for holding such attitudes.

#### *4.4.1. Stage 1 – Framing analysis: Core frame and framing devices*

Framing analysis is conducted to identify how, by creating particular vocabularies, the author forms an article to “work symbolically to shape democratic discourse and influence public opinion” (Winslow, 2018, p. 584). According to Van Gorp and Van

de Goot (2012), each frame package includes a core frame, framing devices, and reasoning devices. The core frame is “the implicit cultural phenomenon that defines the package as a whole” (p.131), such as a value or an archetype. And the frame manifests itself in media content through various framing devices, such as word choice, metaphors, exemplars, descriptions, arguments, or visual images, all of which contribute to the rhetorical structure of a message (Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Reasoning devices form a route to causal reasoning (Van Gorp & Vercruyse, 2012).

Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992) defined news frames as “conceptual tools which media and individuals rely on to convey, interpret and evaluate information” (p. 60). News frames are the “central organising idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events.... The frames suggest what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). Furthermore, Entman (1993) asserted that framing is selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them “more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52). Price, Tewksbury, and Powers (1997) stated that the framing effect is “one in which salient attributes of a message (its organisation, selection of content, or thematic structure) render particular thoughts applicable, resulting in their activation and use in evaluations” (p. 486). Framing in news is important to turn nonrecognizable happenings into a noticeable event. It is a tool to make certain aspects more salient.

The analysis conducted in this study was based on the five most popular news frames of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences and morality.

According to the studies about the nature of news (Brants & Neijens, 1998; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Diez-Nicolas & Semetko, 1995; Iyengar, 1991; Neuman et al., 1992; Patterson, 1993; Semetko & Schoenbach, 1994; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; van Dijk, 1988), these frames cover most of the frames found in the news stories.

Specifically, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) asserted that the frame of responsibility “presents an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual or group” (p. 96). According to those authors, a dominant frame of responsibility is determined by the following questions in the analysis:

- Does the story suggest that some level of the government/an individual has the ability to alleviate the problem?
- Does the story suggest that some level of the government/an individual is responsible for the issue/problem?
- Does the story suggest solutions to the problem?

This frame is used by the media to shape public understanding of who is to blame for causing key social problems or who ought to be solving them (Iyengar, 1991). When it comes to the conflict frame, Neuman et al. (1992) assumed that the conflict frame was most common in the US news when they put political elites in debates or conflict situations. The conflict frame as a dominant frame is determined, in Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) study, by posing the following questions in the analysis:

- Does the story reflect disagreement between parties, individuals, groups, or countries?

- Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?
- Does the story refer to winners and losers?

This conflict frame emphasises conflict between institutions, groups or individuals. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) claimed that this is done “as a means of capturing audience interest” (p. 95). They pointed out that conflict frames are often used in political reporting, especially in presidential elections, which has resulted in the media being criticised for “inducing public cynicism and mistrust of political leaders” (p. 95).

The human-interest frame is determined, by the following questions coded for in the analysis:

- Does the story provide a human example or “human face” on this issue?
- Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, sympathy, caring, or compassion?
- Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors?

The human-interest frame, according to Neuman et al. (1992), presents news with a human face or emotional angle in order to capture audience interest. By using a human example of the impact of a certain issue, the news becomes personalised, creating an emotional connection to the audience (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

The economic consequences frame presents the economic consequences that an event or issue will potentially have for a country, group or individual (Graber, 1993).

The economic consequences frame as a dominant frame is determined, in Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) study, by the following three questions in the analysis:

- Is there a mention of financial gains or losses now or in the future?

- Is there a mention of the cost/degree of expense involved?
- Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?

The morality frame reports an event, problem or issue in the context of moral prescriptions or religious tenets (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). The morality frame as a dominant frame is determined by the following three questions:

- Does the story contain any moral message?
- Does the story make reference to morality, God, and other religious tenets?
- Does the story offer specific moral prescriptions about how to behave?

This research explored journalists' selection and use of facts as key devices to frame stories. This exploration was based on speculation about the role of the selection of news sources and facts as a primary tool for media to set up certain frames among several potential framing devices (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Speckman & Bichler, 1999). Speckman and Bichler (1999) highlighted the point that the selection of a news source, which emphasises or favours one source over various other competing sources, choosing this one and excluding the others, is considered to be a powerful framing device in building the frames of news stories. This device contributes to realising the overall framing impact of a news story: creating reality and setting the agenda for public opinion. Gans (1979) and Soloski (1989) shared the same idea about the importance of types of sources selected and used by journalists as they contribute to presenting what society looks like to the public and change the public perception of reality. "News stories contribute to news consumers' taken-for-granted knowledge about the world" (Soloski, 1989, p. 870). Beside Gans and Soloski, many other scholars

such as Tuchman (1978) and Carlson (2009) have focused on the order and combination of sources which form social orders in stories because the visibility of sources in news coverage expresses “their position, power, legal authority and credibility” (Carlson, 2009, p. 527).

When analysing the sources, it was important to detect and investigate determinant sources as these sources, including elites, politicians and experts, play as key information providers (Tuchman, 1978). They are considered to present facts. Journalists integrate facts and sources in their stories, contributing to formation of their “web of facticity” (p. 68). This means that all of the information attributed to sources is presented as fact, and journalists also make efforts to strengthen their constructed web to ensure the validity of their statements. Information, quoted and attributed to the sources, then becomes the fact and does not need verifying.

Other various framing devices, such as word choice, metaphors, exemplars, descriptions, arguments, and visual images manifest the central frame (Van Gorp, 2007). These devices are held together under the actual frame, which provides the frame package with a coherent structure (Donati, 1992), and they are also considered in this analysis.

#### *4.4.2. Stage 2 – Interviews*

The second stage of Phase 2 consisted of interviews with representatives of foreign embassies in Vietnam and of the chamber of commerce, representatives who connect people (business people and travellers) in their countries to Vietnam and vice versa. Specifically, they supplied information about the Vietnam market, industry sectors and the investment environment; identified and created bilateral business and investment opportunities; organised events to promote trade between their country’s businesses

and Vietnam's government and businesses. The reverse also applied, as they also got information about the opinions of the people of their country toward Vietnam via various surveys and reports.

For these interviews, the participants were chosen based on criterion sampling, a purposeful sampling strategy which is widely used to identify and select information-rich and suitable cases (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2002). This selection method was suitable for the research as it identifies and selects individuals or groups of individuals who are experts or possess knowledge and experiences with the topic of interest in the research (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). There are various purposeful sampling strategies such as homogeneous sampling, typical case sampling, criterion sampling, and snowball sampling. Among them, the criterion sampling design was used in the research as it involved the ability to narrow down the range of variation and focus on similarities (Palinkas et al., 2015). This selection method helped select interviewees who were able to provide information that was both detailed and generalised.

With this method, I set two specific criteria and then identified and selected all cases meeting these criteria. As the interviews in this phase aimed at finding out how people accessed and perceived news stories, what the potential impacts of the stories might be, and what their choices might be if they looked for other media platforms (such as social networks) for information. The interviews were conducted with six representatives of foreign embassies in Vietnam, namely representatives of Argentina, Austria, Denmark, New Zealand and Venezuela, and the Central and Eastern European Chamber of Commerce. I selected the participants based on two main criteria, as follows:

- They were from the countries which have a long-established relationship with Vietnam but their business and tourism activities with the country are modest, as expressed through the figures on investment projects in Vietnam and the numbers of their residents traveling to the country as tourists. This is the reason why I did not select trade experts from the UK, the US, Australia or Asian countries, as these countries are usually the top international business partners of Vietnam.
- They are in charge of trade and tourism affairs with Vietnam.

Some facts about the selected countries' relations with Vietnam are listed below.

### **Denmark**

The two countries established diplomatic relations on November 25, 1971.

From 2015 to 2019, the total value of the two countries' bilateral trade in goods more than doubled from nearly US\$500 million. Denmark has been able to establish itself as the largest EU exporter of goods to Vietnam per capita.

More than 135 Danish companies have a legal setup in Vietnam. The volume of Vietnamese exports to Denmark has also increased significantly during the past five years, to more than US\$450 million. Due to their strong competencies, many Danish companies are in a good position to meet Vietnam's high demand in such sectors as agriculture, food safety, water, clean energy, waste management, maritime transport and logistics. The two countries' FTA supported this movement. According to the representative, Vietnam is currently a well-known alternative to China. When it comes to wage costs, Vietnam is competitive with China. And the FTA makes Vietnam different to

other countries, such as Bangladesh or Cambodia, under the same conditions.

Vietnam is now quite famous in Denmark in terms of production.

The two countries' leaders have stressed the need to push forward the effective development of a bilateral comprehensive partnership towards the 50th anniversary of bilateral ties in 2021.

In addition, Denmark provided Vietnam with a total of over US\$1.3 billion of development assistance over the 20-year period from 1994.

### **Argentina**

Argentina established diplomatic relations with Vietnam on October 25, 1973, becoming one of the first three Latin American countries to establish diplomatic ties with Vietnam before 1975. The two-way trade revenue doubled over the four years from 2015, reaching US\$3 billion in 2019, making Vietnam Argentina's largest trading partner. The two countries signed cooperation agreements in the fields of defence, agriculture and energy. The two countries are making efforts to bring bilateral trade volume to US\$5 billion in 2020 or 2021.

Over past years, the two countries have established many mechanisms and agreements to boost multifaceted cooperation in such various fields as trade, agriculture, veterinary services, political consultation, science and technology. Other cooperation areas, including culture, education, tourism, sports, and Spanish language training, continue to be promoted by both sides. Vietnam has received about 10,000 tourists from Argentina each year since 2017, Vietnam has become trendy for a holiday for people from Argentina.

## **Venezuela**

Vietnam and Venezuela established diplomatic relations on December 8, 1989. The two countries have signed important agreements for cooperation in agriculture, tourism and trade. With the Vietnam-Venezuela bilateral trade agreement coming into force on July 28, 2015, the two countries looked forward to lifting their annual two-way trade from below US\$100 million in 2015 to US\$1-2 billion in 2020 or 2021.

## **Austria**

Vietnam and Austria established diplomatic relations on January 12, 1972. Austria ranked in fifth position among Vietnam's trade partners in Europe, with two-way trade turnover in 2015 reaching about US\$2.6 billion. This number was nearly 1.5 times greater in 2019. There are approximately 30 Austrian subsidiaries in Vietnam, 10 of which also have manufacturing units. The overall Austrian foreign direct investment will be soon around US\$100 million, according to the representative.

## **New Zealand**

New Zealand and Vietnam established diplomatic ties in 1975. Since the establishment of New Zealand's "Comprehensive Partnership" with Vietnam in 2009, there have been regular political exchanges, strong growth in bilateral trade, expanded education links, the celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2015 and the establishment of direct flights in 2016.

The two-way trade was around US\$1 billion in 2015 and expected to be US\$ 1.7 billion by 2020, elevating the status of the relationship to "Strategic

Partnership". The two countries' relationship is characterised by expanding cooperation in areas such as agri-business, disaster management, aviation, tourism, defence and education. New Zealand exports to Vietnam are predominantly dairy products, wood products, meat and seafood, as well as education and tourism services. New Zealand's imports from Vietnam include smartphones and other electronics, garments, footwear, seafood and coffee. More than 20,000 New Zealanders have visited Vietnam each year since 2016.

### **Central and Eastern European Chamber of Commerce (CEEC)**

The CEEC in Vietnam was officially established in 2015 as the very first CEEC. The independent non-profit organisation was formed with the purpose of promoting cooperation between businesses from Central and Eastern European countries, such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro and Poland with Vietnam. It is expected to enhance cooperation, develop relations in term of economic, financial, commerce, investment, and trade promotion between Vietnam and the countries listed above. The Executive Committee is composed of professionals coming from Central and Eastern European countries with various backgrounds and many years of experience in Vietnam in different areas such as consulting, sales, marketing, education, hospitality management, finance, and trade promotion.

Its experts about Vietnam help Central and Eastern European businesses understand the country and all relevant business issues there, as well as offering counsel in trade and economic policy and preparing inter-governmental negotiations and meetings, according to the representative.

Once the selection of interviewees was done, an active interview approach (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) was adopted to allow interviewees to talk about things in their own words. In this approach, the interview is a two-way process in which both interviewer and interviewee play an active role. Instead of asking a list of questions, the interviewer's tasks are opening the conversations and guiding them to take place naturally. This involves "encouraging subjective relevancies, prompting interpretative possibilities, facilitating narrative linkages, suggesting alternative perspectives, and appreciating diverse horizons of meaning" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 78). Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (Doody & Noonan, 2013) were the most suitable for my study. During the interviews, I asked seven open-ended questions and encouraged the interviewees to talk about the relationship between their countries and Vietnam in trading and tourism since 2012 and how they view the impacts of mainstream media, social network sites and news stories about Vietnam on the business and travel plans of people from their countries. The journalist Studs Terkel (1972) said of his brilliant interviewing study of attitudes and feelings about working that he simply turned on his tape recorder and asked people to talk. "There were questions, of course. But they were casual in nature. ... It was a conversation. In time, the sluice gates of dammed up hurts and dreams were open" (p. xxv).

In accordance with the active interviewing approach (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), the interviewees were provided with necessary information about the research, and findings relating to the interview issue, in advance so as to provide them with the opportunity to compare their views with the views of others.

I conducted the interviews in Vietnam. These were held at quiet public places or the interviewee's work environment. The interviewees were informed about the aims of

the interview before the interview started. The interviews, which took approximately an hour each, were recorded with permission of the interviewees and later transcribed by myself.

Once the interviews were done, thematic analysis was applied to the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) and King (2004), thematic analysis is useful for examining the different perspectives of the research interviewees, and for finding and emphasising similarities and differences. Thematic analysis is also useful for summarising the key features of a large data set, as it forces the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling data, helping to produce a clear and organised final report (King, 2004). The method was conducted via six steps: familiarising myself with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I would like to note that this thematic analysis process as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) required revisiting earlier phases; re-thinking and re-examining how and why codes were grouped into themes; and then grouping and re-grouping themes together to ensure consistency between codes, themes and the whole data set, and also the relevance with regard to the research questions. The key was keeping in mind the research questions during the whole process.

### **Step 1: Familiarising myself with the data**

The 'immersion' step of data familiarisation actually began when I transcribed the interviews. However, to get a fresh sense of the content, I re-read each interview transcript (raw data) from the beginning to end in a "curious and questioning" manner as prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 60). I then came back to the parts I found most interesting and was most impressed by in each interview. I could also remember

the key words of these interviews. I started noting down from these most interesting parts that stood out from the parts of the interviews. I used a table to put the texts in cells with the notes collated. I also noted sections of transcripts which seemed irrelevant to the research topic and set them aside for re-examination at later stages. Note-making helped me read the words “actively, analytically and critically” and start thinking about what the data meant (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 60).

According to Braun, Clarke, Terry and Hayfield (2019), the notes should be directed by the research questions.

### **Step 2: Generating initial codes**

In this stage, I identified extracts of data to code based on the notes taken in Step 1, wrote down the codes and marked the text associated with them (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A code summarises or describes the content of a portion of data, according to Braun and Clarke (2012). It is a label for the data. In reality, coding is not only limited to featuring the content of data; it also goes beyond the words, identifies what lies beneath and provides an interpretation of the data content (Braun & Clarke, 2012). From an understanding of what the interviewees implied in their answers, my codes provided both description and interpretation of the segments of data.

I did not code all the portions of data, as some of them were not apparently related to the research topic and were dismissed. I used my research questions to determine what was relevant and what was not (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For this process, I was both inclusive and appropriately selective in determining relevancy. However, in some cases, I was not sure of the relevance of some segments of the data so, based on Braun and Clarke (2006)'s suggestions, while I coded them, I included appropriate surrounding data to provide context, so the codes could be reworked, reviewed or

discarded later. My coding process involved looking at phrases and sentences, rather than single words. According to Braun, Clarke, Terry and Hayfield (2019), a good, meaningful code consists of enough information about the content of a segment of the data, and also analytic interpretation information if necessary.

At this stage, I tried to code for as many potential themes as possible, following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) recommendation. I used tables which I created in Microsoft Word to collate the texts and codes. These table consisted of two columns: the interview transcripts in the left-hand column and the codes in the right-hand column. I selected a small section of the transcript related to the description of a single idea and recorded a corresponding code in the right-hand column. I worked systematically through each transcript in this way, using numbers to mark sections of the transcript and corresponding codes so I could keep track of which codes belonged to which data items (see Table 4). I realised that the codes could be modified to fit what the participants had tried to express, so I adjusted the codes accordingly. I revisited the codes to see whether they still fitted with the research questions. The dismissed segments of data were kept at the last row of the table so that I could go back to make final checks at during the later steps. In this way, the data content was reduced and organised into codes. As shown in Table 4, data were essentially coded on a word-by-word basis, and generated codes closely represented the participant’s language and ideas.

**Table 4:** Example of Transcript and Corresponding Codes

Transcript	Code
1. For the previous generation-my father’s generation when they think about Vietnam, they think about war.	1. War place

54. People in Denmark mainly read newspaper homepages to get news. It is very common.	54. Mainstream media as a main source for people
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This process generated 90 codes (see Appendix 3). Data extracts that were marked for relevance at this stage were re-examined. Some sections of transcripts that I found not to be relevant to the topic were dismissed. For example:

*For Austrian investment, we estimate that there are approximately 30 Austrian subsidiaries in Vietnam, 10 of them also with manufacturing units. The overall Austrian foreign direct investment will be around 100 million USD. (Austrian Embassy’s representative)*

**Step 3: Searching for themes**

This step shifts the focus from codes to themes. A theme “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82).

The third step consists of reviewing the codes to identify areas of similarity and overlap between them, or topics around which codes cluster. In doing so, I figured out a core concept defining each theme. This central concept directed me to determine what the theme is all about and which codes fitted into it. I then generated a set of candidate themes which included clustering codes that shared some unifying feature, so that they reflected and described a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). As they were just candidate themes, I was open to amending or discarding them before having a final set of themes for the data (Charmaz, 2000).

Specifically, I worked through the codes, based on similarities and patterns between codes, cutting and pasting them into different groups which were then presented in

different cells of a table. I collated these groups of codes with corresponding candidate themes, which were identified using a short phrase that covered the meaning of the codes it contained (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes that did not seem to fit in any theme-cells were kept in a separate cell that I labelled “miscellaneous” (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

I re-examined each cell after this process to determine if any codes assigned to one cell would fit better within another, needed separating into a different theme, or needed discarding due to lack of relevance. When a code had more than one meaning, it could be assigned to more than one theme. Upon completion of this step, I re-examined and re-assigned the codes and the theme-cells.

During the work on this step, I also started exploring the relationship between themes and considering how themes would work together in telling an overall story of the data. Dominant and relevant themes are meaningful and typical when standing alone, but also need to work well together as a whole. I needed to “think of themes as like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle: together they provide[d] a meaningful and lucid picture” of my data (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 62).

#### **Step 4: Reviewing potential themes**

This step involves reviewing whether the themes work well with the coded data and entire data set. When any codes did not fit into any theme, I tried putting them under other themes by extending the boundaries of each theme or placing them in new themes. If these solutions did not work, I re-checked my decision to discard the unrelated themes. In doing so, I asked myself such questions as whether this was a theme, what it included, whether it told anything about the data set and whether it was both independent and coherent with the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

As a result of the review and refinement of themes at this stage, some codes were judged as being irrelevant and were discarded. Thus, the data set was organised and condensed after this phase.

#### **Step 5: Defining and naming themes**

In identifying relevant themes, I defined what was unique and specific about each theme and summed up its core concept in one or two phrases. Each theme had a “singular focus” but they were in a close relation with each other, to make up a complete answer to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 64). This process of reviewing and refining led to the final creation of the *main themes*.

#### **Step 6: Producing the report**

This step included finalising a detailed table of codes and main themes (see Appendix 4).

### **4.5. Ethics requirements**

The interviews in this research were conducted following the approval of AUT Ethics Committee No. 18/388. The approval letter, participant information sheet, consent form and indicative questions can be found in the appendices (see Appendix 5).

The ethics application covered the project information (title, stages of the research and the information details of researcher); research participants, location and duration; principles of partnership, participation and protection in the interaction between researcher and other participants; the researcher’s social and cultural sensitivity for participants; principles of respect for the vulnerability of some participants; informed and voluntary consent and principles of respect for rights of privacy and confidentiality of participants; minimisation of risks for participants; and avoidance of conflicts of interest.

I sent participants the participant information sheet by email. It contained the aim of the research, description of the procedure, approximate length of time, for the interview, interview place, and the benefits of proposed research. The right to withdraw was also made clear to the potential participants. Participants were welcome to ask any questions relating to the research before agreeing to take part in the research. The participants could indicate their official agreement to participate via email, call or text. No ethics approval is required in Vietnam for such interviews.

Once the participants accepted the invitation to participate, they could verbally (informally) agree to take part in the research (by phone) or indicate their willingness to participate via text, email or in person. For face-to-face interviews, a formal consent form was signed at the meeting prior to the start of the interview.

Any information provided was initially stored by the researcher and then will be stored at AUT for six years. Personal information about participants will not be disclosed to anyone else apart from the supervisors.

All these procedures aimed at meeting the ethics requirements for this research; offering the project contributions to the advance of knowledge and the benefit of participants; and warranting any cost or risk to participants.

As mentioned earlier, the interviews were conducted with representatives of five foreign embassies and the CEEC in Vietnam. These interviews, which enhance the validity of the research results, are the most suitable tool in this research.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

This research is an empirical investigation of the relationship between a country's attributes and how this is reported on/framed by international media all over the world, and is not limited to the US, like most of other previous studies in the agenda-

setting literature. While previous agenda-setting studies have mainly applied comparative studies between media content analysis and public polls to explore whether there is any correlation between them, my mixed-method approach using both quantitative and qualitative analysis offers new insights into how foreign media might affect the reputation/image of a country. This is based on media content analysis, which is then compared with the CBI public perception index for the period 2012-2015; and interviews with representatives of foreign embassies in Vietnam and in-depth framing analysis of news stories to gain further understanding of this link.

The first section of this chapter offered a detailed explanation of the choice of a comparative study and Vietnam as a case study. The sections that followed discussed the mixed-method approach which has been carried out in the research. The approach consisted of two phases aimed at offering both reliability and validity to the results. The first phase included the coding and quantitative analysis of all news stories about Vietnam on 40 mainstream foreign media outlets between 2012 and 2015, aimed at creating reliable results. This data was then compared with a public opinion index to explore whether there is any relationship between foreign media coverage and public perceptions of Vietnam. The second phase consists of a qualitative analysis of frames and framing devices, and in-depth interviews with staff of foreign embassies in Vietnam, to increase the validity and explanatory power of the results. The qualitative framing analysis was conducted using news stories about the top topics about Vietnam.

In these sections, beside describing the details of the research phases, I justified my choice of methods, based on the limitations of the previous studies in this field and the aim of answering my research questions about how agenda-setting by foreign

mainstream media relates to public perceptions of other nations. For example, a comparative study is the best way to let similarities and differences emerge, so it is appropriate for finding out whether there is any relationship between agenda-setting by foreign media coverage and country reputation.

The next four chapters in this thesis present the findings. Chapters 5 and 6 present the analysis of the empirical investigation of the foreign media coverage of Vietnam as well as of comparisons between the media content data and the public opinion index information about the country. Chapter 7 provides the thematic analysis of the interviews with embassy staff. Chapter 8 presents my framing analysis of four articles on war and economy-related topics. These two topics are the top ones in the quantitative media content analysis during the period 2012–2015 in Chapter 5. The final chapter, Chapter 9, discusses the overall findings of this study and presents how the analysis helps answer the research questions.

## CHAPTER 5

### NEWS MEDIA CONTENT ABOUT VIETNAM

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the first phase of analysis of this study involving a quantitative approach to agenda setting, addressing the question: “What do foreign media cover about Vietnam?” More specifically, I present the findings of my analysis of foreign media coverage of Vietnam during the four year period 2012–2015 which focuses on how visible Vietnam was in the media compared with other countries, the tone of the articles about Vietnam, the most frequent topics and the most visible protagonists that dominated in international news stories about Vietnam.

Forty years after the end of the Vietnam wars, in the years 2012–2015, foreign media reportage on Vietnam portrayed it as a war-damaged country in spite of its more significant developments, which include the country’s biggest achievements in terms of economy, diplomacy and society having been recorded during the period 2012–2015 and General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong’s official visit to the US in 2015 where historically important agreements were signed to mark these achievements. In comparison, little positive media coverage on Vietnam’s image featured during this period.

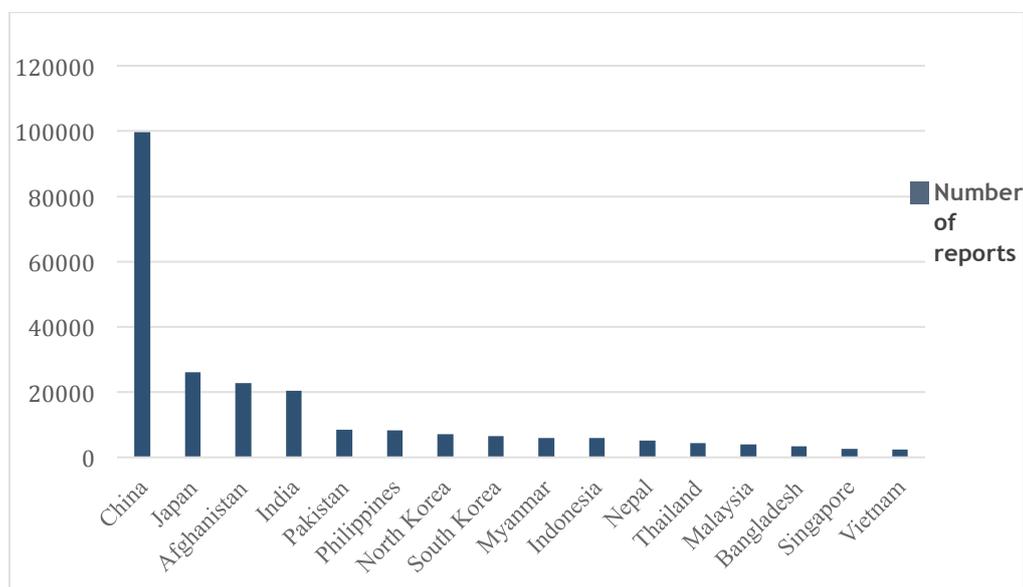
This chapter provides the findings of the analysis of the media content of stories about Vietnam by 40 international media organisations, such as *The Wall Street Journal* (US), *Financial Times* (UK), and *Les Echos* (France), conducted to further explore whether the image they presented of Vietnam was consistent, and to identify the main topics and issues that they covered and how these were presented, e.g., article tone.

Analysing content of 40 foreign media outlets showed that four countries in particular dominated the headlines – the US, UK, Germany and Russia – during the analysis period of 2012–2015. These four countries attracted the most media coverage in which stories about the four powerful countries accounted for more than 63% of the total coverage of the world due to their roles in global geopolitics. Among these top four most-covered countries, there were no differences in the amount of media coverage they received. They each equally took up more than 15% of the total coverage. Because Vietnam featured in 103rd place in this data, its minuteness in comparison to other countries makes it hardly visible; therefore, it is better to discuss it in terms of the media coverage of Asian countries to get a better sense of where Vietnam was placed. Therefore, in the findings is that I present, I focus on identifying how visible Vietnam was in foreign media coverage compared with other Asian countries because they are in the same region and share similarities in terms of geographical and socio-cultural features. I also look at the visibility and salience of topics and people that the news media covered in relation to Vietnam.

### **5.1. Visibility of Vietnam among Asian countries**

In looking at the visibility of Asian countries across the time period between January 2012 and December 2015, as shown in Figure 4, below, China can be seen to be the country that received the most media coverage from the 40 media outlets analysed, accounting for around 6% of the total stories of the world. Meanwhile, if looking at Asia alone, China took up nearly 40% the stories about the whole region. Foreign media coverage China was 40 times greater than that given to Vietnam, which was much less visible when it came the frequency of its appearance in news reports.

While China led the way with a total of 100,000 reports in total, Vietnam appeared much further down the list, being placed as the 15<sup>th</sup> most visible country in the Asian region. It accounted for 3% of all foreign reports on the region in 40 international media outlets. However, Vietnam had almost the same visibility with other South East Asian countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, at nearly 2,500 reports. It should be noted that China is a super power which conducts a lot of trade with other countries, and participates in and even plays a decisive role in key world developments, so its position might account for its dominance on mainstream media.

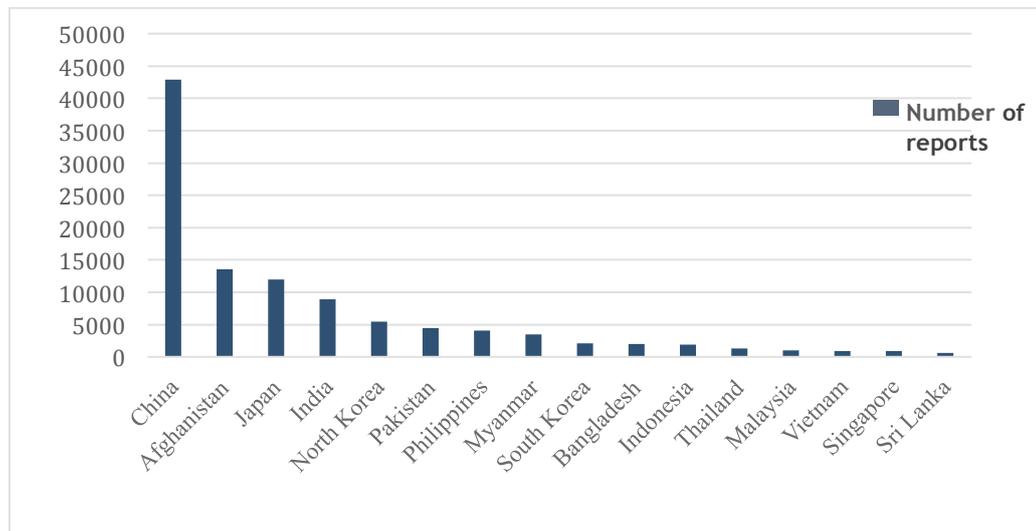


**Figure 4: Visibility of Asian countries by number of reports between 2012-15**

In Chapter 6, analyses of this foreign media coverage are compared with CBI, which is conducted every two years, i.e., the indexes of 2012-13 and 2014-15. Therefore, the following sections present the findings obtained from the media content data divided into two separate periods of 2012–13 and 2014–15. This is to ensure the compatibility and consistency of two sets of data: media content and CBI.

*5.1.1. Visibility amongst Asian countries 2012-2013*

During the period of 2012-2013, as Figure 5 shows, Vietnam was the 14<sup>th</sup> most visible country, one position higher than for the full period analysed.



**Figure 5: Visibility of Asian countries by number of reports in 2012-13**

The reason for this status may lie in the fact that these two years witnessed a number of diplomatic and security developments for Vietnam at an international scale. They can be summarised as follows:

In 2012, Vietnam established its strategic partnership with Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Italy and France, and its comprehensive partnership with the US. However, Vietnam's economy slid down with a financial burden of nearly US\$60 billion and the bankruptcy of nearly 60,000 companies. The leaders of several Vietnamese banks were taken to court due to their fraudulent activities which led to the restructuring of 10 loss-making banks and the stagnation of the economy.

Other events that may have impacted on the media coverage of Vietnam were: the establishment of Ha Long Bay as a the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Site and its listing as one of the seven new wonders of the natural world; and the worship of Hung kings, a unique

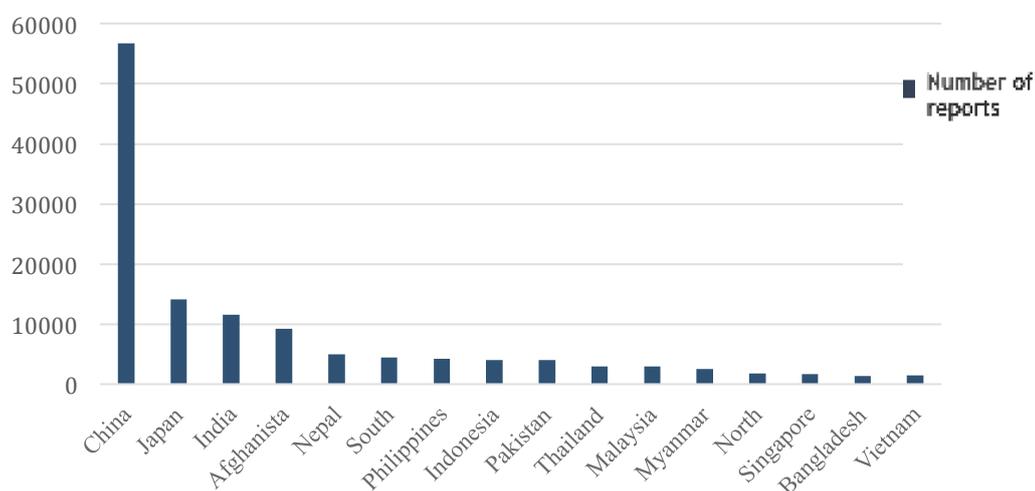
Vietnamese cultural festival, being listed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. These events contributed to the attractiveness of Vietnam and its popularity among foreign tourists.

In addition to these events, in 2012-13 Vietnam suffered natural disasters, in which dozens of people were killed and hundreds of houses and factories were damaged. Specifically, the country was struck by 10 deadly storms which killed 258 people, destroyed more than 6,000 houses and caused losses of US\$800 million. Among them, Son Tinh, the worst storm to strike Vietnam in the past decade due to its strength, speed and terrible destruction, left more than 10 people killed and losses of US\$250 million. Even worse, in 2013, 15 storms struck Vietnam which killed more than 300 people, destroyed nearly 700,000 houses and caused losses of US\$1.6 billion (“Floods and Storms in Vietnam in 2013” 2014).

In 2013, the death of General Vo Nguyen Giap, who was a major figure in the Vietnam wars in the 1960s and 1970s, was significant. His campaigns were responsible for driving both France and the US out of Vietnam and drew world-wide attention from the media. Vietnam’s wars against powerful Western countries have always attracted interest from the media and their audiences. The death of General Giap, the architect of these campaigns, definitely received foreign media coverage from a number of sources, such as BBC, NBC, CNN, NHK, *Financial Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Les Echos*, AP and AFP. They not only reported the event but also discussed the relevant issues of the past and present. The massive amount of reporting about the event and relevant topics contributed to the increase in the visibility of the country in 2013.

### 5.1.2. Visibility amongst Asian countries 2014-2015

During the period of 2014-15, Vietnam was the 15<sup>th</sup> most visible country (see Figure 6),



one place lower than the previous analysed period.

Figure 6: Visibility of Asian countries by number of reports in 2014-15

It is possible that the reason for this is that Vietnam experienced or witnessed fewer noticeable events, despite ongoing disputes between Vietnam and China in the East Sea, than the previous two-year period. The data showed that while the number of foreign media stories about Vietnam in these two years reached 1,500, nearly double that of the period of 2012-13, its visibility status dropped to 15<sup>th</sup> position. This may have resulted from extraordinary events experienced in other Asian countries, including the 7.8 Richter earthquake in Nepal, negatively affecting 8 million people, and establishment of IS terrorist organisations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Nevertheless, the reasons leading the number of stories about the country to double have related to territorial disputes between Vietnam and China in the East Sea which

drew a lot of attraction and coverage from international media in 2014. China built a giant oil rig in Vietnam's territory, in spite of other countries' condemnation. In addition to this, Vietnamese citizens also began taking to the streets to protest against China's escalating activities. Large rallies protesting against the Chinese Government were held by Vietnamese nationwide, especially in front of the Chinese Embassy in Vietnam and in industrial parks which hosted a number of Chinese-owned factories and companies. Popular unrest got out of Vietnam's local authorities' control when they did not take place peacefully, and became violent. Across Vietnam, rioters vandalised hundreds of foreign-owned factories thought to belong to Chinese companies (many other foreign firms were also targeted accidentally). At least six Chinese citizens were killed. Public demonstrations of such a size were highly unusual in Vietnam. All this put Vietnam's security was at risk and damaged its reputation for a stable and friendly business environment.

The year 2015 witnessed the escalating dispute between the two countries when China continued building projects in the sea off the coast of Vietnam. These triggered the involvement of powerful nations such as the US and Russia, and drew attention from international media.

## **5.2. News topics about Vietnam in 2012-2015**

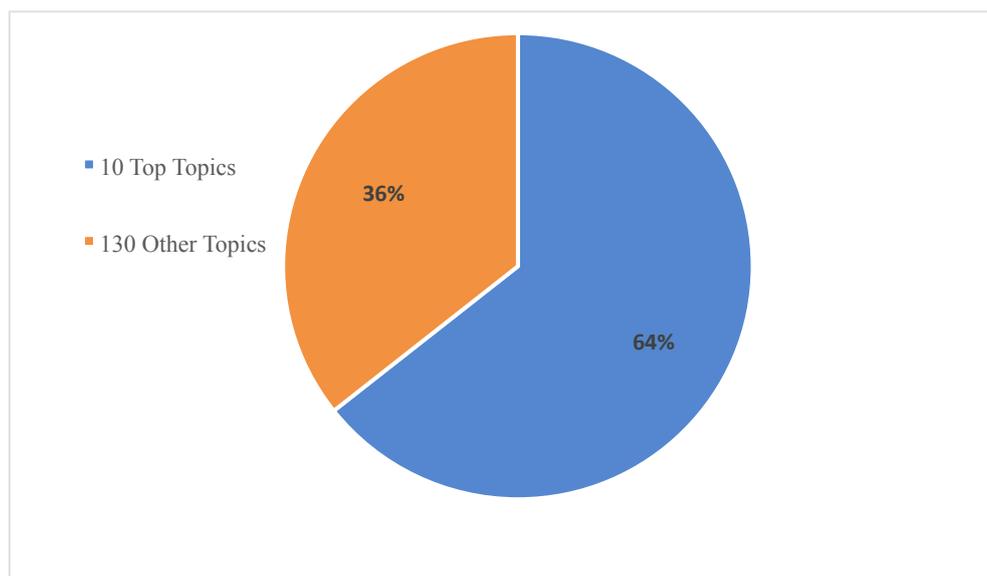
This section now turns to the analysis of the news topics about Vietnam as identified in the data analysis. Vietnam's past wars and conflict have remained the most interesting topics to global media, taking up one-quarter of overall information about Vietnam analysed in the entire period of 2012–2015. Negativity dominates these issues, resulting in a bad image for the country. Besides, according to foreign media, traffic accidents kill 24 people in Vietnam per day on average; and weather catastrophes,

especially biggest storms in the past 50 years and conflicts in the East Sea also contribute to the negativity about country in international media.

Although Vietnam’s foreign policy and diplomacy witnessed progress, with higher status in the region and participation in international agreements, messages about this success have yet to be conveyed by international media.

### 5.2.1. Top 10 news topics about Vietnam in 2012–2013

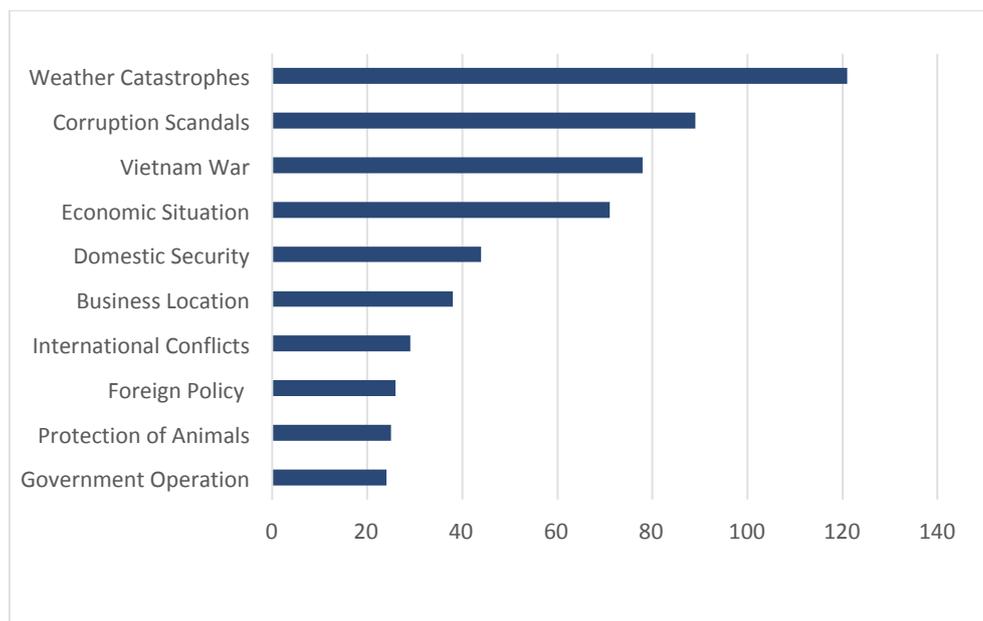
In the 2012–2013 period of analysis, the top 10 topics that were found to be covered by foreign media about Vietnam were: weather catastrophes, corruption scandals, the Vietnam War, the economic situation, domestic security, international conflicts, business location, foreign policy, protection of animals, and government operations.



**Figure 7: Top 10 topics account for the majority of the total coverage of Vietnam 2012–2013**

The top 10 stories are represented in the blue section in Figure 7, where they make up 64% of the total number of reports about Vietnam. The other 36% consists of more than 130 more minor topics such as the constitution, innovation, subsidies or public debt. Taking a closer look at the top 10 topics, the graph in Figure 8 indicates that

weather catastrophes, corruption scandals and the Vietnam War accounted for the largest number of stories, providing one-third of the total coverage in the period.



**Figure 8: Visibility of top ten topics in 2012–13**

In investigating these topics further and the stories that unfolded, I offer suggestions as to why they were dominant in the overall coverage of Vietnam.

### **Weather catastrophes**

Foreign media attention to climate change and weather catastrophes in Vietnam was likely due to the fact that the period witnessed 15 big storms raging in Vietnam that led to serious consequences, with nearly 500 people dying and total losses of US\$2.5 billion. The most devastating storm in Vietnam's history happened in 2013, causing the biggest loss. According to Mc Combs (2004) and Dearing and Rogers (1996), many issues happen at a time, so the newsworthy ones which emotionally impact the audience, get mainstream media's attention and are repeated. This topic then becomes more salient than others, as in these headline examples:

BBC: Floods kill many in central Vietnam after heavy rains

CNN: Powerful storm kills at least 30 in Philippines, Vietnam

### **Corruption scandals**

On the topic of scandals, foreign media reported on a series of stories on cases of bank leaders brought to court due to their fraudulent activities. This can be explained by the fact that, in 2012, more than 10 CEOs of top banks in Vietnam were brought to court. This resulted in the bankruptcy of these banks, affecting the whole economy. For example:

*Les Echos*: Les dirigeants de banque Vietnamiens face à la cour<sup>1</sup>

TG Rai 1: I capi delle banche Vietnam hanno portato in tribunale<sup>2</sup>

### **Vietnam War**

Although the Vietnam War ended nearly four decades earlier, it still featured as the third most dominant topic in the data, with stories focusing on different aspects such as the lasting consequences, war leaders, war victims, war crimes or international court cases between Vietnamese war victims and the US. One story that gained a lot of attention was the death of Vietnam's General Vo Nguyen Giap, ranked by the BBC as one of the foremost military commanders of the 20th century. This can be explained by the fact that General Giap had been a key figure in leading Vietnam to victory over powerful countries such as France and the US. Vietnam's wars changed the geopolitical map of the world due to the failure of foreign powers, so these wars continue to be mentioned and analysed whenever there are any related events. For example:

BBC: Vietnam's General Vo Nguyen Giap dies

BBC: What did General Giap mean to Vietnam

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<sup>1</sup> Vietnam's bank leaders facing the court

<sup>2</sup> The leaders of the Vietnam banks taken to court

*Financial Times: Vo Nguyen Giap, Vietnamese General, 1911-2013*

CNN: Legendary Vietnamese general Vo Nguyen Giap dies at 102

*The Wall Street Journal: Vietnamese Military Mastermind Gen. Giap Dies*

*The Wall Street Journal: He beat us in War but Never in Battle*

Besides, there are stories relating to Vietnamese war victims, their lives and other war consequences.

*The New York Times: 4 decades on, US starts cleanup of Agent orange in Vietnam*

NBC: Vietnamese veterans put faith in scientology 'detox' for Agent orange ailments

### **Economic situation**

When it came to the topic of Vietnam's economic situation, foreign media were particularly focused on the year 2012 when the country's economic growth index slid down to the lowest point in the 10-year period of 2002-2013. The economy witnessed the bankruptcy of nearly 60,000 businesses in the country and a foreign loan of US\$4.5 billion. The growth in gross domestic product was at 5.03%, compared with over 7% in the previous year. Based on this observation, foreign media discussed a range of both negative and positive situations affecting foreign investment and business projects in Vietnam, for example:

CNN: Starbucks to open first store in Vietnam

CNN: Embracing adventure in Vietnam

CNN: Shrimp shortage leads to record high prices

*Financial Times: Vietnam must ditch state-sponsored crony capitalism*

*Les Echos: Success-story: Marou, des créateurs frenchy défrichent le nouvel eldorado du chocolat au Vietnam*<sup>3</sup>

### **Domestic security**

Regarding the topic of domestic security, foreign media wrote stories on topics such as Vietnam's violation of human rights and freedom when imprisoning anti-government activists and publicising a law banning Vietnamese online users from discussing current affairs. For example:

BBC: Vietnam internet restrictions come into effect

BBC: Vietnam breaks up anti-China protests

CNN: Vietnam deports pro-democracy activist

### **Business location**

The two topics of Vietnam's economic situation and domestic security also appeared to drive the media's coverage of the country as a popular business location for international businesses. For example:

*The Wall Street Journal: Tech Firms flock to Vietnam*

*The Wall Street Journal: Starbucks Brings its culture to Vietnam*

*The Wall Street Journal: Nike, New Balance Showdown Highlights Thorny Issues in Trans-Pacific Trade Talks*

### **International conflicts, foreign policy and government operations**

International conflicts, foreign policy and government operations are also in the top topics list. Vietnam and China, for example, had conflicts in the East Sea with China imprisoning Vietnamese fishermen. Foreign media analysed the Vietnam

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<sup>3</sup> Success-story: Marou, Frenchy creators break through the new El Dorado of chocolate in Vietnam

Government's reactions to this issue and security concerns as demonstrated in these headlines:

*The Wall Street Journal: Vietnam accuses Chinese ships*

### **Animal protection**

The final topic in the list is the protection of animals, related mostly to the foreign media condemning the killing off endangered animals in Vietnam as well as the habit of eating dogs and cats as part of Vietnamese cuisine. Illegal trading, transport and cases of the usage in Vietnam of hippo and elephant teeth and bears' parts were reported on, with international communities criticising these practices. For example:

NBC: Vietnam tiger farms called fronts for illegal sales

*The Guardian: Wildlife crime ranks among trafficking in drugs, arms and humans*

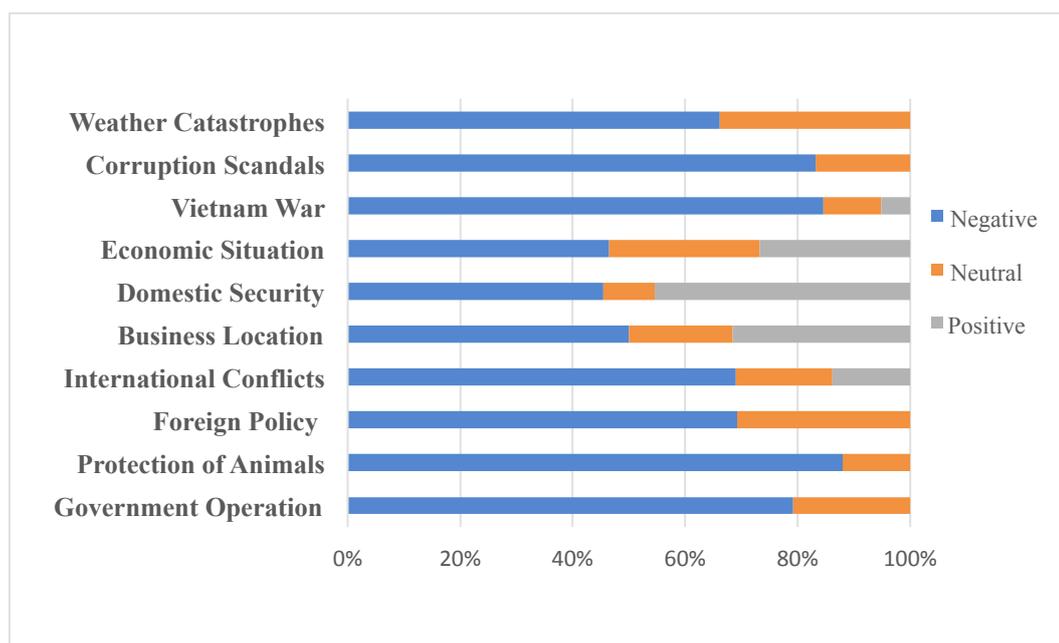
CBS: Vietnamese police seize four baby tigers in car

In comparison with these ten topics dominating foreign media coverage, according to the Vietnamese Government (Hanoi Moi, 2014), there were other notable events in these two years 2012-13 which appear to have received a great deal less coverage. These include: UNESCO recognising more cultural activities of Vietnam as part of the world's heritage, Ha Long Bay being recognised as one of the world's seven new wonders, Vietnam becoming a member of UN's Security Council, and free trade agreements being discussed with the EU and the US.

When the tone of the top ten topics is investigated, specifically in the two separate time periods, 2012-2013 and 2014-2015, there are some notable differences which are discussed next.

### 5.2.2. Tone of top 10 news topics about Vietnam 2012–2013

The tone of the stories in the top 10 topics in 2012–2013, as shown in the Figure 9, is predominantly negative about Vietnam. Five out of these 10 topics, which lacked any positive information, consisted of weather catastrophes, corruption scandals, foreign policy, protection of animals and government operation. Three-quarters of the stories in these topics were clearly negative in tone.



**Figure 9: Negativity is predominant in all 10 topics**

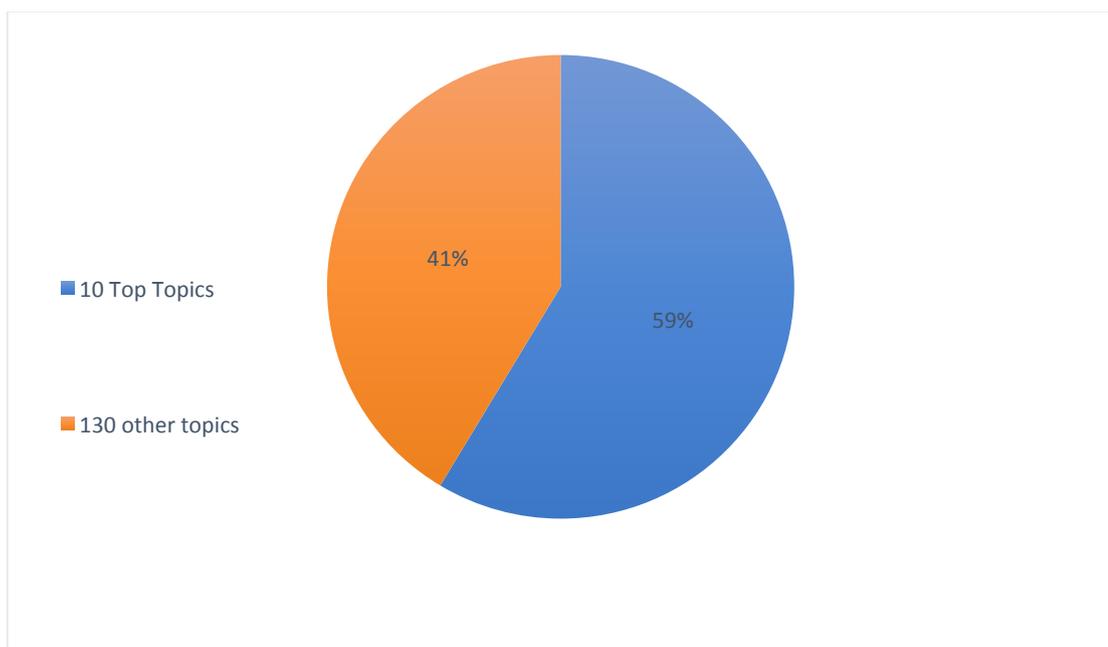
Besides, the other topics such as the Vietnam War and international conflicts were decidedly negative in tone (75–85%), while around two in ten (20–15%) were positive. Domestic security is the only topic which experienced a balance between the positive tones and the negative tones.

In the two remaining topics of economic situation and business location, more than 40% of the stories were negative in tone while nearly 30% were positive. While negativity exceeds positivity in stories covering these two topics, it is not a large gap.

These top 10 topics with the predominance of negative tone mainly cover aspects of quality of life (whether the place is safe for living or whether its welfare systems, like health and education, are robust), business potential (whether the place with its regulatory and infrastructure systems is good for business) and environmental issues (whether the place is environmentally friendly). These top topics and tones present the image of Vietnam in the international media in the period 2012–2013.

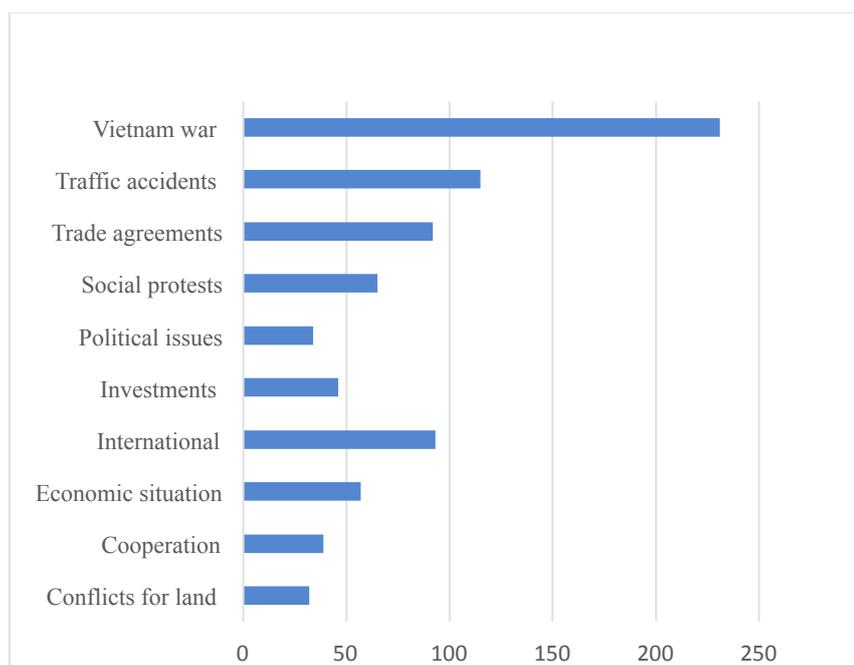
### 5.2.3. Top 10 news topics about Vietnam in 2014-2015

In the two years of 2014-2015, foreign media coverage focused on such topics as the Vietnam War, traffic accidents, international conflicts, trade agreements, social protests, the economic situation, investments, cooperation, political issues and conflicts over land. Figure 10 shows that these top 10 topics, made up 59% of the total number of reports about Vietnam. The remaining 41% consists of more than 130 other topics.



**Figure 10: Top ten topics account for majority of the total coverage of Vietnam 2014-2015**

Figure 11 indicates that the difference in the visibility of the top topics in 2014-2015 arose from the Vietnam War, traffic accidents and trade agreements, which took up the biggest share of foreign media coverage. Social protests, investments, international conflicts, the economic situation, cooperation and conflicts over land were the remaining top topics.



**Figure 11: Visibility of top ten news topics in 2014-15**

This analysed period shared three topics, namely the Vietnam War, international conflicts and the economic situation, with the previous analysed period. The international media expressed their consistent attention to the Vietnam War (which had ended 40 years earlier) and the country's international conflicts. The economic situation is also mentioned as an example of the possible results of wars and conflict. These three topics, along with other seven top topics, are discussed in the following paragraphs to examine what the media reports about them in detail and consider the possible reasons for their massive coverage.

## **Vietnam War**

In this period, the topic of Vietnam war featured first in the list of top topics in the foreign media coverage of Vietnam. The stories mainly reported on the border war between Vietnam and China, as the year of 2014 was the 35<sup>th</sup> year since the war ended. That war was “bloody”, and killed “tens of thousands on both side”. “It is a conflict the Chinese, in particular try to forget”, according to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* (2014). This war was also taken as an “awkward history behind Vietnam and China’s current conflict” (Tharoor, 2014).

*BBC*: Vietnam’s forgotten Cambodian war

*CNN*: ‘The Seventies’: Time magazine’s take on the end of the Vietnam War

*Les Echos*: Ces decisions absurdes qui conduisent a la guerre<sup>4</sup>

*New York Times*: Shadow of Brutal ‘79 War Darkens Vietnam’s view of China relations

## **Traffic accidents**

Regarding the topic of traffic accidents, foreign media focused on the large number of people killed in traffic accidents in Vietnam and the frequency of their occurrence. According to them, nearly 10,000 people were killed on road accidents in the country, with 25,000 injured.

## **International conflicts and social protests**

The following two topics of international conflicts and social protests relate to tensions between Vietnam and China in the East Sea which arose when China built an oil rig in the sea territory of Vietnam. Foreign correspondents were given access to the scene to observe and follow the developments. This is the reason why there was a large

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<sup>4</sup> The absurd decisions that lead to war

number of stories about the tensions which lasted a month in 2014. Not only the decisions of the two governments but also the protests of millions of Vietnamese against the Chinese Government received a great deal of coverage by foreign media. These massive protests had never happened before and led to the destruction of many Chinese factories doing business in Vietnam.

Actually, in general, half of the top topics analysed the tension between China and Vietnam in the past and at present, indicating the long-standing rocky relationship between these two countries as these headlines show:

*CNN*: China, Vietnam, Philippines collide amid escalating South China Sea tensions

*CNN*: China uses Vietnamese textbook to back claim in oil rig dispute

*The Wall Street Journal*: Anti-China rioting turns deadly in Vietnam

*German Welt am Sonntag*: Tote im Inselstreit zwischen China und Vietnam<sup>5</sup>

### **Free trade agreements, economic situation, investments and political issues**

In this period, foreign media also directed their attention to economics-related topics, including Vietnam's free trade agreements, the economic situation, investments and political issues. They noted the remarkable economic growth which Vietnam had gained in comparison with the previous analysed period. For example:

*BBC*: Trans-Pacific Partnership: vast trade deal made public

*The Wall Street Journal*: Anti-Chinese Riots Threaten Foreign Investments in Vietnam

### **Conflicts over land resources**

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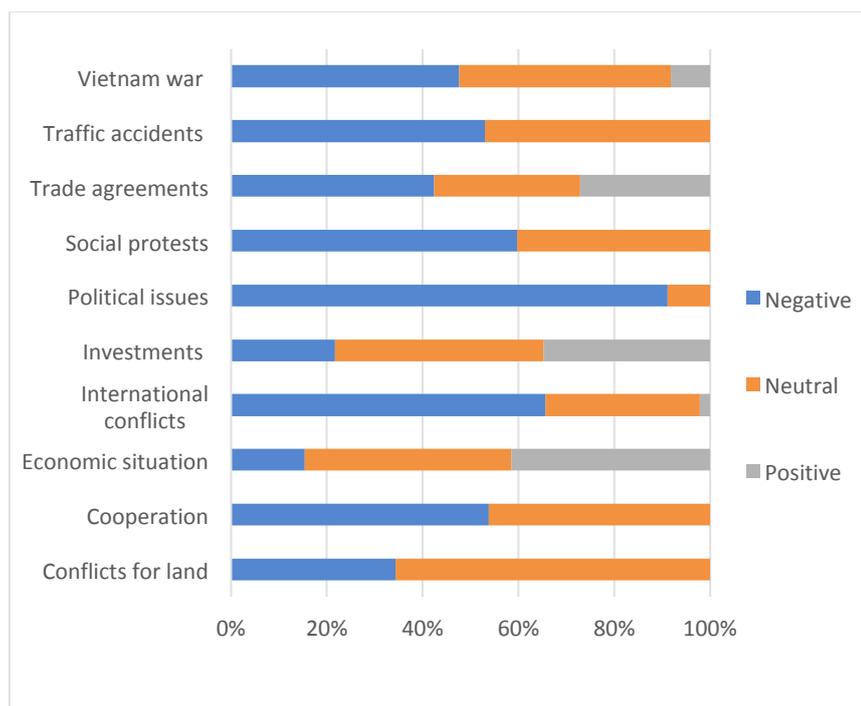
<sup>5</sup> Deaths in the island dispute between China and Vietnam

Foreign media gave attention to domestic land disputes in Vietnam in this period as farmers claimed that they did not get adequate compensation from the government, which had seized their farmland. These disputes attracted foreign media as farmers were injured while dealing with the local authorities and they partially affected the investment process of foreign investors.

Meanwhile, in this period, according to the Vietnamese Government (Hanoi Moi, 2016), there were some noteworthy events that received little foreign media coverage including: Vietnam joining free trade agreements such as EFTA, TPP and RCEP, the highest growth of GDP in five years, the discovery of Son Doong, one of the world’s longest and most beautiful caves, and, most notably, the first visit of Vietnam’s leader to the US in the past 20 years.

#### 5.2.4. Tone of top 10 news topics about Vietnam 2014-2015

Stories about the top 10 topics about Vietnam during the period 2014–2015 maintained a less favourable stance (45% negative vs. 17% positive), as can be seen in Figure 12.



### **Figure 12: Tone of top 10 news topics in 2014-2015**

Negativity is still predominant in most topics, except for the topic of investments and the economic situation. These two topics represent the positive element of Vietnam's coverage.

A clear majority of the stories about traffic accidents, social protests, international conflicts and cooperation (55–65%) were negative.

The topic of political issues experienced more than a 9:1 ratio of negative to positive coverage because it was a period when the disputes with China about sovereignty over the East Sea archipelagos escalated. This topic had the most negative stories amongst the top ten topics, while stories about the Vietnam War and trade agreements were also unfavourable (more than 40% negative vs. 10-25% positive).

The topic of conflicts over land carried a clearly neutral tone (62%), with the rest of the coverage being negative (38%). This topic had no positive stories. This might possibly have resulted from some cases in which local people protested against low land compensation rates offered by the local authorities. These protests caused some injuries. The local authorities were condemned in these cases and they subsequently publicised plans to settle the issues in the future.

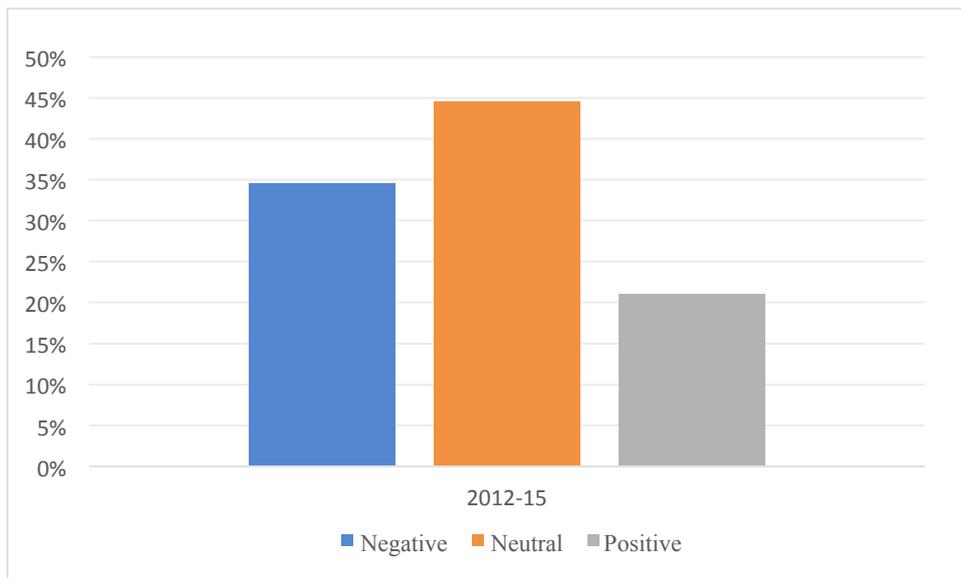
In comparison with the previous analysed period, the tone of coverage was less negative, which suggests that international media paid attention to more various issues from different angles, which were covered in positive tones such as investments or the economic situation.

### **5.3. Media tone about Vietnam during 2012-15**

Although the frequency and visibility of foreign media coverage is important, so too is the tone of the articles that can influence perception of Vietnam. The analysis of this is

covered in this section. The agenda-setting methodology required tone to be divided into categories of positive, negative and neutral. The tone of media coverage is decided by answering two questions: “How strong is positive and negative tone on the protagonists?” (that is, how are the main people in a story represented from either a positive or negative viewpoint) and “How salient are favourable and unfavourable circumstances?” (that is, how do the issues/events dominate the news). Neutral tone is identified when the answers to these questions indicate that the stories are neither positive nor negative, neither favourable nor unfavourable. That is, they may just present balanced and objective information, without displaying any feelings for or against a topic.

The analysis shows that neutral tone makes up the largest part (44.5%) of mainstream media coverage about Vietnam during the whole analysed period 2012-2015. The stories with either a negative or a positive tone were 34.5% and 21% of stories respectively (as shown in Figure 13). For example, there may be a neutral tone, such as “Metro in talks to sell Vietnam cash and carry unit” (*The Wall Street Journal*); a negative tone such as “Vietnam’s General Vo Nguyen Giap dies” (*BBC*) or “Floods kill many in central Vietnam after heavy rains” (*BBC*); or a positive tone such as “Tech firms flock to Vietnam” (*The Wall Street Journal*).

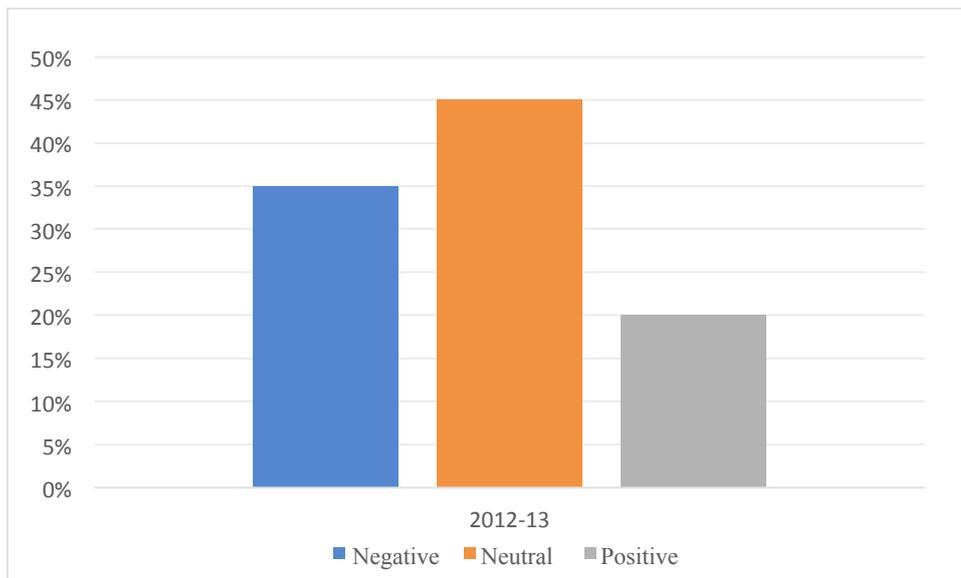


**Figure 13: Tone for Vietnam in 2012-2015**

It can be seen that negative tone was found more often than positive tone. In comparison with other Asian countries, the majority of the other most visible countries, except for Singapore, indicated similar results. As before, I present details about the tone of stories in the two separate time periods under analysis and include some examples of the stories that were identified as having positive, negative or neutral tone.

#### *5.3.1. Media tone about Vietnam 2012-2013*

In Figure 14 which relates to the 2012-2013 period of analysis, neutral tone accounted for 45% of mainstream media coverage about Vietnam, the highest number among the three tones. Meanwhile, just one-fifth (20%) of coverage about Vietnam was identified as positive in tone. The number of negative stories was 35% of the whole coverage.



**Figure 14: Tone for Vietnam in 2012–2013**

Excluding the neutral tone category, it can be seen that the tone of media stories about Vietnam has generally been more negative than positive, that is, the proportion of negative stories is 1.5 times higher. This relates especially to stories about natural disasters such as consecutive storms and floods, taking up much of the negative coverage. This suggests that Vietnam is a country which is at the mercy of natural disasters, which could cast it in a more negative light.

Also, the death of General Vo Nguyen Giap contributed to driving the general tone for coverage of Vietnam to be more unfavourable when it was relevant to the topic of war and conflict. General Vo Nguyen Giap was portrayed as a strong and forbidding opponent of Western countries by foreign media such as BBC, *The Wall Street Journal* and CNN. The General, and Ho Chi Minh, the first president of Vietnam, had a big impact on the image of the country in the world, leading the victories of Vietnam over world powers with their intelligence and bravery. In the meantime, a lot of stories which analysed the problematic issues in General Giap’s tactics and reported his struggles with the current government were heavily unfavourable. For example, the article “Vietnamese Military Mastermind Gen. Giap dies” in *The Wall Street Journal*,

October 4, 2013, presented the Vietnamese General, a representative of the country, as a “feisty” commander who showed “readiness to send tens of thousands of his own men to their deaths”.

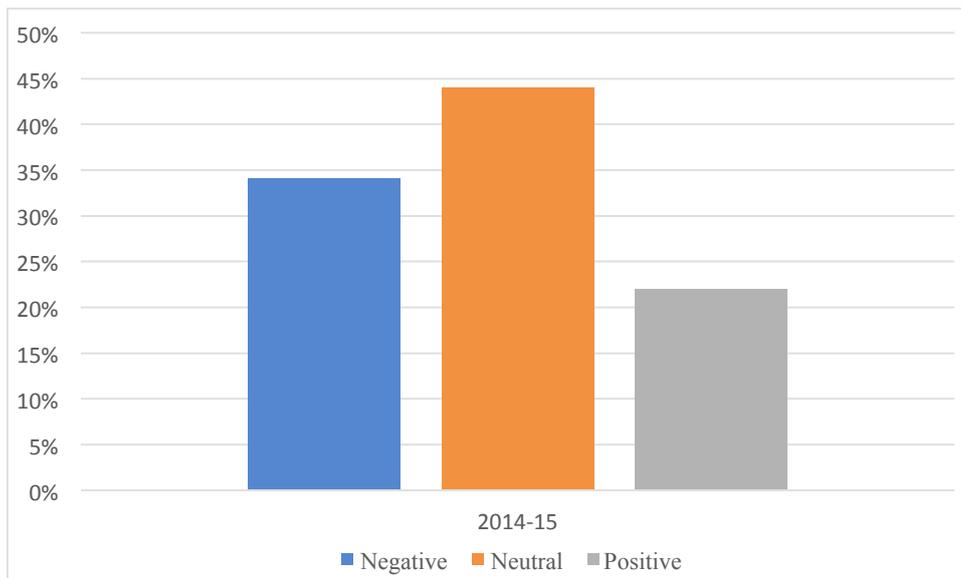
This percentage of negative coverage is comparatively low in comparison with the other most visible Asian countries such as Bangladesh and Thailand, which experienced the development of insecurity in their societies.

The positive-toned stories in this period were mainly about the country’s current economic development and domestic security, which showed some progress, in comparison with some past years and other countries with the same conditions as Vietnam.

The stories with neutral tone focused on the neutral foreign policies of Vietnam, when responding to international issues, based on its consistent foreign policy strategy of independence, self-reliance, peace, cooperation and development. Neutral stories also focused on forecasts on the country’s economic situation and weather catastrophes.

### *5.3.2. Media tone about Vietnam 2014-2015*

Similar to the first analytical period, in 2014-2015 the neutral tone took up the greatest amount of the media coverage (see Figure 15). Meanwhile, the percentage of negative stories (34%) is still greater than positive ones (22%). But it can be seen that the number of stories with positive tones had started increasing, in comparison with the previous period. These numbers showed a gradual shift to a more positive image of Vietnam. It was a signal for the change in the years which followed.



**Figure 15: Tone for Vietnam in 2014-2015**

As can be seen in Figure 15, stories with a positive tone are less than those identified as having negative or neutral tones. The negative coverage partially came from the stories covering the protests against the Chinese Government’s operations in the disputed sea area (described in section 5.1 about visibility, above). These stories negatively featured the investment environment of Vietnam and the operations and effectiveness of the Vietnamese Government in support businesses and dealing with social disorder.

With these events, the general tone of media coverage about Vietnam in this period, as shown in the graphs presented in this section, is still negative over positive. However, this negative percentage is lower than the whole analysed period as more positive developments and events in the country were reported over the complete time span of 2012-2015.

The positive stories mainly focused on the increase in foreign investments into Vietnam which are funnelled from traditional partners of Vietnam such as Japan, South Korea, Singapore or the US. The stories about the growing investments were covered by the BBC, *The Wall Street Journal* and the *Financial Times*.

A neutral tone was witnessed on most of the top topics during this time, especially cooperation, investments or traffic issues.

### *5.3.3. Presentation of the neutral tone of data analysis findings*

It is interesting to note that the large number of stories identified as having a neutral tone in the data sets in comparison with those with a negative or positive tone, and this requires further explanation. As an example, it is useful to consider the neutral tone in “Metro in talks to sell Vietnam cash and carry unit” in *The Wall Street Journal* on August 4, 2014. The article is about Metro’s plan to sell its unit in Vietnam to Thailand’s Berli Jucker. It is as an update about the unit. The article then mainly focuses on the shifts in current business strategy of Metro. The sale price is also mentioned. No subjective comments relating to Vietnam are given.

It is impossible to get to know exactly why journalists write neutral stories, instead of positive or negative ones. Possible reasons for neutral stories may be, for example, journalism practices or news organisations’ policies and marketing strategies. According to Rosenson (2015), the power of journalistic objectivity was the main reason for the predominance of neutral stories. This norm, he said, aims at presenting the facts and giving voices for relevant sides, without expressing journalists’ own opinions. The intention is to present a balanced picture of events. Besides, other factors such as news values, the reliance on official sources and relationships with other sources lead to the balance of tones in stories (McCombs, 2004).

It should be noted that previous studies of news media coverage’s influences on audiences have not always included discussions of neutral tone in their findings. They only put the focus on positive and negative stories, although the number of neutrally-toned stories was known.

For example, in the Project for Excellent in Journalism of Pew Research Center, the share of neutral stories takes up majority of the coverage of US presidential elections by US media, such as in 2008 or 2012. However, the neutral tone is not fully addressed in the conclusion of the project and has no effect on it. Specifically, the project concluded:

The media coverage of the race for president in 2008 has not so much cast Barack Obama in a favorable light as it has portrayed John McCain in a substantially negative one. ... Coverage of McCain has been heavily unfavorable — and has become more so over time (“Winning the media campaign” 2008, para. 1).

The conclusions were drawn in spite of the neutral tone accounting for more than one-third of the coverage. For Obama during this period, positive tone took up 36% of the stories, while neutral tone accounted for a similar figure (35%). A smaller percentage (29%) were negative. For McCain, 37% of stories were positive, a lower number of 31% were neutral and 32% were negative (“Winning the media campaign” 2008).

The same situation can be seen in 2012. In the presidential election of 2012, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney both received more negative than positive coverage from the news media, according to the study. The proportion of favourable stories about Obama was just 19% while 30% were unfavourable and more than half of the media coverage about him (51%) was neutral. As for Romney, the share of favourable and unfavourable stories was 15% and 38% respectively. Meanwhile, nearly half of the total stories (47%) about Romney were neutral (“Wining the Media Campaign 2012” 2012).

Recently, in their study about psychophysiological reactions to news, Soroka, Fournier and Nir (2019) also put their focus on just negative and positive news and audiences’

reactions to them. According to them, “the average human is more physiologically activated by negative than by positive news stories” (p. 18888). However, they did not mention neutral-toned stories at all. For them, neutral stories do not lead to audiences’ psychological reactions.

According to Guenduez, Schedler & Ciocan (2016), a story is deemed to be neutral in tone when “it reflects neither negative nor positive views” (p. 589). That is, no views or attitudes are conveyed in a story as a way to attract audiences. Rather, those with a neutral tone are considered to be objective stories providing balanced information. Marinkova and Steibel (2013), Conde, Calderón and Pascual (2016) and Rosenson (2015) agreed with this perspective in their studies, adding that when audiences read balanced news, they have a balanced picture of something or someone, or even of a country, not a negative or positive picture. Dunaway (2013) shared the idea of balanced pictures provided by neutral stories for audiences and asserted that neutral stories do not influence or shape audiences’ attitudes.

Schatz (personal communication, 2020), a scholar in the agenda-setting field, asserted that tonality must exist in the media context. Regarding the meaning of the neutral tone, he stated that the neutral tone in the data means that a statement about one or more protagonists simply conveys information, without any “any feelings for or against a topic.”

Furthermore, a number of studies showed that the negative and positive tones of news stories, rather than neutral ones, were more likely to influence audiences’ perceptions of and attitudes towards other people (especially leaders of political parties and businesses) or countries (Eberl & Plescia, 2018; Hopmann et al., 2010; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2012).

According to Druckman and Parkin (2005), the assumptions of audiences about the characteristics of people or places tend to be automatically made from positive or negative descriptions in texts, not neutral ones. For example, studies by Balmas and Sheaffer (2010) and Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof, Oegema, and de Ridder (2007) showed that positive news makes favourable impacts on the assessment of parties and candidates. Nyhuis and Plescia (2017) also found that positive stories on a party coalition during an election campaign has a positive effect on voters, such that they perceived that the coalition may have been more competitive than other parties. Similarly, studies by Norris et al. (1999) and Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2007) concluded that positive stories toward particular parties lead voters to have more positive evaluations of those parties. Thus, the tones deciding the audiences' favourable or unfavourable impressions are negative and positive, not neutral. According to the scholars, when audiences have no chance to witness or have direct experiences, they "have nowhere else to go than the media—the media's tone must be assumed to be an important cue" (Hopmann et al., 2010, p. 391). Accordingly, positive and negative tones are counted, not neutral tone.

As with the project of Pew Research Center or the studies of Norris et al. (1999) or Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2007) described above, in the case of Vietnam I too acknowledge there are a high number of neutral stories that appear in the data. However, as I focused on the relationship between mainstream coverage and people's perceptions about Vietnam, neutral tone played a less important role on perceptions as it is less likely to have an influence on readers. This is reason for my focus on the analysis of negative and positive stories, instead of neutral ones.

In addition, my study scope is on the relationship between foreign media coverage and country reputation. Specifically, the predominance of negative stories over positive ones about Vietnam showed that press treatment to the country was unfavourable. How the unfavourable press coverage compared with CBI data, which conveyed whether people were favourable or not about particular aspects of Vietnam, is discussed in Chapter 6. Accordingly, negatively and positively toned stories are taken into account, as suggested by previous research.

Moving on from top stories and tone, an important part of agenda-setting research is a consideration of the coverage of protagonists in news stories, as this too relates greatly to people's perceptions about Vietnam.

#### **5.4. People and organisations of Vietnam**

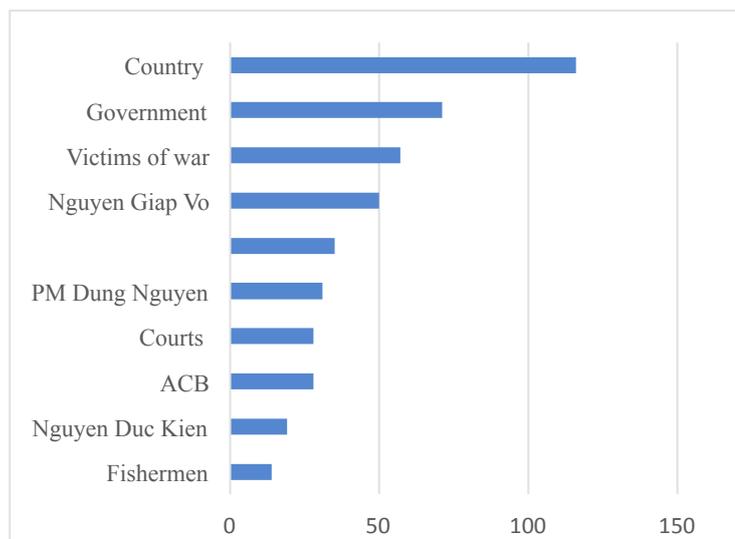
Vietnam and war-related protagonists figured prominently in all four years of analysis. These two protagonists took up more than 80% of the stories related to reporting on protagonists, including: persons, such as politicians, authorities, war victims, traffic accident victims or farmers; organisations/groups, such as ACB (a bank), the Vietnam Communist Party or government; and the country (Vietnam) in general. Tonality was negative. The country's painful history and conflicts were highlighted. Also, some corruption scandals, with the involvement of banking officials, drew much interest from media. Other top protagonists, such as victims of accidents, especially children in an overloaded Can Gio boat, and Vietnamese overseas (including illegal refugees) also frame negative pictures.

In analysing the protagonists and how they were reported on by international media, it was apparent that there was less emphasis on positive stories of people such as successful business people or leaders, or stories about cultural and tourism activities

and attractions; these stories were not part of the country's branding up to the time of the research.

#### 5.4.1. Top protagonists 2012–2013

There appeared to be a close link between the top topics and the top protagonists (see Figure 16) as these top protagonists are the main characters in the stories covering dominant topics. The top ten persons/organisations covered in the news included: Vietnam (the country in general), government, victims of war, General Vo Nguyen Giap, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, victims of accidents and weather, ACB (the leading bank of Vietnam), Nguyen Duc Kien (the chief executive officer of ACB), courts and fishermen. They are the main participants in the events relating to the top topics.



**Figure 16: Visibility of top Vietnamese protagonists in 2012-13**

During this analysed period, Vietnam (the country in general), government, war veterans, victims of war and General Vo Nguyen Giap were the top five protagonists covered by foreign media. This situation can be explained by the fact that foreign media had a lot of stories revolving around the topics of war and conflict involving Vietnam that they felt their audiences were likely to be interested in. So, these became

main protagonists, and were featured in 80% of the total number of stories analysed in this period.

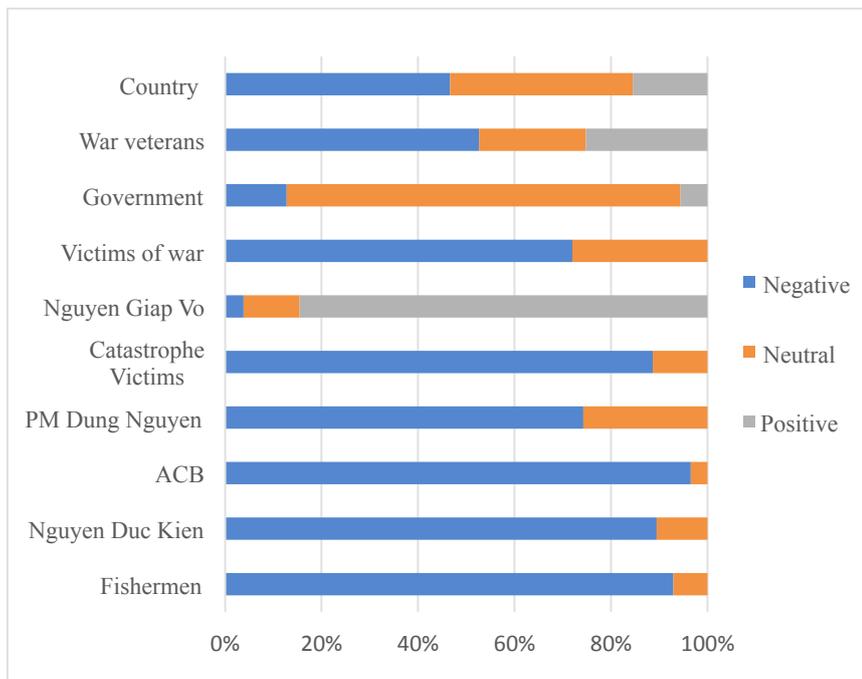
As weather catastrophes are one of the most dominant topics, victims of catastrophes get much attention from the media accordingly. Foreign media featured victims with typical stories covering how they suffered and recovered.

The next most frequently covered protagonist was Vietnam's then-Prime Minister, Nguyen Tan Dung (Dung Nguyen), as this was the key person leading Vietnam's changes and decisions on international-related issues, including international conflicts, as analysed by foreign media.

Remarkably, also in the top list are ACB and its leader, Nguyen Duc Kien, as serial banking scandals originated from this bank and its CEO Kien, which drove down economic growth and badly affected investment activities in the country. ACB suffered from the decisions of CEO Kien, with bad loans worth more than 7 trillion dong (NZ\$467 million).

Fishermen became a top protagonist group as they were the main victims in the international struggle in the East Sea between Vietnam and China, when China kept attacking them and their boats.

Due to the development of the events relating to these top people/organisations, the tonality with which foreign media covered these top people was largely more negative than positive, as indicated in Figure 17. The exception here is in the stories on General Vo Nguyen Giap who, as stated earlier, had been praised by foreign media as a significant Vietnamese military general in the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

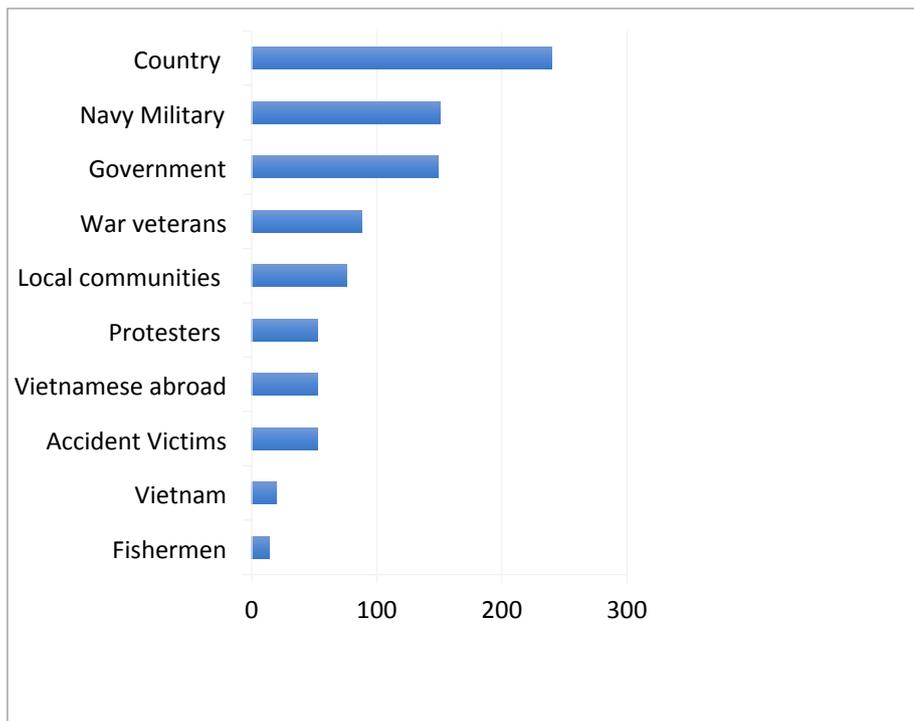


**Figure 17: Tone of top ten protagonists in 2012-13**

Notably, the then-Prime Minister, Nguyen Tan Dung, and his government got a number of negative analyses from foreign journalists with regard to letting the economy down and dealing with the struggle with China in the East Sea.

#### *5.4.2. Top protagonists 2014–2015*

During this analysed period, most of the top topics (see Figure 17) revolved around the disputes between Vietnam and China, which escalated when China built an oil rig in the sea claimed by Vietnam and attacked Vietnamese fishermen. Vietnam’s navy was called to readiness. This explains why most of the top people/protagonists of stories about Vietnam in this period, including the navy, local communities, protesters, Vietnam citizens abroad, fishermen, local communities and government, are related to this topic.

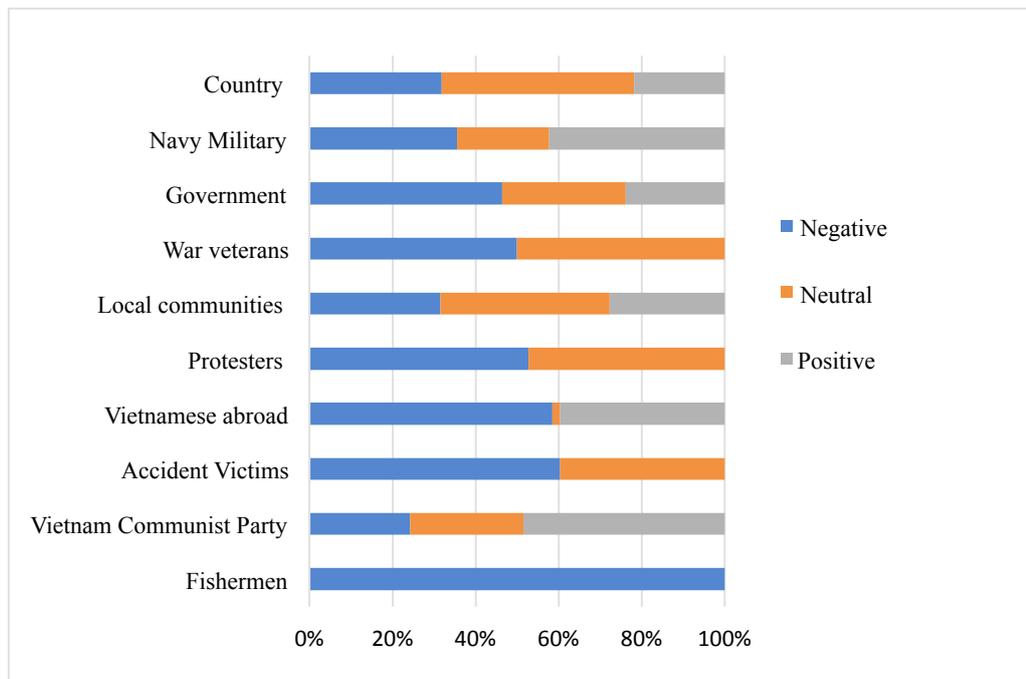


**Figure 18: Visibility of top ten protagonists in 2014-15**

In addition, war veterans and victims are still in the top list, like the previous analysed period, as foreign media focused on featuring the life of war veterans and victims of Vietnam.

Regarding the other top people/organisations, including the government and the Vietnam Communist Party, their presence can be explained in that their decisions on political and economic issues attracted analyses and comments from foreign journalists.

Tonality for all top protagonists, as seen in Figure 1, is mainly negative due to the nature of the events in which they were involved.



**Figure 19: Tone of top ten Vietnamese protagonists in 2014–15**

In this period, most of top protagonists were covered with negative tones. However, it should be noted that the navy and the Vietnam Communist Party got more positivity than negativity. This might possibly be due to the efforts of the navy to protect its people in the disputed sea and the effective policies of Vietnam Communist Party regarding the restructure of the country’s economy.

While the previous four sections have concentrated on visibility, tone and protagonists, as identified in the data, it is also important to look at data on the top international media outlets that covered Vietnam. This is discussed in the next section.

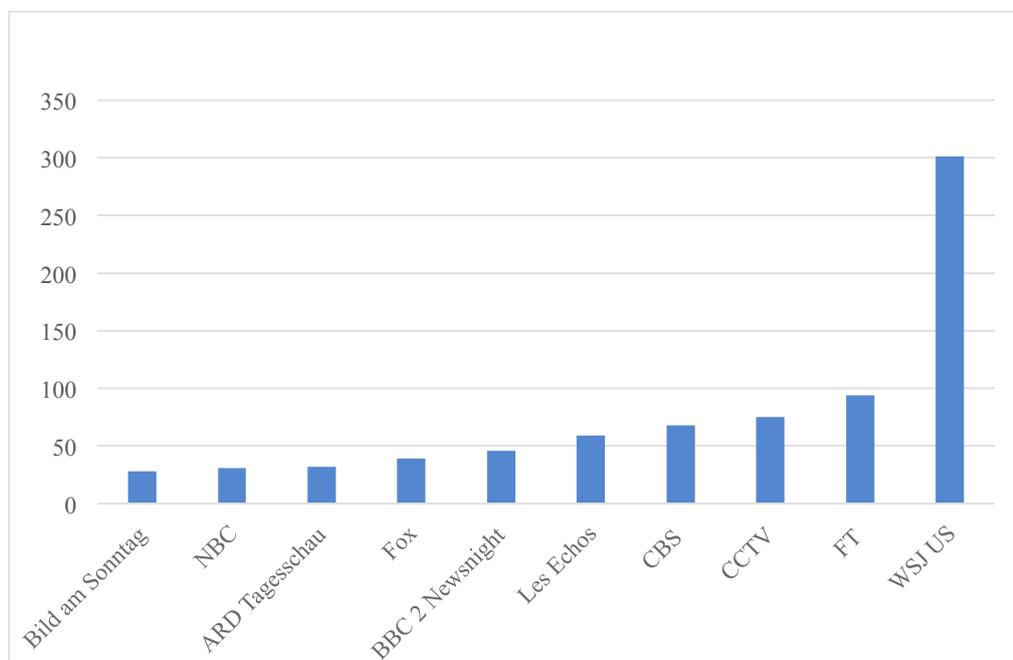
### **5.5. Top media outlets and channels covering Vietnam**

According to Severin and Tankard (2001), leading elite media outlets play a key role in laying out an agenda which can influence other news organisations around the world. They are likely to initiate series of stories on particular issues or people that are picked up by the others. Top foreign media covering Vietnam that were identified in the

Media Tenor data included *The Wall Street Journal*, *Financial Times*, CCTV, CBS, *Les Echos*, BBC2 *Newsnight*, Fox, ARD *Tagesschau*, NBC and *Bild am Sonntag*. These are leading media outlets, offering news in different languages such as English, French, Chinese and German. Looking at how they cover Vietnam, their top stories and tone, helps answer the research question of how different foreign media represent Vietnam and how this relates to its reputation.

### 5.5.1. Tone of media coverage 2012–2013

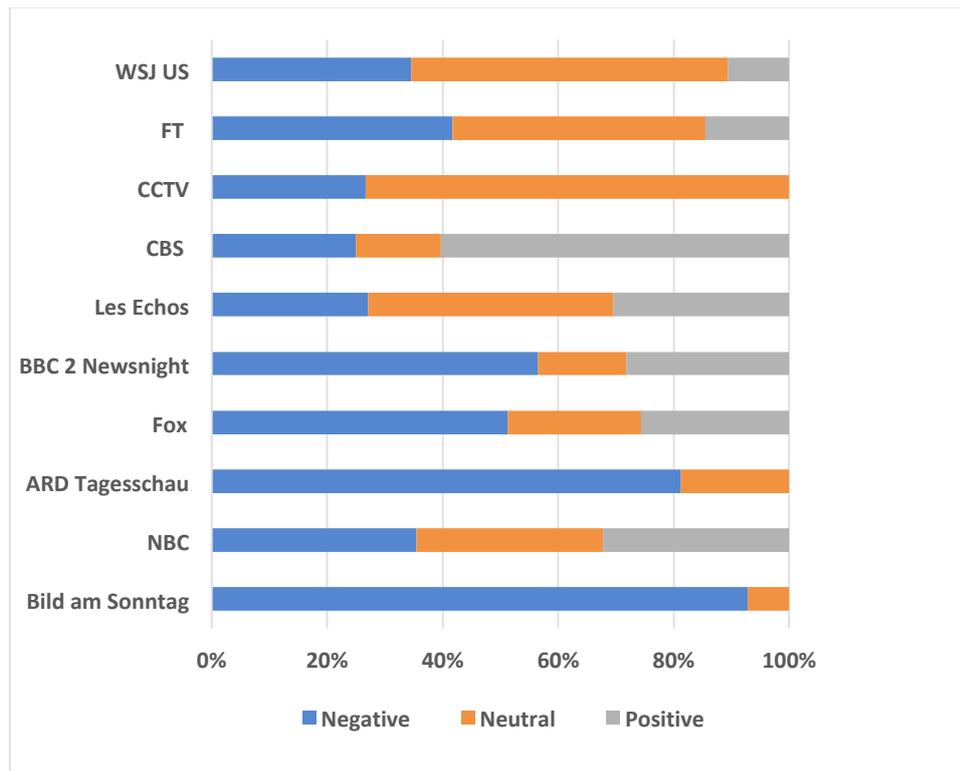
The top ten media outlets that provided the most coverage of Vietnam (identified in Figure 20) were *The Wall Street Journal*, *Financial Times*, CCTV, BBC 2 *Newsnight*, Fox, ARD *Tagesschau* and *Bild am Sonntag*. The number of reports by these media outlets about Vietnam is considerably larger than others. As explained in Chapter 3, the goals of news organisations contribute to their decision on what to write about. So, Vietnam might be among their topics of interest for coverage.



**Figure 20: Share of media outlets in stories about Vietnam 2012–13**

The countries that these media outlets represented were mainly the US and in Europe, such as the UK, France, Germany or Switzerland. However, they are not limited to readers/viewers in these countries, but have global reach as they offer digital editions.

When looking at the general tone of the stories that these media produced (see Figure 21), the findings showed that less than half of the stories were unfavourable.



**Figure 21: Tone of media coverage about Vietnam 2012–13**

Specifically, around 40% of stories from *The Wall Street Journal* (US) and the *Financial Times* (UK) were negative, while more than 10% were positive and the remainder neutral. Nearly 30% of stories by the Chinese broadcaster CCTV were negative while none were positive. Negativity by the UK's *BBC 2 Newsnight* and the US's *Fox* coverage was nearly 60% percent, double the percentage of positive stories. However, more remarkably, nearly all of stories of German media *ARD Tagesschau* and *Bild am Sonntag* were negative and no positive stories were identified in their data.

However, different from other top media outlets covering Vietnam, the US broadcaster CBS took a more favourable approach to Vietnam, with 60% of its stories being positive and around 20% negative.

US broadcaster NBC was the only one witnessing a balance in the number of negative and positive stories about Vietnam (nearly 40% each).

The reason for the negative tone of top foreign media, except for CBS, in covering Vietnam is due to the fact that they focused on such topics as the Vietnam War, court cases, international conflicts and scandals, as shown in previous graphs. Also, it is possible that the historical experience and knowledge with which a lot of people in the US were scarred might dictate the choice of story and tone.

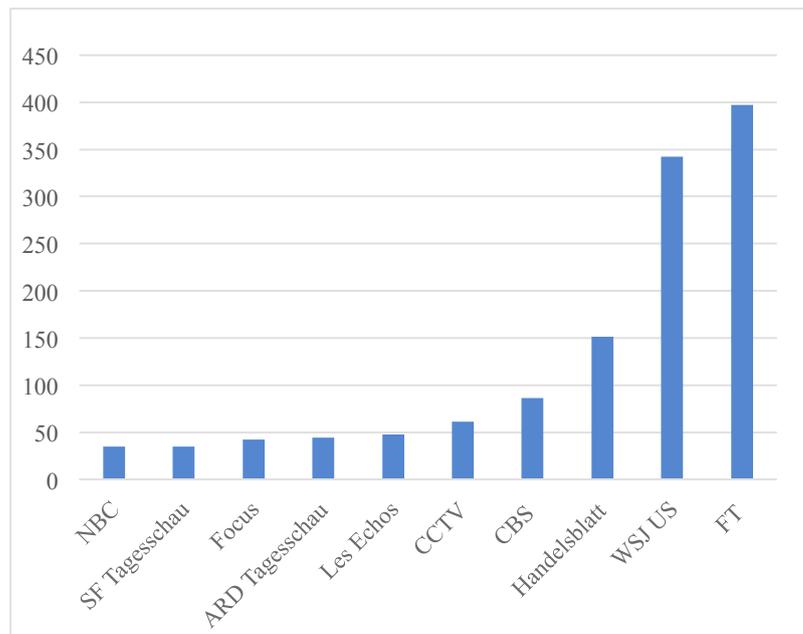
Meanwhile, CBS mainly reported on Vietnam's product reputation, labour market and trade agreements. Even with the topics of the Vietnam War and international conflicts, CBS's tone was still positive as shown, for example, in the following headlines:

CBS: First Agent Orange clean-up to start in Vietnam

CBS: Filipino warship in standoff with Chinese boats

#### *5.5.2. Tone of media coverage 2014–2015*

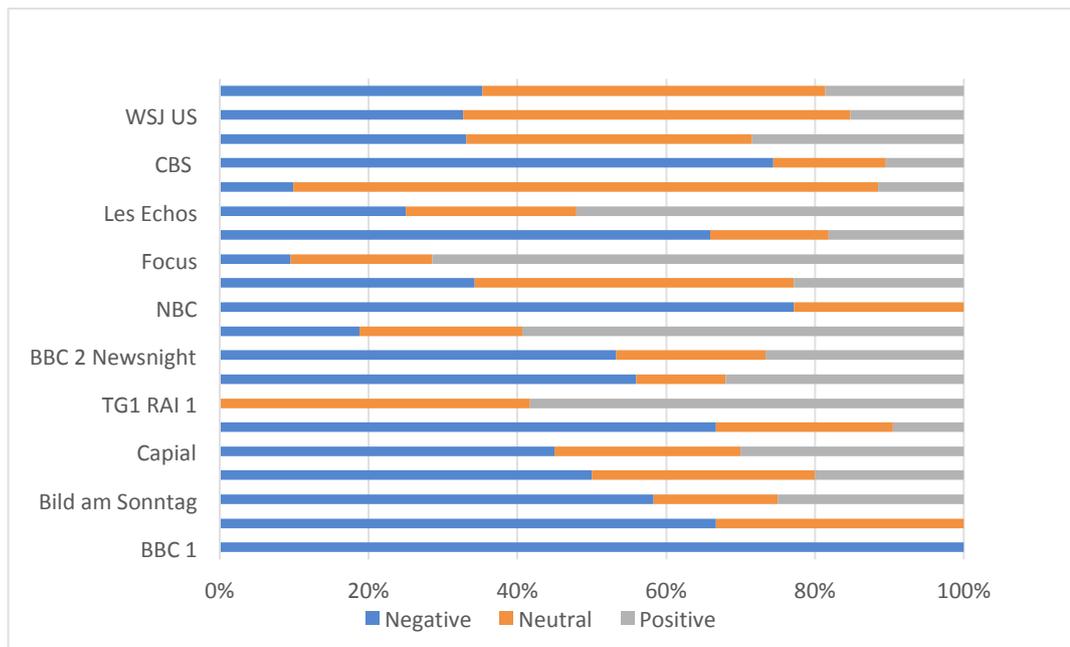
In this analysed period, the list of top foreign media included some new names compared with the previous two-year period, as seen in Figure 21.



**Figure 22: Share of media outlets stories about Vietnam 2014-15**

These additional outlets included the *Focus* and *Handelsblatt* (from Germany), while the earlier outlets of *The Wall Street Journal*, CBS, CCTV, *Les Echos*, *ARD Tagesschau*, *SF Tagesschau* and NBC remained.

When it came to looking at the tone of their stories in this time period, the US stations CBS and NBC were the outlets with most negative share in their total stories at nearly 80% (see Figure 22).



**Figure 23: Tone of media coverage about Vietnam 2014-15**

NBC, in particular, recorded no positive stories, while CBS had only 10% positive stories. In the earlier period, CBS was the most favourable for Vietnam among the top media outlets covering the country. However, this period witnessed a completely contrary situation because the topics about Vietnam covered by CBS mostly included war, conflicts and traffic accidents .

Coverage of Vietnam by the *Financial Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Handelsblatt* and *SF Tagesschau* was also quite unfavourable, with nearly 40% of stories being negative and around 20% positive.

Meanwhile, the number of negative and positive stories of CCTV were equal, at around 10%, leaving 80% cent neutral.

*Focus* and *Les Echos* were most favourable for Vietnam during this period, with more than 50% of stories being positive and around 10–20% negative.

The reason for the dominance of negativity in top foreign media coverage is the same for the previous analysed period. Meanwhile, *Focus* and *Les Echos*, with more

favourable stories, mainly covered topics on Vietnam's economic growth, favourable policies for foreign businesses, and the labour market.

The findings of the content analysis of stories about Vietnam by 40 international media organisations such as *The Wall Street Journal* (US), *Financial Times* (UK), and *Les Echos* (France) showed that Vietnam's image is consistent: Vietnam's past wars and its conflicts with China have remained the topics that are most interesting to global media, taking up one-quarter of overall information about Vietnam in the whole period analysed, 2012–2015. Negativity dominated these issues, resulting in a bad image for the country. In addition, traffic accidents and weather catastrophes also contributed to the negativity about the country in international media

Thus, the general tone for media coverage of Vietnam across the analysed period is more negative than positive, with the percentage of negative stories being 2.5 times higher than the percentage of positive stories.

In the next chapter, Chapter 6, these findings are compared with Vietnam's CBI to see whether there are any correlations.

## CHAPTER 6

# COUNTRY BRAND INDEX ABOUT VIETNAM & COMPARISON BETWEEN MEDIA CONTENT VS. THE INDEX

### Introduction

As outlined in the method chapter, Chapter 4, the next stage of the analysis involved taking the publicly available CBI data on the public perception of countries that was drawn from a survey of almost 6,000 people (opinion formers, international business people and travellers) across two time periods of 2012–2013 and 2014–2015. The objective was to look at the CBI survey data on the impressions of specific groups of people about Vietnam and its reputation and see how it compared with the ways in which foreign media represented the country as outlined in the findings in Chapter 5. In this chapter, I first provide further information about the CBI which examines and ranks country reputation, based on the proprietary research methodology. Then, most importantly, I look specifically at the CBI data relating to Vietnam's image in respondents' perceptions, such as what they know about Vietnam and how they think about the country, so that I can then see how that image compares with my own media content analysis conducted over the same time period.

### 6.1. Vietnam not being perceived as a safe and favourable place in 2012–2013

The 2012–2013 CBI was derived from a survey of 3,600 international business people and travellers from 18 countries, namely Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, Turkey, the UAE, the UK, and the US. These respondents were chosen because of their interest in foreign investments or travelling to other destinations and were therefore considered to have comprehensive knowledge of the world.

In the list of 118 countries ranked on desirability, Vietnam was in the bottom half, positioned at number 69. This may be due to Vietnam's reputation and issues over political freedom, environmental friendliness, quality of life and business environment, which were not rated as highly as other countries.

In the top half of the list, there were quite a few Asian countries such as Japan (3<sup>rd</sup>), Singapore (14<sup>th</sup>), Thailand (26<sup>th</sup>), Malaysia (36<sup>th</sup>), India (42<sup>nd</sup>), South Korea (49<sup>th</sup>) and Taiwan (50<sup>th</sup>). Noticeably, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia – three South East Asian countries – have the same ranking as Vietnam in international media coverage. In a tumultuous world, countries at the top of the list are symbols of stability in social issues, politics and economics, according to the CBI expert (personal communication, 2018 November 13).

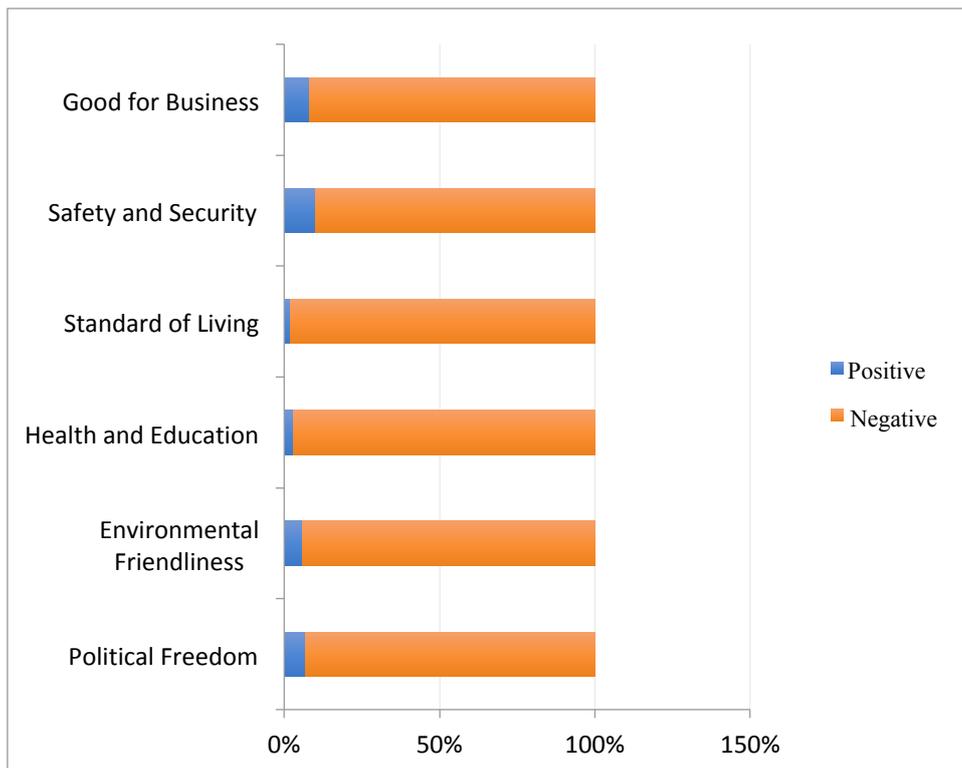
Meanwhile, other Asian countries in the bottom half of the list, along with Vietnam, included China, Laos, Indonesia and Cambodia. Countries which were ranked in this half of the list are mainly in Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East and South America. These countries share commonalities with some instabilities in their socio-political situation. For example, China is notorious for their censorship restrictions, with limited Internet and social networks.

When it came to Vietnam's image, the CBI data showed that around 90% of the survey respondents did not rate the country very highly when it came to its values such as political freedom, quality of life or business potential, as shown in Figure 24.

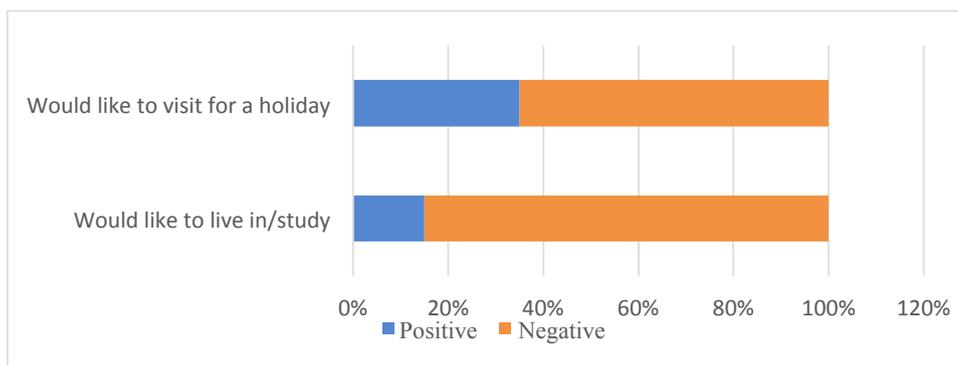
- Value system: 93% of respondents confirmed that they thought there is no political freedom in Vietnam. They do not see it as having environmental friendliness, a stable legal environment or freedom of speech as well (see Figure 24).

- Quality of life: 90% of respondents said that they do not think Vietnam is a safe place due to wars and other struggles. And 97% of respondents agreed that the education system and healthcare system are not robust. The standard of living of Vietnam is backward. All of these aspects are at the bottom of the list in the countries analysed. There are no job opportunities in the country, according to the respondents (see Figure 24).
- Business Potential: 92% of respondents agreed that Vietnam is not good for business and travelling. Vietnam was ranked 115<sup>th</sup> out of 118 analysed countries on the question of whether the country is a good place for business or not. This question is based on four categories, including regulatory issues, workforce, technology and investment climate (see Figure 24).

As a result, most of respondents said they were not willing to visit or live in Vietnam due to its lack of safety (wars, other struggles, accidents) and backwardness (low standard of living, healthcare and education) (see Figure 25). More than 30% of the respondents said that they would like to come to visit Vietnam for a holiday and only 15% of the respondents said they would like to do business or study and live in the country (see Figure 25).



**Figure 24: Perceptions about Vietnam 2012–2013**



**Figure 25: Coming to Vietnam or not**

From the above analysis, with an overall rank of 69 out of 118, Vietnam is not graded by the respondents as a safe country due to its history of wars and struggle; as a good place for business due to its problematic system of governance and legal framework; and as a good place for living on account of its backward public health system, infrastructure and education.

It appears from this CBI data that there is a lot of negativity when it comes to Vietnam's reputation, as perceived by business people and travellers. This may well have related to historical wars and struggle. But there appear to be reservations about its current governance and legal system which could put potential foreign business partners off developing relationships through fear of difficulties. Vietnam "has a long road ahead" to sustainable growth when it came to essential needs to do with public health, infrastructure and education, which certainly painted a very negative picture of Vietnam. This suggests that its reputation was lacking and that involvement from a business perspective was risky.

## **6.2. Vietnam not being perceived as a good place for business in 2014–2015**

The CBI report for the second period, 2014–2015, collected quantitative and qualitative opinion data from 2,530 frequent international business and leisure travellers from 17 countries, namely Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, the UAE, the UK and the US.

In the list of 75 recognised countries, Vietnam was nearly at the bottom (64 out of 75). The explanation is that Vietnam's political freedom, environmental friendliness, quality of life and business environment were not well graded by most of the respondents.

In comparison with the previous period, this position is worse as the country is just above 11 countries in the list of analysed countries. The countries which Vietnam is above were either deeply involved in wars, struggles or political crisis such as Cambodia, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Ukraine, and Zimbabwe, or were notorious for corruption and ineffective governance such as Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Ghana, Kenya,

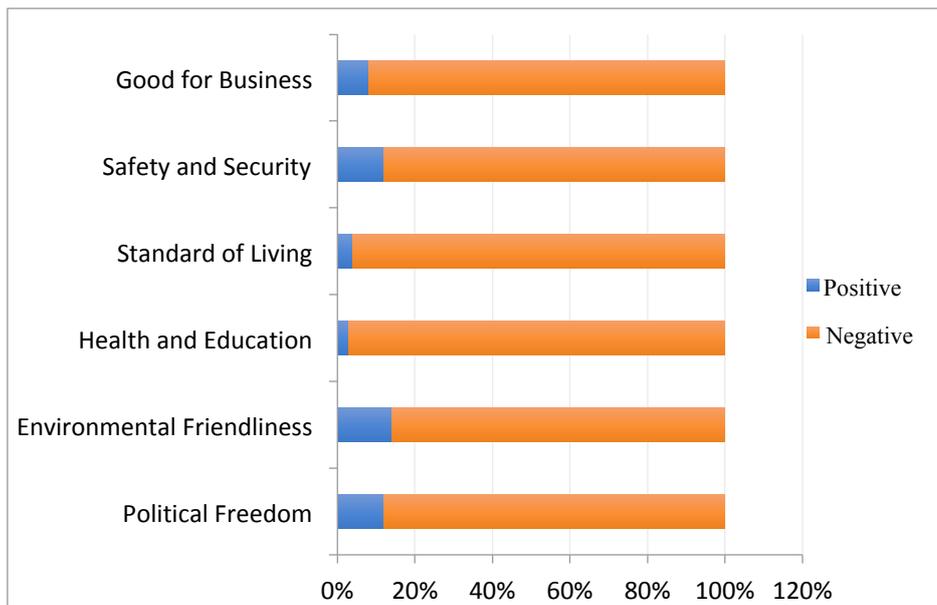
and Indonesia. It is noticeable that just two South East Asian countries, Indonesia and Cambodia, are in this bottom part of the list with Vietnam.

Meanwhile, the top countries were still the same as the previous period of analysis, including Canada, Germany, Japan, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the US. Quite a few Asian countries such as China, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand held high rankings.

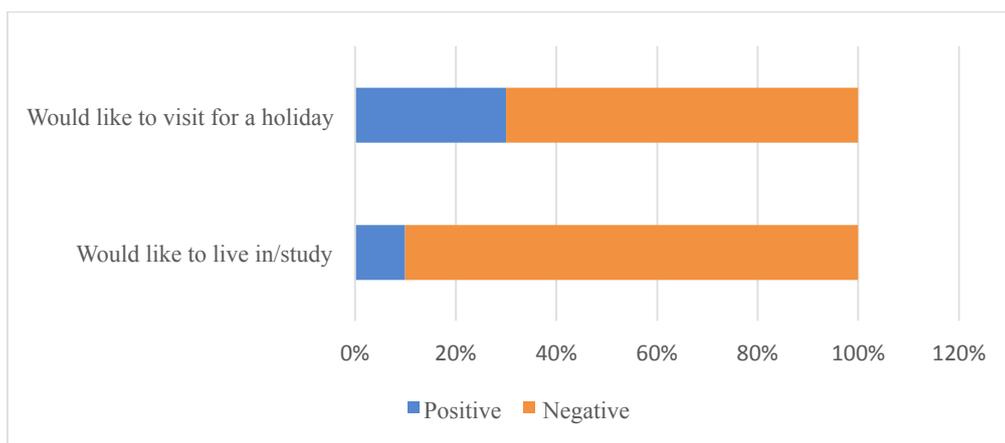
Specifically, the analyses of the criteria used to evaluate the ranking of Vietnam are as follows:

- Value system: 88% of respondents said that they do not see political freedom and freedom of speech in Vietnam. They also do not see the country as environmentally friendly (see Figure 26).
- Quality of life: The same number of respondents said that safety and security in Vietnam are not ensured. And the higher number (96%) do not give a good grade to the standard of living and health and education systems of Vietnam. So, they do not think the country is a good place to live (see Figure 26).
- Business Potential: Only 8% of respondents see the country as a good place for business. Meanwhile, the majority (92%) said that the country lacks advanced technology, good infrastructure and a good regulatory environment (see Figure 26).

During this period, the CBI index also analysed whether respondents would consider coming to Vietnam for travelling purposes or for study/business purposes. In reply, 40% of respondents said that they would come to see Vietnam; 10% would come for study/business purposes and the remaining 30% would come for a short vacation (see Figure 27).



**Figure 26: Perceptions about Vietnam 2014–2015**



**Figure 27: Coming to Vietnam or not**

From the above analysis, with an overall rank of 64 out of 75, Vietnam was graded worse than the previous period. Respondents’ perceptions about Vietnam were that it was an unsafe and backward place with conflict and low quality of life.

From this data, the negativity is much greater than the positivity about Vietnam’s reputation as perceived by businesses and travellers. This was relevant to the struggles

in the East Sea at the time, and past independence wars and also the present governance system.

### **6.3. Comparison between foreign media coverage of Vietnam and CBI**

In this section, the findings from the content analysis and the CBI reports are compared to see if there appears to be an association between the news reporting about Vietnam and the international public perception of the country.

The comparison between the media content analysis and the CBI results is conducted for separate periods, given that the CBI surveys were conducted 2012–2013 and 2014–2015. The findings are presented for the three main areas discussed in Chapter 5, general tones about Vietnam, the main media topics covered in regard to the country, and attitudes toward the main topics and the main people/institutions of the country.

#### *6.3.1. General attitudes toward Vietnam*

I use the results of the analysis of the tones of foreign media coverage toward Vietnam in a comparison with the general feelings/perceptions of respondents toward the country based on the data provided in the CBI. This brings together two perspectives. The first is from McCombs (2004), who suggested that the tonality of media articles is the sum of the attitudes and impressions of the writers toward issues, people or countries. In the case of Vietnam, the tonality of media coverage means the sum of foreign journalists' and media organisations' attitudes toward the country. The second perspective relates to the perceptions of the public about a country - a country's reputation, this was defined by Kotler (1991) as the sum of beliefs, attitudes, and impressions that an individual or a group has of a country. Of course, in this situation the CBI data relates to specific groups within the public, i.e., opinion makers, and international business people and travellers.

As a result, making comparison between two sets of data means comparing the general attitudes of mainstream media and these publics. I am looking at the data in two periods of 2012-2013 and 2014-2015.

### General attitudes toward Vietnam in 2012-2013

Taking the two data sets which feature in Figure 14 and Figure 24, it can be seen that there is a similar pattern: negativity over positivity when it comes to the general tonality of articles about Vietnam and with the general perceptions of respondents in the CBI data. Specifically, for the general content of analysed mainstream media coverage of Vietnam in this period, negative tonality is greater than positive tonality (37% versus 18%), while a neutral tonality accounts for the rest of the coverage (45%). In the data for the CBI respondents' general perceptions about Vietnam, 63% said that they did not feel like coming to visit Vietnam and 85% said that they would not live or do business in the country.

As shown in Figure 28, negativity in both general tonality of mainstream media and general feelings of respondents toward Vietnam is nearly twice the positivity figure.

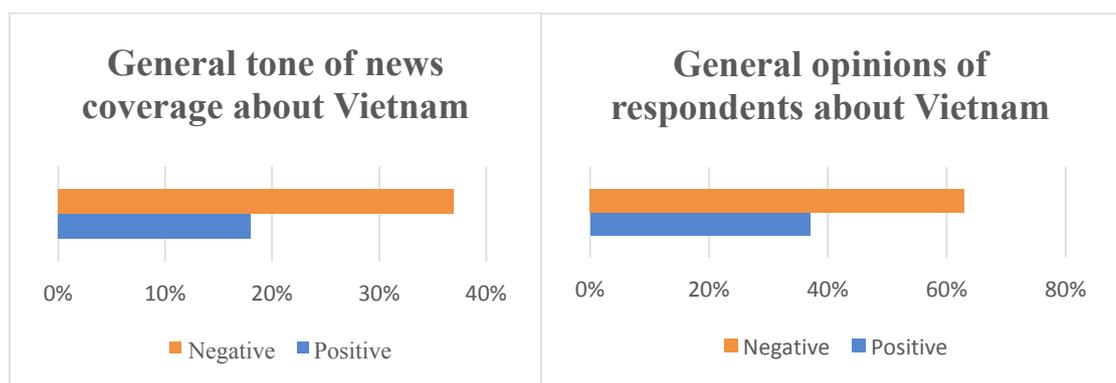


Figure 28: General attitudes toward Vietnam 2012-13

### General attitudes toward Vietnam in 2014–2015

In the analysis of media content during this period, the negative tonality in news articles about Vietnam was found to be nearly double the positive tonality (35% versus

19%), while a neutral tonality accounts for the rest of the coverage (46%). And in the CBI data, the majority of respondents expressed negative perceptions about Vietnam during this period: 70% of them said that they did not feel like coming to visit Vietnam and 90% said that they would not live or do business in the country. The higher amount of negativity over positivity in both the general tonality of news articles about Vietnam and the general perceptions of respondents toward the country shows that a relationship between media content and people’s general perception in this regard exists.

As shown in Figure 29, negativity was greater than positivity in both general tonality of media content and perceptions of CBI respondents about Vietnam at similar ratios.

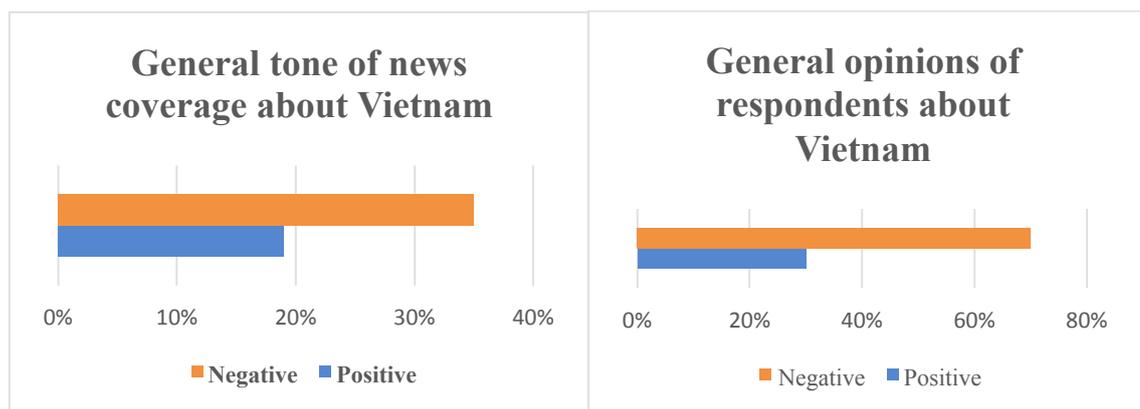


Figure 29: General attitudes toward Vietnam 2014-15

### 6.3.2. Main media topics about Vietnam and CBI respondents’ attitudes toward these main topics in 2012–2013

During this period, news articles focused on weather catastrophes, corruption scandals, the Vietnam War, the economic situation and domestic security. These five topics took up more than 40% of all content. Along with the next top five topics, these top ten topics accounted for 60% of content in total. They discussed three main issues: safety and security, business environment, and socio-environmental issues. It was noticeable that the coverage on these topics was mainly negative. Regarding the

relevant fields in the CBI, respondents expressed negative attitudes toward the country's freedom, security and safety, and socio-environmental issues. They also did not have positive perceptions of Vietnam's technology, regulatory environment, health and education systems, all of which ensure the business environment.

Looking at details of the data on the top topics in the media content and the CBI respondents' perceptions of Vietnam's main issues, it can be seen that the international mainstream media mainly directed their attention to the safety and security, business environment and socio-environmental issues of the country, and this coverage was negative. All these negatively-toned messages were delivered to their audiences. They seem to be correlated with the opinions of the CBI respondents, who mainly expressed negative attitudes on these issues.

Figure 30: Negativity dominates in Security, Business & Socio-Environmental Issues in media coverage 2012–2013

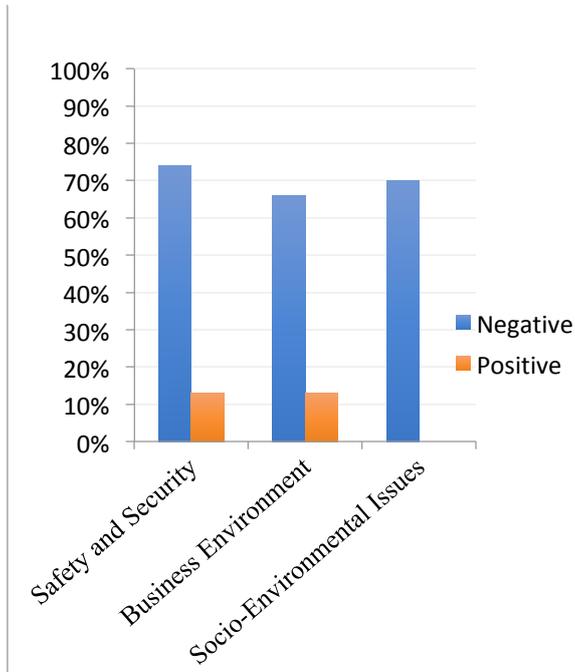
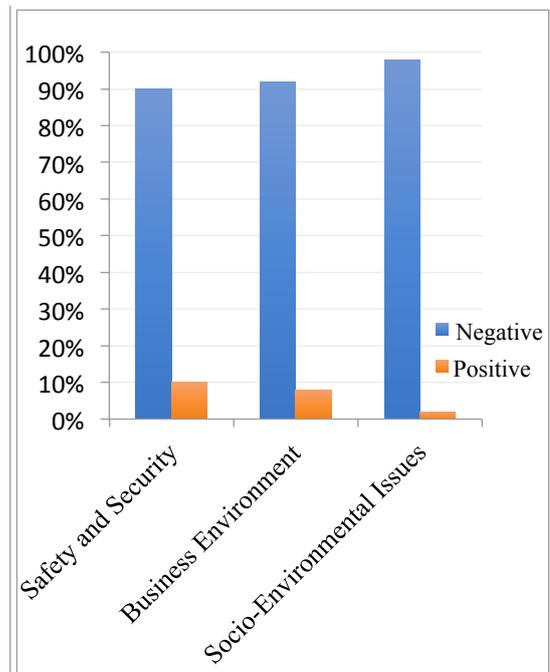


Figure 31: Negativity dominates in Security, Business & Socio-Environmental Issues in the CBI 2012–2013



As can be seen in Figure 30 and Figure 31, the negativity strongly dominates the positivity in both media coverage data and CBI data in the three main areas mentioned above. Specifically, regarding the issue of safety and security, negative content accounted for 74% of media coverage while negative attitude in the CBI data was 90%, more than five times higher than the positivity. Regarding the country’s business environment, negative content made up 66% while negative attitude was 92%, totally predominant over the share of the positivity in both data sets. And in regard to the socio-environmental issues, negative content was 70% while negative attitude was 98%. Noticeably, there was no positive coverage (0%) in the top socio-environmental topics and only 2% positive attitude toward these issues.

### *6.3.3. Main media topics about Vietnam and CBI respondents' attitudes toward these main topics in 2014–2015*

News articles during this period maintained their focus on the Vietnam War, international conflicts, political issues, and the economic situation, and also switched their attention to some new topics: traffic accidents, trade agreements, cooperation, investments, social protests and conflicts over land resources, which still revolved around the country's security and safety, business environment and socio-environmental issues. All the top topics discussed three main areas: safety and security, business environment and socio-environmental issues. The analysis of the news content on these issues showed they are mainly negative.

Respondents in the CBI survey also showed their negative attitudes on these issues in this period, rather than positive ones. Specifically, the respondents expressed their negative attitudes toward the country's security and safety, business environment and socio-environmental issues. They had no good impressions of Vietnam's technology, regulatory environment and health and education systems.

Figure 33: Negativity dominate in Security, Business & Socio-Environmental Issues in media coverage 2014–2015

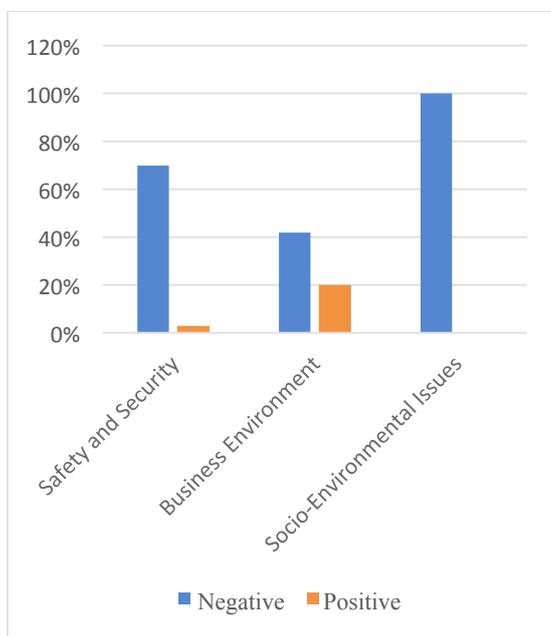
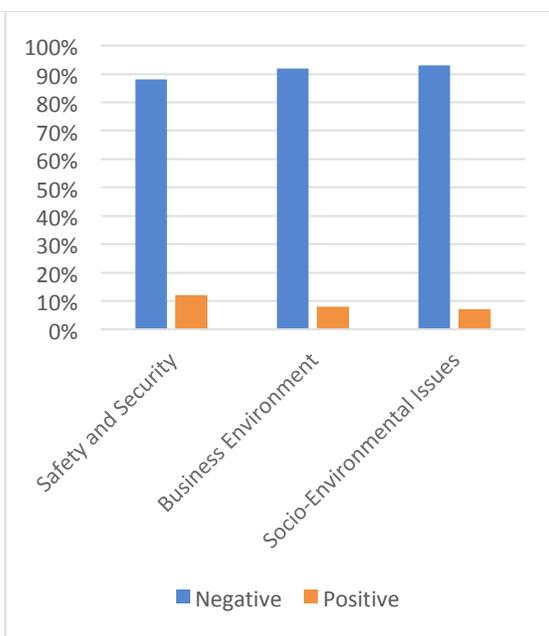


Figure 32: Negativity dominates in Security, Business & Socio-Environmental Issues in the CBI 2014–2015



In Figure 32 and Figure 33, it can be seen that, similar to the previous analysed period, this period also witnessed the predominance of negativity over the positivity in both media coverage and CBI. Regarding the country’s safety and security, negative media content accounted for 70% while negative attitudes of respondents were at 88%, more than eight times higher than the percentage of positive attitudes.

Regarding the business environment, the share of negativity remains higher than the positivity in both media coverage and CBI. It can be seen that the percentage of negative media content is not as high as for the other issue areas because, during this period, the neutral media coverage on the country’s business environment accounted for up to 42% with the stories of trade agreement discussions or forecasts of cooperation. However, the share of negative attitudes on business environment in the CBI data during this period is still as high as the for the other issue areas. This has been

explained by the researchers such as Lovelace (2010) and Schatz (personal communication, 2020), who have argued that when the share of neutral media coverage takes up a lot of the stories, it is the negative media coverage that has long-lasting impressions on the public, not the neutral stories, especially in the case of Vietnam, since the country does not appear too often in the world media and does not own the famous brands that the general public is familiar with.

Regarding the socio-environmental issues, negative content was 100% while negative attitude was 93%. The positivity percentage remains extremely low in both sets of data.

#### *6.3.4. Main people and institutions of Vietnam and attitudes toward them*

During both periods of analysis, the lists of people/organisations covered most frequently by mainstream media were relevant to war and conflict issues, including for example the country's heroes, such as Vo Nguyen Giap and Ho Chi Minh, war veterans, war victims, protesters and local communities.

Regarding the CBI respondents, most of them named Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap when asked about Vietnamese people they had heard about.

This finding suggests that when mentioning Vietnam and its people/organisations, those related to historical wars still emerge and dominate in both mainstream media and public perceptions, not those relevant to the present time, although Vietnam is now part of the global economy.

## **6.4. Discussion**

In comparing the results of media content analysis with the CBI survey data of people's perceptions of Vietnam, there appears to be a clear relationship between how the country is perceived by the public and how it is represented by the media. While it may

not be possible to state that the people's perception relates directly to the media coverage, as other factors may be involved such as the personal experiences of the survey respondents, the commonality in how Vietnam is talked about and viewed in both data sets cannot be discounted. The findings generally show that Vietnam had some way to go at the time the data was collected if it wished to be perceived in a positive light and attract more business investment and tourists. While there are historical issues that point to why the country might be represented negatively – particularly relating to war and conflict – ongoing current issues also seemed to be linked to people's perceptions surrounding aspects such as scandals, corruption, government control, foreign policy, etc. It appears that more positive aspects of the economy and investment opportunities, as well as Vietnam as a place for tourism, were still to be realised at the time the analysed data was collected.

The findings on foreign media coverage about Vietnam and the general tone of the media coverage of Vietnam, during the whole analysed period, is more negative than positive. The top topics covered mainly focus on safety and security, business environment and socio-environmental issues. Regarding the CBI, Vietnam is not graded by the respondents as a safe country due to its history of wars and struggle; as a good place for business, due to a problematic governance system and legal framework; or as a good place for living, due to backward public health systems, infrastructure and education. This section discusses the findings arising from the comparison between these two sets of analysis.

Data comparisons led to the identification of three correlation points. First, in the general picture, from the result of the comparison, it is noted that there is a common perception about Vietnam which aligns with how the foreign media have presented it.

The negativity in both the general tones of mainstream media and general feelings of respondents toward Vietnam is greater than the positivity. Interestingly enough, the foreign media analysed in this study circulate in the countries of the CBI respondents. This suggests that it seems there is a correspondence between how the mainstream media consistently covered the country and how the public looked at and perceived it. As McCombs (2004) explained, the mainstream media influence the public in terms of what to think about. Earlier, Walter Lippman (1922) also asserted that the mainstream media were the principal connection between events that occur in the world and the general images of these events in people's heads.

Then, in the details of the data on the top media topics and the CBI respondents' perceptions of Vietnam's main issues, it can be seen that the mainstream media, which was mainly paid attention to safety and security, business environment and the socio-environmental issues of the country, was negative in its coverage. And the CBI respondents expressed negative attitudes on these issues. This correlation is seen in both periods of analysis.

In addition, the people/organisations relating to historical wars still emerge in both mainstream media and public perceptions, not those that are relevant to the present time, although Vietnam is part of the global economy. The correspondence between the two data sets has been proved.

Moreover, it should be noticed that the neutral tone is found in a number of stories, especially on business environment in 2014–2015. However, when the negative coverage exceeds the positive coverage, it still can be seen that the negative attitudes of respondents toward the issues are maintained with a very large gap over the positive attitudes. The relationship between the media content data and CBI in the

main issues still exists. It seems that the neutral tone which, according to researchers, expresses no positive or negative attitudes of the journalists/writers, does not have much impact on the audiences' perception of the issues.

One of the findings when looking at the two time periods was that there was a general shift in attitude to Vietnam to the more positive side, even though this might not have been by a huge amount. This shift relates to the protagonists and topic. This signals that there might be a greater movement in the common perception of the country and in media coverage over a longer time period.

These findings from the case study of Vietnam also provide more verification for the validity of the third-level of agenda-setting, the network agenda-setting model: "the news media have the capability to construct a more integrated picture of the outside world to people's heads" (Guo, 2013 p. 129). Issues, their attributes and the attributes of the attributes interact with each other and connect together, although these links are not easy to recognise in stories in the mainstream media, and then in the public's thoughts and opinions.

These findings on the relationship between foreign media coverage and people's perceptions toward Vietnam in the CBI data answered a key research question. This question asked: How does agenda-setting by foreign mass media relate to public perceptions of other nations? The answer to the question emerged through the correlation between the results of foreign media coverage about Vietnam and the public perception toward the country, from the general feelings/tonality to the specific topics, and persons and organisations attracting the most interest. That is, the content of mainstream media stories is consistently correlated with people's perceptions of the country.

These findings are relevant to and consolidate what McCombs (1976) revealed, namely that the public takes note of the saliences of the news media, and what is emphasised, and incorporate a similar set of weights into their personal agendas. In other words, the salience of an issue or a topic in the mass media causes that issue or topic to be important and influences how it is to be framed among the public. This is also reflected in other scholars' studies, including those by Funkhouser (1973) and Perse (2001).

In addition, these findings clarify that there is a relationship between foreign media coverage and a country's reputation among people from different countries with different interests, and particularly in relation to a country such as Vietnam which gets enough attention from foreign media and is in a stable position in terms of global politics, economy and tourism, and this finding is not limited to the US and the relationship between the US media and US public. Thus, the relationship between media coverage and public opinion can be seen in a broader perspective.

As indicated earlier, agenda-setting studies have been criticised for only offering quantitative analysis in the investigation of how the media influences what the audience thinks about. In response to this, my research included a qualitative phase which examined more closely some of the news articles about Vietnam to understand the ways in which the media frame the stories, represent the country and convey a particular tone. I also include interviews with embassy officials from a selection of countries to understand their perceptions about Vietnam to see how these align with the agenda-setting data. These data and analyses are covered in the next two chapters.

## CHAPTER 7

# FRAMING VIETNAM – JOURNALISTS’ CONSTRUCTION OF THE NATION

### Introduction

In this chapter, I present my analysis of a sample of news stories about Vietnam that have appeared in media outlets in the US and the UK. The purpose of the inclusion of this analysis is to add a further layer to my study in understanding the potential impact of foreign media in directing the audience in what they might think about in regard to Vietnam. It complements the findings from my agenda-setting analysis and interviews with embassy officials (Chapters 5, 6 and 8). While not representative of all media, the findings provide insights into the ways in which journalists frame stories about Vietnam and help to answer the two research questions: What do foreign mass media cover in relation to Vietnam? And how does their agenda-setting relate to Vietnam’s reputation?

In conducting a framing analysis for each story (see Chapter 4 for specific details), I identify how the author’s word choice and grammar were used to construct articles that “work symbolically to shape democratic discourse and influence public opinion” (Winslow, 2018, p.584). According to Van Gorp and Van de Goot (2012), the elements of framing include a core frame, framing devices, and reasoning devices. The core frame is “the implicit cultural phenomenon that defines the package as a whole” (p. 131), such as a value or an archetype. Framing devices, such as word choices, metaphors, catchphrases, models or visual images, help to rhetorically structure a message. These devices are the manifestations of a frame (Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Pan

& Kosicki, 1993). And reasoning devices construct “a route of causal reasoning” (Van Gorp & Vercruyssen, 2012, p. 1275).

My framing analysis focuses on four articles that I selected because they relate to two of the top topics identified in the media content analysis of stories about Vietnam, that is “war” and “the economy”. In addition these articles were selected based on the fact that these American and British outlets had the largest readership worldwide e.g. BBC (148 million), CNN.com (166 million) and Wall Street Journal (2.52 million in 2017), as listed in Appendix 1.

The findings in the story-framing analysis contribute to seeing whether the content of mainstream media stories is consistently correspondent with the CBI. These topics were the most frequently observed in the quantitative media content analysis covering the period of 2012–2015, and presented in Chapter 5. Two stories were selected for each topic, and appeared in American and British media outlets as listed below. (The full texts of these articles appear in Appendices 6–10.)

### **7.1. Framing the death of a Vietnamese General**

The first article analysed is from *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ), a Pulitzer prizewinning daily international newspaper which is American business focused, written in English, but with international editions available in both Chinese and Japanese. Online, it reaches a global audience of 42.4 million readers per month. About 80% of readers are male college graduates, 41% of them are millionaires and 35% of them are in top management, according the data of 2019 Fall Ipsos Affluent Survey and WSJBG Adobe Analytics.

The journalist James Hookway wrote this article on October 4, 2013, under the headline “*Vietnamese military mastermind Gen. Giap dies*” (see Appendix 6 for the full

text). It is in fact an obituary for General Giap, a general prominent in the Vietnam War in the 1960s, who died on October 4, 2013. The genre of the obituary, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is “a record or announcement of a death or deaths, esp. in a newspaper; usually comprising a brief biographical sketch of the deceased” (Starck, 2006, p. 10). However, in reviewing this text, it appears that this is more than a brief biographical sketch (a recitation of historical fact), and goes beyond that to meet the standard of a news story with elements of criticism and opinion added (Starck, 2006). Hookway appears to use this genre to “exercise” his comments to frame the main character and the relevant events. As Starck (2006) pointed out “newspapers seized what opportunities there were for exercising comment; this suited the practice of obituary, for as well as being an appraisal of a life lived, it can consider the effect of that life on society at large” (p. 46).

Three questions guided me in analysing the conflict frame of the article:

- i. Does the story reflect disagreement between an individual and a party?
- ii. Does one party or individual reproach another?
- iii. Does the story refer to two sides of the problem or issue?

In commemorating General Vo Nguyen Giap as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s greatest and most important military leaders (Birchall, 2013; Frisby, 2013; Gregory, 2013; Templer, 2013), this obituary focuses mainly on his role in the wars.

The obituary is divided into three main parts: Giap’s death; his contribution during wartime as a military leader and his rifts with other Party leaders; and his disagreement with the Vietnamese Government’s decision to let China’s bauxite mining projects go ahead, which he believed would destroy Vietnam’s natural environment. In particular, it highlights: how Giap was a mastermind when it came to

dealing with powerful countries during the Vietnam War in the 1960s, including the US, France and their allies, in order to gain Vietnam's independence; his military tactics; and how he managed the inner rifts between himself and other Vietnamese Communist Party leaders from the wartime until the time of his death. In this article, framing the conflicts by emphasising how they manifested themselves between institutions, groups or individuals is "a means of capturing audience interest" (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95).

Rhetorical devices used in the news article can also be interpreted as consistent with the conflict frame. I discuss these by working through the structure of the story – the headline, the lead paragraph, and the body of the story.

The headline, which is in a larger and bolder font than the rest of the article, "*Vietnamese military mastermind Gen. Giap dies*," "tells the reader what the story is about" (Rich, 2010, p. 3). It helps to attract readers, so they can decide whether to access the full story. This headline communicates the genre of the article: an obituary with the verb 'dies'. The detail given is not impressive from the perspective that it does not state how Giap died. However, the key words "*Vietnamese military mastermind*" denote that Giap is a person of importance with military expertise.

There is an underlying suggestion in the headline, for people who may not be familiar with Giap, that he was instrumental in directing the Vietnam War. This would attract readers who remember even just the horrors surrounding the war and the ongoing mental and physical effects that may still be experienced today. Those readers who recognise the name of the Giap may be more aware of his direct involvement in the war, which could stir up reflections on this historical event and its effects. So, although a newspaper obituary recounts history relating to a person of significance, it also has

the ability to reignite memories and a range of emotions about the wars that occurred in Vietnam. The effect on readers is dependent on their presupposed knowledge about the wars in Vietnam, as well as what the article covers about the main actor and how it frames him and the war.

Indications of the conflict frame emerge from analysis of the script structure (Starck, 2006) that develops in the body of the story. A person against a group of people via differences in opinions and activities is depicted to signal that this is the conflict script.

The lead summarises General Giap's contributions in Vietnam's wars for its independence and presents him as one of the world's greatest military leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

*"Fifty-nine years ago, Vietnam's Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap rang a death knell for Western colonialism in Asia, masterminding the defeat of France's armed forces at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in northern Vietnam. He later went on to play a crucial role in forcing the US out of Vietnam, burnishing his standing as one of the 20th century's most important military leaders.*

*But at the time of his death—in a Hanoi military hospital Friday at the age of 102—Gen. Giap was engaged in a fresh battle: This time, to protect Vietnam's fragile ecology from the strip mining driven by its fast-growing economy and that of its giant neighbor, China."*

The lead is very informative and helps attract audiences' attention by using rhetorical devices such as modifiers – words/phrases/clauses clarifying other words in a sentence – and metaphors – a metaphor being a figure of speech containing an implied comparison. The author uses metaphors of the general ringing a *"death knell for Western colonialism"* or referring to him as a *"mastermind"*. Such metaphors picture the decisive role of the General in projecting military plans and ending the wars.

Modifiers are used to describe and construct the personality of Giap. There is a strong use of material (active) verbs, describing him as “*crucial in forcing the US out of Vietnam*” and “*burnishing his standing*”. The use of modality, indicating Giap was “*one of the 20th century’s most important military leaders*”, suggests that he was a force to be reckoned with by his opponents.

An image of Giap is created with the words “*nationalist cult*” as a strong statement to symbolise him in terms of the following he attracted when it came to leading his nation in the war. The lead positions the General as a significant military commander – that is, he was powerful and may have created a sense of fear among Americans and Westerners at the time. Symbolising Giap this way has the potential to stir up the bitter and uncomfortable memories and feelings in American and Western audiences. While this could create a reluctance about travelling to Vietnam or doing business there, because of the emergence of feelings and images of wars, at the same time Giap’s death is indicative of times past. The remnants of the war are disappearing – people may still have images of a devastated and poor Vietnam in their minds, but they may be more curious to see the country, which has appeared in so many movies and documentaries about the war. Nevertheless, it is still the war that seems to be to the fore in imagining Vietnam in this story, rather than encouraging any tourism or economic investment.

The 14 paragraphs that follow the lead provide more detailed depictions of Giap, the episodes of the background events, direct quotes from experts or US leaders, and so forth. These elements, analysed below, vividly present Gen. Giap’s contribution mixed with the rifts between him and other Party leaders. This storyline is quite effective in framing conflicts, emotions, dramas, and visual images, all necessary ingredients of

newsworthiness. The memories from the lead paragraph are further developed with more detail about the wars and Giap's involvement in these following paragraphs. They stir up sad memories of the horror of the war. This is now decades ago and audiences are likely to view this as the historic past rather than the present. But they do reinforce a difficult time in history and, admittedly, many Western people disagree with their countries' involvement in the war. When soldiers came back, they were not hailed as heroes. So, the more the General was framed as victorious when it came to discussing fighting the Western nations, the more bitterness there was towards their own governments.

Hookway went into detail about what the General did to lead his country in its fight against powerful countries. The use of strong and negative words to describe his tactics, serve to frame Giap as a terrifying opponent. For example:

*"A close student of Mao Zedong's guerrilla tactics in China" – suggests he learned a lot from other terrifying war leaders*

*"wearing down French colonists"*

he *"executed a ruse"*

he starved his French *"opponents of food and ammunition"* suggests that he did not care what happened to the enemy

as a result the French commander *"blew himself up with a grenade"* – because of the guilt he felt when underestimating the opponent's poweress.

*"He drew plans for the 2,000-mile-long Ho Chi Minh trail—a snaking series of roads and jungle paths that became one of the most-bombed stretches of land in the history of warfare and a vital supply chain from northern Vietnam to the Viet Cong guerrillas fighting US-backed forces in the south of the country."*

This war imagery is very strong and lively in this article and this is created through the persona of the General. The verbs in these paragraphs, including “wearing down”, “starved”, “executed” or “shook”, are really strong and make a great impact on the audience’s imagination. This could reignite memories of a terrible past for the readers of the WSJ, many of who are American and French people. As stated earlier, the negative memories, feelings and opinions towards the wars in Vietnam were stirred up in the lead paragraph and later deepened in these supporting paragraphs. With such feelings exposed, it might be difficult for the audience to be objective when viewing Vietnam today, as the General, a symbol of the country, is being described as terrifying. The negative tone of the story can be seen making a negative impact on Vietnam’s image.

The use of sources in this obituary is interesting. Hookway, who has covered Asia for nearly two decades for *The Wall Street Journal*, includes commentary from a number of people who are mainly representative of Western countries which fought against Vietnam in the war. For example, he cites Carlyle Thayer, a Vietnam expert and emeritus professor of politics and social science at the University of New South Wales and at the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra, who has published books about Vietnam’s politics and security issues in South East Asia; many historians who are not mentioned by names; US General William Westmoreland, who died in 2005, who was one of Giap’s antagonists; and the US Public Broadcasting System. Conflicting perspectives may result in a final story that puts too little emphasis on an evidence-based view and too much emphasis on opinions held by a minority (Bushman & Anderson, 2001).

US General Westmoreland painted General Giap in very negative terms – criticising him for his “*readiness to send tens of thousands of his own men to their deaths”*, saying that he had “*a disregard for human life*”. Although this quote from the General’s opponent cannot be objective, and the truth of the matter or the General’s intention might be different, even opposite to that attributed to him, it is still regarded as trustworthy for Americans as these are the US general’s words and are the only quotes from the US side.

While General Giap is regarded by the world’s historians and the Vietnamese people to be one of the world’s greatest military generals (Domínguez, 2013; Frisby, 2012; “Vietnam’s ‘Red Napoleon’ Vo Nguyen Giap” 2013), it is unlikely that American people, who were Vietnam’s opponents in the war, would view him in the same way. Therefore, it is not surprising that the obituary in an American newspaper represents the general by using metaphors that present him negatively and in such a graphic way. The author’s choices of words, quotes, details and other narrative devices frame the Vietnamese General negatively and definitely frame a negative image of the country.

At the same time, especially in the final paragraphs, the author tries to show how the General’s personal story and his conflict with other leaders within his own regime changed internally after the war. It almost seems to excuse him from his role in the war because of his later disagreements with others, which did not support the communist perspective. Then the General turns his attention to fighting for Vietnam’s ecology, i.e., he becomes an eco-warrior. General Giap’s political troubles in the Party were woven into the text on episodes in the war. The first quote relevant to Giap’s disagreement with other leaders, attributed to Thayer, contains a substantive argument, stating the political trouble General Giap ran into and that he “was left on

the outside". The other indirect quotes attributed to many historians refer to the disagreements with other leaders in the war plans. The author himself also drew the conclusion that *"Still, Gen. Giap had his rifts with other leading members of the Communists' ruling politburo."*

Overall, the author used the obituary genre effectively, offering an opinion-based text deliberately presenting no positive aspect in thinking about Vietnam as a place for Americans and Westerners. The Vietnamese General, the representative of the country, is presented as a *"feisty"* commander who was ready *"to send tens of thousands of his own men to their deaths"*, coupled with war images throughout the article, to reinforce the audience's negative feelings towards the country although the wars ended long ago. The author's choice of vocabulary and symbols (visual or auditory representation of another object) are derived from the notion that *"frames are contingent and dynamic"*, but they must rely on the *"existing cultural narratives, symbolic traditions, and social orientations"* (Winslow, 2018, p. 585). Audiences always expect to know what happened, why, and what should be done about it, and journalists answer those questions *"in a way that resonates with the cognitive schema already in place in the minds of their audience"*, and the author of this article acknowledged his target audience to fulfil their need to *"make sense of the news event in a way that aligns with their existing orientations"* (Winslow, 2018, p. 584). By stirring up uncomfortable memories of the past Vietnam War with the losses caused by a *"feisty"* commander, the article reinforces negative images of Vietnam as a war-torn country. These images, in their turn, may impact on how people still think about Vietnam and then perhaps affect the audiences' business and travel decisions to the country as, according to Winslow (2018), the frames which shape public opinion,

aligning with the existing social orientations, end up influencing the audience's decisions.

## 7.2. Analysis of article: "Kim Phuc, who was girl from iconic Vietnam photo, begins new treatment"

This article was published on the CNN website on November 10, 2015 (see Appendix 7 for the full text). The article, a feature written by Alina Machado, is headlined "*Kim Phuc, who was girl from iconic Vietnam photo, begins new treatment*". CNN audiences are global, not just from the US, and CNN saw a larger global audience than any other news platform in the world in December 2019, with 165 million unique multiplatform visitors ("CNN Digital Breaks All Records" 2020).

The article's topic is the long-lasting physical and mental pains of a napalm attack victim in Vietnam War, Kim Phuc, who was a burned girl from an iconic photo "communicating the horrors of the war", and the new treatment she was undergoing, a new hope for her after 50 years.

The genre of the article is a profile feature, which focuses on people to attract readers' interest. The feature belongs to the category of "soft news, which is defined as news that entertains or informs, with an emphasis on human interest and novelty and less immediacy than hard news", but often of a timely nature (Rich, 2010 p. 17). A feature story can be derived from a news event or simply focus on interesting people or topics.

Choices of vocabularies, symbols or visual images are the manifestations of a frame, according to Gamson and Lasch (1983) and Pan and Kosicki (1993). This feature frames human interest. Rhetorical devices used in the news article can also be interpreted as consistent with the human-interest frame. Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) study shows that this frame clarifies the following five questions:

- i. Does the story provide a human example or “human face” on this issue?
- ii. Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, sympathy, or compassion?
- iii. Does the story emphasise how individuals and groups are affected by the issue?
- iv. Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors?
- v. Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, sympathy, or compassion?

The human-interest frame presents news with a human face or emotional angle in order to attract audience interest. By using a human example of the impact of a certain issue, the story becomes personalised, connecting it emotionally with the audience (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Audiences are usually attracted to stories about people with special problems, achievements or experiences.

The story features a victim of the Vietnam War with long-lasting physical and emotional pain that expresses the horrors of the war. The story includes 12 photos which recreated the whole picture of what happened in a Vietnam War napalm bomb attack by the Americans and how people, including the main actor of the story, suffered in it. The two videos also attached are the extracted interviews that contribute to the overall story as it appeared on the CNN website. The text of the article is divided into two parts:

- physical and mental health problems which have strongly affected the war victim Kim Phuc during her whole life; and

- a treatment offered to her by an American dermatologist as the light at the end of the tunnel, healing her pain and building her hope for a new and painless future.

The headline tells the main content of the feature: the little girl photographed while fleeing from the dropping bombs and ripping off her burning clothes led a painful life and is going to get a new treatment.

The leading paragraph provides detailed and graphic information summarising Kim Phuc's past and current life, from the time she was burned as a child, and living with her mental and physical scars, until the present day as she seeks a new life with treatments for her scars and the pain she still experiences. The verbs used are very strong: *"burned"*, *"naked"*, *"crying"*, *"running"*, *"survived"* to describe the dangerous situation the girl found herself in. These drew a clear picture of that situation. Opposite words are also employed in the lead such as *"smile"* – *"pain"*, *"morning"* – *"night"* and *"wake up"* – *"last thought"*. They emphasised the long-lasting pains Kim Phuc has experienced since she was nine years old. She lived with endless pain. The visual imagery, through the use of *"God"* and *"Heaven"*, showed the hopelessness in Phuc's life made her lean completely on her faith as a Christian to keep living. The lead generates feelings of outrage and sympathy in audiences. And, at last, the lead shows there is light at the end of the tunnel, as Phuc seems to have a chance to escape from the pain and find hope for a new future. Her joy is conveyed with this direct quote and repetition of the word 'happy': *"I'm so happy, happy, happy"* and the visual image *"Heaven on Earth"* was reused, but this time it is real for Phuc. The construction of the lead paragraph, the emotive language and imagery are used effectively to convey how Phuc's life has gone from one of tragedy and pain to new hope and happiness.

The subsequent paragraphs go on to explain the new hope Kim Phuc has for the relief of her pain. This is thanks to a new and free treatment for her scars, offered by an American dermatologist. Two details should be noticed. One is that the dermatologist is from the US: the scars caused by the US are being healed by the US themselves, which may create some sense of relief from the guilt felt by Americans or their allies for the tragic circumstances they were responsible for in the injury experienced by Kim Phuc as a young child, which was photographed and featured in the news around the world at the time of the war, and is still referenced today. The other is this magic is brought to Phuc as she is *"a beautiful soul"*, according to the dermatologist who offered her the free treatment. Despite the pain caused by the war, she has led a helpful life in helping others. These two details make the audience perhaps feel a relief that the war is in the past now and people are together healing the pain.

In the following paragraphs, the war imagery was compelling in the retelling of the tragic story about the way Kim Phuc was badly wounded and scarred as a little girl and destroyed her life. *"She was just 9 years old when the napalm disfigured parts of her body. Her childhood was destroyed. ... My heart was full of hatred. I hated my life."* When reading these lines, the audience probably thinks that war can hurt anyone, including the innocent ones. Many people in Vietnam must have been bearing with these scars. Besides, adjectives such as *"hatred"* and *"dead"* and personal vignettes such as *"I learned to distract my mind when the pains come"* are employed to stir up the audience's feelings of outrage for what happened, and sympathy for Kim Phuc's suffering. However, to offer a balance between the past and the present and remind the audiences that today is different, the light shed on her painful life was featured again at the end of the story. The audience's uncomfortable feelings about the war

and the pain of victims were lifted by the new hope and new future for Kim Phuc. It is not easy at the beginning of the article for the audience to think that Vietnam is now a place free of war and pain, but then the end of the story persuades them that it is true. Overall, the framing of this article presents a happy-ending story for audiences about the past injustices of the Vietnam War. It has a positive tone as the author's choice of details, and the descriptive and graphic vocabulary in the article, make the past war present in the audience's perceptions and feelings but then this is balanced with the present reality in Kim Phuc's life and new hope. The sad, uncomfortable and sympathetic feelings in the audience were balanced with joyful feelings for the victim. This signals that what happened in Vietnam and to its people in the 1970s is an historical event and much has changed since then. It is possible that, along with the positive advertising of Vietnam as a tourist destination – beautiful beaches, tasty and inexpensive cuisine – that people will consider Vietnam as a place to visit. According to Winslow (2018), frames are very flexible but comply with existing social orientations. In this case, from the time when the wars happened in Vietnam until now, most Americans claimed that the US should have stayed out of Vietnam and that the US did not do the right thing in Vietnam. According to a CBS News Poll: US involvement in Vietnam (2018), few Americans today think the US did the right thing in getting involved in the fighting in Vietnam. By a margin of more than two-to-one (51% to 22%), more Americans think the US should have stayed out of the conflict compared to those who believed they "did the right thing" by participating in the war. With the passage of time, this percentage has stayed relatively unchanged since CBS first asked the question back in 1985. "The more we look at American decision-making in Vietnam, the less sense it makes... Political and military leaders massacred civilians.

They pursued strategies that seemed designed to produce neither a victory nor a settlement” (Menand, 2018, para. 6). Thus, journalists still make sense of the news but may also impact on the public’s opinions about an issue as that issue is presented in a way compatible with the “cognitive schema already in place in the minds of their audience” (Winslow, 2018, p. 584).

### **7.3. Analysis of article: “Vietnam opens door to hard money and soft power”**

This article was published in the UK’s *Financial Times* on March 1, 2015 (see Appendix 8 for the full text). This feature article, written by Michael Peel, Kana Inagaki and Simon Mundy, is headlined “*Vietnam opens door to hard money and soft power*”. The *Financial Times* reaches an audience of 26 million people monthly, among whom are the most influential people in business and politics and some of the wealthiest and most discerning consumers in the world (62% are business decision makers and 80% are international business travellers) (Financial Times, 2022).

The article’s topic is about a wave of new Japanese and South Korean investment in Vietnam, occurring for both business and geopolitical reasons. As the article highlights, Vietnam is notable for its “*cheap labour and 90m-strong consumer market*” and, in the meantime, Japan and South Korea are grabbing an opportunity, when Vietnam is in a tense situation with China, to tighten their embrace with the 10 countries of the ASEAN South East Asian grouping.

The genre of the article is a news feature, which focuses less on immediate events, or breaking news, but more on offering greater insights and background to stories. This feature is derived from a news event but it covers not only “a factual account of the event” but also features a specific angle on the event, a noticeable trend similar to human-interest reactions (Rich, 2010, p. 17).

This feature frames the tension that exists between economic benefits and conflict as a result of new investment in Vietnam by other countries. It presents opposing viewpoints about the investment in Vietnam with, on the one hand, concern about the geopolitical situation among the powers in Asia, including Japan, South Korea and China, and the importance of Vietnam in this situation, while on the other hand is the more positive view of the commercial potential for Vietnam at present and in the future due to its cheap labour market, favourable tax policies, great consumer market and good infrastructure system than.

Rhetorical devices used in the news article can also be interpreted as consistent with the economic consequences – these are conflict frames.

The headline: *“Vietnam opens door to hard money and soft power”* does a lot to frame the story and also summarises the content of the story. This headline is very eye-catching and informative for the audience. It gives the audience a positive signal about Vietnam facilitating foreign businesses coming to the country. It also mentions the country’s current political moves using the present tense of ‘open’ and contrasting words *“hard”* and *“soft”* and the combination of the two words *“money”* and *“power”*, suggesting a link between having money gaining power. Hard money, in this case, should be considered in the political field when the governments of Japan and South Korea offered a funding stream to Vietnam for their plans to promote their positions in the country, replacing China’s position. Also, thanks to this hard money, Vietnam can be the next power in the region’s retail markets. The way the authors play with the words and visual images is really effective in promoting Vietnam’s situation.

To give more explanations to the headline, the sub-head states: *“Hanoi welcomes Japanese and South Korean advances as it looks to revive the nation’s economy”*. It

goes into detail and explains the headline by mentioning two powers, Japan and South Korea, which are showing their interest in Vietnam and pumping money into the country. Once again, the verbs used in the sub-line, “welcomes”, “advance” and “revive” are in the present tense, indicating the immediacy of what is being talked about in this story. They are also positive representations of the capital city of Vietnam, Hanoi, and therefore its government, showing its willingness of Vietnam to receive the new investment. After the previous year’s incident with China, Vietnam’s economy was badly affected due to the worries of foreign investors about its security, resulting in a decrease in foreign investment. Japan and South Korea pumping money into the country helped it regain confidence from foreign investors and lessen its dependence on China.

The leading paragraph is clear and informative with an example of the biggest film hit in Vietnam, *Let Hoi Decide*, co-produced by a giant South Korean entertainment group, which is used to attract the audience and cover the overall information. As the comedy movie is the tale of a Vietnamese transgender entrepreneur’s adventures, which made a box office record of US\$4.75 million, this paragraph takes the opportunity to reinforce the benefits for South Korean businesses and their entry into Vietnamese market. It is also indicative of the openness of Vietnamese society to a sensitive issue relevant to the LGBT community, which evidences the progress in Vietnamese’s ideology and education. By crafting visual images with the words of “a stream” or “goodwill” in the sentence “*CJ’s Vietnamese cinematic coup is part of a stream of new Japanese and South Korean investment in the country, amid goodwill that contrasts with the troubled relationship between Hanoi and Beijing*”, the lead tells of the investment potential offered to Vietnam by Japanese and South Korean groups with

the support of these two countries' governments. The writers want to contrast the negative history with the positive present, and presumably future, when it comes to investment in Vietnam. So, they briefly mention the previous year's incident in which anti-China riots broke out in Vietnam's industrial parks after a Chinese oil rig was built in the disputed waters of the East Sea between Vietnam and China. The riots triggered a wave of foreign factory shutdowns and sparked fears about future security in Vietnam as a global manufacturing hub. The lead also explains the reasons for the incident. The nouns "rioters" and "skirmishes" expressed how the serious the situation between Vietnam and China was and how it impacted on Vietnam's reputation itself. However, it somehow re-assured the audience about safety and security in Vietnam when Japanese and South Korean companies kept their interest in Vietnam and rushed to the country.

In the following paragraphs, several rhetorical devices used in the news article can also be interpreted as consistent with the economic consequences frame. One such device is the use of quantitative terms in representing the current economic situation of Vietnam, the investment from South Korea and Japan, and the potential of Vietnam in the single South East Asia market. Quantification is used effectively to present Vietnam's attraction to Japanese and South Korean businesses. Comparisons are made between 'before' and 'after' to show the size of the direct foreign investment from these two countries pouring into Vietnam, as demonstrated in these two article excerpts:

*"Direct investment by Japanese businesses in Vietnam more than tripled to \$9bn between 2011 and 2014, compared with the previous four years."*

*"South Korean investment in Vietnam in 2013 and last year totalled \$2.6bn, almost a third higher than in the previous two years."*

Quantification helps enhance the empirical quality of the story (Van Gorp, 2007). The positive numbers regarding investment from two Asian powers build and strengthen audiences' confidence in the country's potential investment and business opportunities. By drawing the audience's attention to Vietnam, this may push countries such as South Korea and Japan to channel more money there.

Two other rhetorical devices appear in this article, coming from sources including a corporate lawyer and a chief executive of the largest retailer in Asia, Aeon. One depiction of Vietnam was made by Fred Burke, a corporate lawyer in Ho Chi Minh City, who is quoted as saying that Vietnam looks *"a lot like Thailand was 20 years ago"*. The other example involves a metaphor for Vietnam as a towering and powerful image, *"the next big pillar"*, which was made by Motoya Okada, Aeon's chief executive. He gives a direct confirmation of Vietnam as an investment possibility when he is quoted as saying: *"I am certain that Vietnam will be that next major power."* Previously, it was China and Malaysia that held the top positions in the giant retailers' plans but now, according to the chief executive, it is Vietnam's turn. These high evaluations build Vietnam's credibility.

Specific names of the world-famous groups who are doing businesses and expanding their projects in Vietnam are listed to enhance the attractiveness of the country to audiences such as Samsung Electronics, Aeon, LG Electronics and Kumho Tire and supermarket Lotte Mart.

These rhetorical devices reinforce the positive construction of Vietnam to attract businesses in contrast to experience with China as indicated earlier.

To further explain change of direction of South Korea and Japan in their perception of Vietnam, the authors also mentioned Vietnam's efforts to create more favourable

conditions for business, especially investment in infrastructure and legal systems. For example, Hanoi has:

*“the attractions of low wage costs, reasonable infrastructure and political stability resonate with Seoul’s desire for more regional clout”.*

Additionally, comparisons between the current business environment of Vietnam and China show Vietnam’s advantages as companies which *“incurred heavy losses”* in China are *“pushing across the frontier with Vietnam instead.”*

Indications of the confrontation framing of the tension between Vietnam and China may emerge from the nouns *“troubled relationship”* and *“dispute”* and explain the geopolitical situation of Vietnam.

Overall, details or vocabulary arranged by the authors built the confidence of the audience in Vietnam’s business environment and stable political situation. The story uses quantification and specific examples to evidence the details about the country as the truth. Rhetorical devices used in the story lead audiences to think of Vietnam as a destination for their business and travel. The story frames the geopolitical relationships in Asia among three powers, Japan, South Korea and China, and the importance and potential of Vietnam in their competition. Vietnam appears to be a destination of great potential, and a stable and safe business environment, in spite of an existing conflict with China. The feature is a mixture of frames of conflict and economic consequences. The economic consequence frame dominates over the conflict frame and the good (Vietnam’s potential for foreign investors) over the bad (some conflicts with China in the East Sea). According to (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143), news frames are the “central organizing idea or storyline that provides

meaning to an unfolding strip of events”. This story is positive, and gives positive signals about the country’s economic and investment situation.

#### **7.4. Analysis of article: “Nguyen Duc Kien’s arrest in Vietnam prompts ACB fears”**

The article was published on the BBC website on August 23, 2012 (see Appendix 9 for the full text). The news article is headlined “*Nguyen Duc Kien’s arrest in Vietnam prompts ACB fears*”. BBC World Service in English has achieved all-time record audiences of 97m (“UK must unleash the full global potential of the BBC” 2020).

The article’s topic is the arrest of one of the founders of Vietnam’s largest bank and the government’s response to lessen the impact of this crisis on the country’s economy. The genre of the article is the hard news story, which includes stories of “a timely nature about events or conflicts that have just happened or are about to happen, such as crimes, fires, meetings, protest rallies, speeches and testimony in court cases” (Rich, 2010 p. 17). Hard news is basically about what happened, why it happened and how readers will be affected. These stories have immediacy. The feature frames economic consequences, according to Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) study, to answer the three questions:

- i. Is there a mention of financial losses now or in the future?
- ii. Is there a mention of the cost/degree of expense involved?
- iii. Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?

The news has three main parts: the arrest of the founder of ACB, Vietnam’s largest bank, Nguyen Duc Kien; how the market reacted to this; and what the government

(the State Bank) did to rescue the bank and minimise the impacts on the country's economy.

The headline "*Nguyen Duc Kien's arrest in Vietnam prompts ACB fears*" goes straight to the point and gives a summary of the story. The words "*arrest*" and "*fears*" signal that this is a negative tone story, covering a negative event and so it will be more interesting than good news (McKane, 2006). These two nouns recreate the whole scenario of what happens to a leading bank in Vietnam, ACB, when its CEO is arrested and the bank has to face its fears, such as negative reactions from its investors or a massive withdrawal of money by its customers. A larger audience will be then attracted to this news. Moreover, the proper noun – name of the bank's leader, Nguyen Duc Kien, caught the readers' attention as he is a very well-known person in Vietnam and the region, not only in the banking industry but also in the sports field (being the owner of a football team).

The leading paragraph highlights the events after the arrest of this well-known banker. The quantification "*hundreds of millions of dollars*" evidences to the market reaction when bad news happens. The case is quite serious, as the story mentions it happened to "*one of the country's largest banks*" so it must affect the country's economy. It may be relevant to diverse audiences who are doing or going to do business in Vietnam or are foreign shareholders of the bank, living in different countries such as the US, Singapore or Hong Kong. The circulation of this news also badly affected the country's business environment reputation when the founder was arrested for suspected economic violations. The paragraph stirs the audience's curiosity or worries about those affected, not only in Vietnam but in other countries.

The supporting paragraphs give more details about the development of the case and the response of Vietnam's government. They, on the one hand, "*pumped millions*" into the bank to stabilise the situation. On the other hand, the government provided evidence that although Nguyen Duc Kien was a founder, his stake in the bank was under 5%. These details rebuild the audience's confidence in Vietnam's market as its government is acting effectively and in a timely manner.

However, in the following paragraphs, potential risks to the stability and transparency of the country's economy and market caused by the case, and other factors relevant to it, are discussed in detail. Quantification is used again to emphasise how badly the case is impacting on the economy in spite of the efforts of the government. The other rhetorical device is used by a source, who provided speculation about "*a power struggle*" among the cabinet causing this arrest and reminded the audience that Vietnam a "*communist-run*" country.

Overall, the news story, with its negative tone, leads the audience's feelings of fragility about Vietnam's economy: a founder of a bank arrested affects the whole economy. The stability of the country's politics caused concern and a sense of reluctance in the business people and investors in the audience.

## **7.5. Discussion and conclusion**

In this chapter I have presented the findings of my framing analysis of four articles about Vietnam that relate to two topics – the Vietnam War and the economy. The findings from the framing analysis of the stories then contribute to answering the research questions: What do foreign mainstream media cover in relation to Vietnam? How does their agenda-setting relate to Vietnam's reputation?

These two topics are the top topics found in the quantitative media content analysis presented in Chapter 5 for the period of 2012–2015. The chosen stories were:

- War-related topic: *“Vietnamese military mastermind Gen. Giap dies”* and *“Kim Phuc, who was girl from iconic Vietnam photo, begins new treatment”*.
- Economy-related topic: *“Vietnam opens door to hard money and soft power”* and *“Nguyen Duc Kien’s arrest in Vietnam prompts ACB fears”*.

Reflecting on my framing analysis of the stories above, there are some conclusions that can be made. First, the stories are examples of how Vietnam can be framed in different ways depending on the author’s intention. The authors’ choices of details, vocabularies, symbols and rhetorical devices frame the stories to express what they want to tell audiences about the country and how they want it to be told. According to Sissons (2006), journalists collect all the facts of the story and then decide which elements to include and which to discard and then how they frame the story through its structure, word choices or source references. For example, in the article about Kim Phuc, the author makes the past war present in audience’s perceptions and feelings but then balances it with the present reality in Kim Phuc’s life and her new hope. The sad, uncomfortable and sympathetic feelings in the audience were balanced with joyful feelings for the victim. This signals that Vietnam and its people can now escape from the past war. In this way, what the authors present about Vietnam, and how they present it, lead the audience’s feelings through the stories and might potentially impact their common perceptions about the country.

Second, the authors’ goals or intentions when covering stories decide the tones of the stories are then formed by these factors, not by the topic or issue itself. Sissons (2006) asserted that it is journalists who can give the tones to their stories, not the issues or

events. Specifically, a negative tone is set via deadly war images and the loss of life in the analysis of the article *“Vietnamese military mastermind Gen. Giap Dies”*. Meanwhile, in the second article about the topic of war, the article *“Kim Phuc, who was girl from iconic Vietnam photo, begins new treatment”* sheds a positive light on the issue. The positive tone of the story is seen via a new beginning for the war victim. Similarly, for the topics of the economy and investment, a basically developing and fragile economy is framed in the negatively-toned article *“Nguyen Duc Kien’s arrest in Vietnam prompts ACB fears”*. Meanwhile, a positive tone can be seen in the article *“Vietnam opens door to hard money and soft power”* on the investment flows into the country.

These findings from the analysis emphasised the agenda-setting influences of mainstream media. They strengthened the conclusions drawn from the news agenda-setting findings, that the content of mainstream media stories is consistently correspondent with people’s perceptions of the country.

These findings from the frame analysis are relevant to and consolidate what McCombs (1976) revealed, that publics take note of the saliences of the news media – what is emphasised – and incorporate a similar set of weights into their personal agendas. It should be noticed that these findings clarify that there is a relationship between foreign media coverage of events in the world and a country’s reputation index based on data collected from respondents around the world. The data is not limited to the US or the relationship between the US media and US public. Taking a broader perspective in the agenda-setting research, a correlation can be seen between international media coverage and international public opinion.



## CHAPTER 8

### MAIN THEMES IN INTERVIEWS WITH FOREIGN TRADE SPECIALISTS

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of semi-structured interviews with representatives from embassies of Argentina, Austria, Denmark, New Zealand and Venezuela, and the Central and Eastern European Chamber of Commerce (CEEC), in Vietnam. The interviews focused on how the representatives and people in their countries viewed mainstream media, news stories about Vietnam and the impact they had on their business and travel decisions with regard to Vietnam, and also the impact of social network sites (with nearly 4 billion users) since 2012, especially during the period covered by this study, 2012–2015.

I conducted the interview analysis by adopting the six-step guide to thematic analysis from Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012), as described in Chapter 4. The process required a close reading of the transcripts and identifying dominant themes through deductive stages. I kept in mind the research questions during the whole process. This led to the final identification of four main themes:

- i. War memories and their impact on perception of Vietnam.
- ii. A shift in perception about Vietnam for trade and tourism.
- iii. The changing media landscape's impact on Vietnam.
- iv. Social media platforms: an alternative channel for information dissemination.

In the following sections of this chapter, I present results of the analysis and then discuss the four main themes.

### **8.1. Interview participants as well-experienced experts in Vietnam**

Before discussing the four main themes of these interviews, it is important to provide the background to the interviews and the processes involved, as well as identifying the roles and experience of the interviewees, who were key personnel from various embassies and the CEEC. The criteria for selection were discussed in Chapter 4 but can be summarised as follows: the interviewees were in charge of trade and tourism affairs with Vietnam in their organisations, and had experience and understanding in, and knowledge of, the economic, tourism and trade aspects of Vietnam and how others perceived the country.

The six foreign interviewees had been working at the embassies or the chamber of commerce in Vietnam for at least four years, and the Venezuelan representative had been living and working in the country for nearly 20 years. Before being given their positions in Vietnam, some of them had travelled to the country as visitors during their vacations. These embassy representatives advised that they have become very familiar with the 'real' Vietnam – its food, culture, daily activities with serious traffic congestion, and its people, not just the ones featured on foreign media – and that they are committed with working hard at the building of trade relationships between countries. More importantly, they had witnessed events and had experience in the country during the period of this study, 2012–2015.

Five of the six interviewees held key roles within their embassies for encouraging trade and tourism activities between their countries and Vietnam. Generally, they each collected and supplied information about the Vietnam market, industry sectors and investment environment; identified and created bilateral business and investment opportunities; organised events to promote trade and internationalisation

(e.g., trade missions, exhibitions, seminars, future dialogues, innovation meet-ups, showcase presentations; and hosted meetings and talks with their country's businesses and between their country's businesses and Vietnam's government and businesses. They each held the key data on their country's business and tourism projects with Vietnam, gave consultation on trade and economic policies and prepared inter-governmental negotiations and meetings.

The one remaining interviewee was an executive committee member from the CEEC in Vietnam. The CEEC represents member states such as Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. The chamber was selected as explained in Chapter 4: these country members have long-lasting diplomatic ties with Vietnam but trade and tourism have not seen any improvements. For example, the two-way trade between Bulgaria and Vietnam in 2012 reached US\$59 million. Meanwhile, the two-way trade between Vietnam and the US, Vietnam's a leading trade and tourism partner is nearly 500 times higher, at US\$25 billion. The interviewee contributed to building this independent non-profit organization, which, according to him, supports Central and Eastern European companies which are already active in Vietnam and connect local businesses with Central and Eastern Europe and advises new entrants on the challenges in this market. He has lived in Vietnam for more than 10 years and held the same position. He has experienced and built up his knowledge of Vietnam's businesses, services, legal systems and so on. The representative also was frequently engaged in similar initiatives across Asia and thus had established a wide network amongst businesses, associations, embassies, international organisations, and government bodies.

All the six representatives were chosen as the participants as they were from countries that have long-lasting, established relationships with Vietnam, and have experienced a number of stages in the relationship to come to flourish as they do at the moment. Their business and tourism activities with the country have progressed but were still yet to meet their cooperation potential before 2015, according to the representatives. The participants all agreed that the distant location and differences in languages and cultures between their countries and Vietnam were barriers for people in their countries to access and have full and first-hand information about the country.

## 8.2. Main themes

### 8.2.1. War memories and their impact on perceptions of Vietnam

When reflecting on the 2012–2015 period, the embassy representatives suggested that people of all generations at that time still viewed Vietnam as a war-ravaged country. The Venezuelan representative, for example, remarked that people commonly “*assumed that it was still attached with wars and conflicts*” which created some fear about visiting there. A similar comment was made by the Argentinian official who stated that people were worried about Vietnam being a dangerous place based on their memory of the war. She gave the example of her own experience: “*When I told my family and friends that I was coming to Vietnam, they asked: ‘Are you sure?’*”. She also mentioned that many business people and tourists had been reluctant to do business or travel in Vietnam because of those recurring war images that were reproduced by the mainstream media.

The famous photograph of the young naked Vietnamese girl Phan Thi Kim Phuc running away after being burned by napalm that appeared in the news around the world in 1972 was still having an impact. In commenting on the impact of the media,

the CEEC representative also mentioned the publication of this photograph in particular, stating that it stuck in people's minds because of its human-interest value.

Researchers such as Lovelace (2010) have investigated this photograph, which was taken by the Pulitzer Prize winning photojournalist Nick Ut of Associated Press, and has "carved its place in history" (p.35). The photo triggers a strong emotional response from audiences and, according to Lovelace (2010), it is an example of one of those photos that has been as defined as "iconic" by scholars. They have appeared "repeatedly in the media, ... been reused and repurposed by popular culture, and they appear in history books as visual representations of the war" (p. 35). Lovelace (2010) indicated that "the common threads of emotional outrage, the portrayal of innocence, and the sense of powerlessness existed among ... iconic photos" and that this photo was one of the most famous and most widely recognised images of the Vietnam War in American photojournalism because it "projects her pain into our world" (p. 42).

Most of the embassy representatives agreed that media war images, articles and texts from many years ago had greatly impacted on people's emotions and decisions towards the country during 2012–2015. This is supported by Lovelace's (2010) comment that experiencing strong negative reactions, especially to such photos, stayed in people's memories. Pendergrast (2017, p. 43), too, noted that recalling the past can project it into the future, making people believe that similar things might happen again.

The memories of wars and conflict made it difficult to sell Vietnam to business people and tourists up to 2015, according to the Argentinian representative. People assumed that wars were still happening in the country and they were worried that the country remained disordered, unsafe and unstable. They did not think that they should go

there for investment or tourism. The New Zealand Embassy representative in Vietnam also confirmed that business owners had often been reluctant to consider Vietnam as a destination for their products or services. Business owners assumed that Vietnam was still experiencing long-term effects of its wars. They thought that it was still an under-developed country with no proper infrastructure. People's memories of the Vietnam War impacted on their perception of the country and generated a reluctance to invest there. He said:

*“the embassy tried to build awareness of Vietnam in New Zealand and tried to get people thinking about Vietnam in a different way. We tried to change perception of New Zealanders about Vietnam.”*

He explained that the Embassy hosted regular meetings with people in New Zealand and showed them images of fun tourist activities such as bike riding in beautiful scenery, and the modern buildings in the cities, as well as giving them statistical details relating to the positive side of Vietnam's economy. The New Zealand representative recalled the meetings.

*“I said: ‘Some years ago, Vietnam was exporting the values of mobile phones as three times as total dairy export of New Zealand. And then, people would go: ahhhhh. And that is the idea of getting people to think about what Vietnam is becoming and how it is changing.’”*

McCombs (2004) affirmed that the news media just presents a limited view of the world outside, some slice of the whole picture. Sharing the same idea as McCombs, Cohen (1963) asserted that: “the press ... is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. ... The world will look different to different people, depending on the map that is drawn for them by writers, editors, and publishers of the newspaper they read” (p. 13). This is why and how an issue which grabs the attention of media

professionals, then the attention of the public, finally climbs up an agenda, in the process of agenda-setting. In doing so, journalists have the concepts of their imagined audience as basis for directing their thoughts, decisions and practices relating to their stories (Cottle, 2000; Litt, 2012). As a result, there is the possibility that a strong correlation can exist between the salience of the issues appearing in the mass media and the concerns of the public.

In this case of Vietnam, the embassy officials seemed to concur that the international audience's perception of Vietnam was influenced mainly by the mainstream media and the war-related stories accompanied by dramatic photos or film footage. This explains why the audience perceives Vietnam as a place of war and have such significant worries about war and conflict in Vietnam, as if they are still occurring. And people's negative perceptions of the country influence their decisions to travel or do business there.

However, it was still interesting to note that, regardless of the negativity associated with the Vietnam War discussed earlier, there was also a recognition of the resilience of the Vietnamese people and their bravery in dealing with war and conflict in the 1970s. For example, the CEEC representative stated that people admired Vietnam for its *"resistance, bravery and its victory in the independence wars"* and its efforts in fighting for its independence against powerful countries.

The embassy representatives also said that they had recognised a slight shift in people's perception about Vietnam, from around 2015, among younger people, who saw it in a more positive light. For example, the Danish representative stated that younger people appeared to be more aware that any association of Vietnam with war was in the past. *"They started thinking about Vietnam differently."* There was some

suggestion that this generational difference, whereby younger people viewed Vietnam more positively, was connected to a rise in the use of digital media which gave greater access to information about the country. The Austrian representative said:

*“the importance of Internet platforms, electronic newsletters and also social media sources has increased a lot over the last couple of years. The access to these sources of information has improved a lot, it is now cheap and quick to get up-to-date information about remote markets. The abundance of information via the Internet helps a lot to get a better and more profound image of the country – it reduces also many of the previously existing intercultural barriers.”*

### *8.2.2. A shift in perceptions of Vietnam for trade and tourism*

Gradual shifts in attitudes towards Vietnam in terms of business and tourism was a common theme that surfaced in the interviews with embassy representatives. Most of them expressed the view that the years 2012 or 2013 (the first half of analysis period) was a time when people viewed Vietnam negatively and did not find it attractive as a place to visit or to develop trade possibilities. This, they believed, related to a number of issues including the country’s communist status and its representation as a developing, or even third-world country.

The New Zealand representative believed this response was partly because Vietnam still had an *“agriculturally-based economy”* which painted it as a poor nation. The CEEC representative also suggested that some business people felt nervous about the prospect of dealing with Vietnam because of concerns about its legal system, levels of corruption, lack of public services or failing infrastructure.

This concept of people having a negative impression of Vietnam was generally felt to have been reinforced through news stories in the international media that framed the country in negative ways. The New Zealand representative also felt that there was

little “*quality information*” available about Vietnam during this period suggesting that journalists were not doing their job as well as they should. The Danish representative believed misconceptions about the country occurred when visitors had not actually visited Vietnam and seen it for themselves.

However, the embassy representatives have recognised a gradual shift in people’s perception about the country over all of this time, especially from 2015 (the last quarter of the 4-year analysis period) through to the present day. This slight change has occurred recently, coinciding with my analysis of media content during 2012–2015, which sees a gradual shift in foreign media coverage from mainly focusing on past wars and conflict or traffic accidents in 2012–2013, to sparing some coverage for reporting on Vietnam’s on-going economic or tourism situations by the end of 2015.

For example, the Argentinian representative acknowledged that in newspapers or on news websites, audiences “*see the development of Vietnam, which is officially and publicly announced with datas and numbers*”. The country’s economic development or business projects have recently been reported. It then has become more enticing for business people.

The Danish representative stated that people were increasingly considering it as a promising destination for business because of its favourable legal conditions for foreign investors, in comparison with other Asian countries, which have been covered by foreign media.

The Venezuelan and Argentinian representatives both identified that the development of trust in Vietnam’s government and its rules and regulations were important components in this change in attitude. The Argentinian representative described Vietnam’s more recent reputation as being seen as “*stable, reliable and well-organized*”

*with lots of potential*” for investment. According to the representative, Vietnam’s government is really trusted as they always *“do what they promise.”* For example, when they set up the timeframe for removing barriers to trade and foreign direct investment businesses, they realised it step by step. When they work out five-year economic plans, they can also achieve the goals.

Tourism, too, had definitely elevated Vietnam’s status according to the embassy representatives. The Argentinian representative stated: *“we put Vietnam in our holiday map now. And we discover Vietnam is amazing.”* TV and radio channels broadcasted tourism programmes about Vietnam, its delicious food and natural and wild beauty spots or even adventurous trips to the caves.

Mercer (1996) asserted that a country’s reputation indicates how the country is perceived. And *“a country’s reputation is described by the collective beliefs of people about its image and identity, which represents or predicts its future behaviour and performance”* (Jain & Winner, 2013, p. 111). Globalisation pushes a country to compete with others for its share of the world’s commercial transactions and, in such an environment, country reputation has become ever more critical because of its influence on the opinions, decisions and actions of each country’s target audiences such as foreign investors, tourists, consumers, students, entrepreneurs, trading partners, donors and international agencies (Passow et al., 2005). The foreign public’s perception of a country makes a key difference to the success of its business, trade and tourism efforts. So, when it comes to Vietnam, people had negative attitudes toward the country (Vietnam’s bad reputation) in providing good conditions for business and tourism, and they were reluctant to go there. But as their attitudes have changed

(Vietnam's better reputation), they started thinking about travelling to Vietnam and making plans for doing business in the country.

The interviewees agreed that there has been a gradual shift in the media's portrayal of the country, from mainly covering war and conflict topics with negative angles, or failures to find solutions to international struggles, to covering the country with positive angles, such as how war victims got compensated by the US, and reporting on economics, tourism or cultural attractions. These articles seemed to appear from around 2015 until the present time. According to the interviewees, this slight shift in media coverage about the country has had an impact in terms of the gradual change in people's attitudes.

According to the New Zealand representative: "*International media are [now] covering Vietnam in different ways, particularly financial news agencies as they understand the story of Vietnam now.*" The country is technologically up-to-date and has become one of the biggest mobile phone and electronic appliance manufacturers in the world.

The representatives also recognised that Vietnam started working hard to improve its reputation by actively presenting its image in foreign media coverage, showing its strengths and activeness. They agreed that the country started taking opportunities to host international events to promote its image to the world.

Both the Venezuelan and Austrian representatives affirmed that Vietnam itself gradually became proactive in improving its international media coverage. The country itself has realised the importance of the media. The Venezuelan representative commented that the country does not just "*let the media do it*" as it did in the years 2012–2013, but it now actively leads the way when hosting international events such as the 132<sup>nd</sup> Assembly of Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2015. The Venezuelan

representative said the country actively organised trips and activities outside the meetings for reporters, to advertise the country.

The CEEC representative also mentioned Vietnam as a host of other international events like Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summits attracting a number of foreign media agencies to the country where they got to see what it was really like. This offered a big opportunity to “*promote the image of Vietnam*” to the rest of the world, he said.

### *8.2.3. The changing media landscape’s impact on Vietnam*

In talking about the role of media use in people’s lives, the Embassy representatives acknowledged that technological changes in how news was produced and consumed had an impact on how they viewed the rest of the world.

Hardcopy newspapers and broadcast forms of radio and television had traditionally been the ways publics relied on information about both local and international events, according to all of the representatives. The Argentinian representative explained that newspapers in particular were used habitually by people in his country. particularly when they wanted to keep informed “*about the developments in our own politics, trade between Argentina and China and also other countries*”.

The Venezuelan representative also indicated that people’s reliance on the mainstream media’s reporting of world events meant that this was usually the only way they were able to picture countries that they knew little about, such as Vietnam. They were reliant on what they read or watched in the news. Both the Danish and New Zealand representatives agreed with this view, stating further that people tended to believe and trust international news sources when it came to accessing ‘quality’ information.

At the same time, the representatives indicated an awareness that journalistic practice could affect the way in which a country might be represented, in that journalists often worked under pressure of deadlines and were keen to produce a story that was newsworthy and would attract a bigger audience. These comments are supported by McCombs and Reynolds' (2009) belief in the context of the agenda-setting paradigm that a "near perfect match" exists "between the media agenda and the public agenda" (p.8).

According to McCombs (2004), one of the key factors determining the agenda-setting power of mainstream media is journalism practices, which influence what journalists write about. For example, they are under pressure of deadlines, and subject to space requirements in a publication, rules for writing different types of stories (such as the inverted pyramid structure for a news story), news values, the standard of objectivity, the reliance on official sources, and the relationships with other sources, in setting the media agenda.

Further to this, the embassy representatives indicated that countries and their businesses were often involved in marketing campaigns in which public relations officers provided news agencies with specific information to reach a global market. The CEEC representative said that lengthy and key features could make a big difference in how a country might be perceived. However, he said Vietnam had in the past not been promoted to any great extent through these channels as the country and its businesses seemed not to take up marketing strategies with foreign media. The Denmark representative agreed, stating that some countries ran big public relations campaigns through the international media such as CNN to promote their image, while Vietnam had done little in this area.

However, some change had been noticed when news organisations started publishing online. While currently mainstream media channels remained an important information source, according to the embassy representatives, they also affirmed that changes in technology made it easier for people to access the media through their websites and on news feeds, and for advertisers to target audiences too.

The Austrian representative also noticed that accessing these media sources online had now made it *“cheap and quick to get up-to-date information, especially about remote markets.”*

The New Zealand representative shared the same idea with the Austrian representative and offered an example of an official newspaper’s homepage which posted a series of articles about Vietnam’s tourism attractions with dramatic photos and videos. Besides, these articles were also posted on the newspaper’s Facebook page, which drew interactions and comments from the audience. Many people posted comments that indicated they had never thought Vietnam was so amazing, charming and modern.

Coupled with journalism practices, the audience’s NFO and exposure to news media are two other key factors determining the agenda-setting process. According to McCombs (1976) and McCombs and Shaw (1972), when audiences need to understand a new environment or situation, they will turn to the media. And the more they are exposed to the news media, the more their perceptions are correlated with the content of news media. This perspective was reflected by the interviewees in this research.

#### *8.2.4. Social media platforms: An alternative channel for faster information dissemination*

Connected with the media coverage theme discussed above, the embassy representatives, in their interviews, also acknowledged the increasingly important role of social media forums and networks in circulating information and sharing experiences among people, especially about distant countries including Vietnam. There has been an increasing number of people joining online social networks and being active in these networks has become their routine. According to Clement (2020), social networks are currently estimated to have 3.6 billion users. Facebook, which became the first social media platform surpassing one billion registered accounts, now possesses more than 2.7 billion monthly active users. This number keeps rising every minute.

Most top ranked social networks with more than 100 million users originated in the United States, but European services like VK, Japanese platform LINE, or Chinese social networks WeChat, QQ or video sharing app Douyin have also garnered mainstream appeal in their respective regions due to local context and content (“Global social networks ranked by number of users 2021”, para 2, 2021).

The reasons for this popularity are explained by Clement (2020): “The leading social networks are usually available in multiple languages and enable users to connect with friends or people across geographical, political, or economic borders” (para 3).

The Argentinian representative stated that while images of Vietnam and war still existed in the mainstream media, people could also look for other sources through social media sites. The Austrian representative also shared this view about the popularity of social media sites where information could be shared. He said: *“Facebook, Twitter and blogs help young people a lot to get a better and more*

*profound image of the country, not only the images of wars and conflicts.*” It therefore seems that advances in communication technology are having a positive impact on the reputation of Vietnam, particularly now that people are not so reliant on the news media to get information.

The Argentinian representative said that, in her country. *“Some unexpected events like tornadoes or earthquakes somewhere are updated on Twitter or Facebook faster than official media channels”* as people live-streamed these events. The Venezuelan representative shared similar thoughts about his country and highlighted that the middle and upper classes in the country use social media frequently.

The embassy representatives recognised that social media platforms offered many opportunities for people to share their experiences with others, including the uploading of videos and photos with their written texts. The Danish representative said social networks like Facebook really made a difference now that everyone can share their own experiences on digital and advanced platforms.

The Embassy representatives also identified the role of social media in helping deliver a new image of Vietnam to the rest of the world when members of social media networks or forums exchanged information about the country. According to them, some of the early business people and tourists who came to Vietnam shared their experiences on social media forums which led to positive exposure of the country to many other people. The Danish representative said that people tended to trust their friends and family members who shared their positive experiences of visiting Vietnam through photos and social media: *“When your friends come and show it is interesting, you will go there.”* This was true for New Zealanders as well, according to the New Zealand representative who said those tourists who decided to visit Vietnam recently

had a greater awareness about the country: *“New Zealanders come here and then return with their own stories about Vietnam and also their experiences.”* As a result, they *“generated much more awareness”* about the country, he said.

The Austrian representative shared the same opinion and said that Facebook, Twitter and blogs played a very important role nowadays, mostly for the travel industry. *“Social platforms influence very much the decision making specifically of young tourists.”*

However, the embassy representatives also indicated that many people still habitually rely on mainstream media channels to do fact checks on what they get from social media. For example, the CEEC representative said: *“You can get lost with the information”* in those networks or forums, as often the information is from an individuals’ experience and could be biased or not factual.

The Argentinian representative said that because people are free to talk about anything they like on Facebook, Twitter or any digital platforms, it was difficult to know what was true:

*“When I read something happening on Facebook or Twitter. I ask myself: ‘Wait! Wait! Is it True?’ I then Google it. If there is a lot of articles from different agencies reporting the same thing, that means it is happening. If not, just someone is joking.”*

The advances in technology facilitate the use of social media networks, where people as online members can provide, update and exchange the latest information about incidents or events around them, or anywhere in the world. However, people maintain their habit of using traditional media channels to verify the correctness of the information.

### 8.3. Main findings from interview analysis

The trade experts expressed their opinions on: war memories and their impacts on people's perception of Vietnam; a gradual shift in perception about Vietnam for trade and tourism; the surge of Internet technology leading to the changing media landscape's impacts on Vietnam; and the popularity of online media networks. Some findings arising from the analysis of the interviews should be noted as follows.

First, when reflecting on the 2012–2015 period, the embassy representatives suggested that people of all generations still viewed Vietnam mainly as a war-ravaged country. Recurring war images from Vietnam and texts about Vietnam's war circulated on mainstream media made many business people and tourists reluctant to do business or travel in Vietnam. People did not find it an attractive destination to visit or to plan to do business. According to the interviewees, this was due to people's assumptions on a number of issues including the country's communist status and its representation in mainstream media as being a basically developing country.

Second, a gradual shift in people's perceptions of Vietnam, especially among younger people, was identified. They seemed to be more aware that any association of Vietnam with war was in the past. Consequently, there has been a shift in their perception of Vietnam for trade and tourism. This shift is correlated with the changes in the content of foreign media coverage about Vietnam to reporting on the country in a more positive way.

Third, the embassy representatives recognised that mainstream media channels were the main sources people used to update and check information. The embassy representatives acknowledged journalism practices and other factors affecting the content of information delivered to people. However, some change had been noticed

when news organisations started publishing online. The representatives noted that changes in technology made it easier for people to access the media through their websites and on newsfeeds, and for advertisers to target audiences too.

Fourth, the embassy representatives also acknowledged the more important role of social media networks in circulating and sharing information and experiences among people, especially about distant countries, including Vietnam. These social networks are available in multiple languages and enable people to connect with each other beyond geographical, political and economic borders. Representatives felt that there had been a great deal of change since then and that Vietnam was becoming more popular. This aligns with the 2013-2014 CBI report that identified Vietnam as a progressive country to watch in the future.

From the interview findings summarised above, it is noteworthy that there has been a gradual shift in people's perception about Vietnam, which has been noticed especially since 2015. It is also interesting to see that changes in people's perceptions have correlations with changes in the content of mainstream media about the country, according to the embassy representatives.

The advances in technology have enriched conditions for journalists to do their work and have given audiences more access to mainstream media channels. As Wanta and Wu (1992) found, the more exposure individuals have to the news media, the more they become concerned about the issues emphasised in mainstream media during that time. At present, the changing mediascape and many different sources available provide people with more chances to get updated. However, according to the representatives, mainstream media channels maintain their roles as a reliable information sources for check whatever they get from other sources.

The more interesting suggestion is that Vietnam started actively building up its image on foreign mainstream media channels.

These findings are in alignment with conclusions of Chapters 5 and 6 regarding news agenda-setting and public perceptions about the country. In the comparison between mainstream media tonality and topics on the one hand, and people's attitudes toward and interest in Vietnam on the other, with regard to news agenda-setting findings, both correspondingly focused on Vietnam's wars and other struggles, and trade and tourism, and also expressed their negative attitudes on these issues in regard to Vietnam. In the thematic analysis of the representative interviews, it is found that there was a correspondence between people's negative perceptions about Vietnam due to the war issues and trade potential, and what they read in the mainstream media about the country in the same time period. Through the interviews, it can be seen that a gradual shift in perceptions of Vietnam, which also coincided with a slight shift in media coverage about country, especially from the year of 2015, from negativity to seeing the country in a more positive light.

As a result, it is noticeable that the interviewees mentioned the reluctance of their country's people to travel to and do business in Vietnam, which is similar to what was seen in the decisions of the respondents of the CBI surveys.

The findings in the interview analysis consolidated what was concluded earlier in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. That is: there is a relationship between the content of mainstream media stories and people's perceptions toward country, which has been proven.

Furthermore, analysing the interviews thematically showed that the public used mainstream media as an important information channel and that when there was a

change in mainstream media coverage, people's perceptions toward Vietnam changed accordingly. This reflects the process of agenda-setting (McCombs, 2004).

#### **8.4. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented the findings from my interviews with six representatives from the embassies of Austria, Argentina, Denmark, Venezuela and New Zealand and the CEEC. I conducted these interviews in Vietnam using seven open-ended questions to open the discussion with the objective of gaining a greater understanding of their country's perceptions of Vietnam, given their involvement with the relationships of the businesses and people they deal with. I also sought their views and experiences relating to the role of mainstream media and news stories about Vietnam and how they felt these impacted on the business and travel plans of people during the period of this study, 2012–2015.

Reflecting on my thematic analysis of the interviews, a very important point to note is that, at the present time, even with the popularity of social media platforms, the embassy representatives believe that mainstream media remains a key trusted information channel for people. This role seems irreplaceable, according to the embassy representatives. Especially for information about foreign countries, audiences mainly rely on the mainstream media.

When reviewing the 2012–2015 period, the embassy representatives suggested that people of all generations retained a view of Vietnam as a war-torn country. War images from Vietnam and texts about Vietnam's wars repeatedly circulated on mainstream media, and made business people and tourists reluctant to do business or travel in Vietnam. People still viewed Vietnam negatively and did not find it an attractive destination to visit or to plan to do business. However, there has been a

gradual shift in people's perceptions of Vietnam, especially among younger people, especially from 2015: they become aware that the wars were in the past of 50 years ago, not the present. These shifts are correlated with the changes in the content of foreign media coverage about Vietnam, which has presented the country in a more positive way. Along with these noteworthy interview findings, it is interesting to recognise that changes in people's perceptions have correlations with changes in the content of mainstream media about the country.

Remarkably, the findings from the interviews show that mainstream media channels were the main sources people used to update and check information. The embassy representatives acknowledged journalism practices and other factors affecting the content of information delivered to people. According to them, it is journalists' choices of details, words and ways to shape the stories that direct the audiences' attention to particular issues and influence their feelings on the issues, persons or organizations framed in mainstream media. They also recognised that the bigger news organisations are, the greater the influence they could have on other news organisation and on the flows of news. The advances in technology enrich conditions for journalists to do their work and give audiences more accesses to mainstream media channels. With greater access to news sources, it is possible that people's knowledge of countries such as Vietnam could increase.

Furthermore, the frames of the stories about Vietnam align with the findings of the interview analysis in regard to people's perceptions about the country. When reflecting on 2012–2015 period, the embassy representatives suggested people viewed Vietnam negatively and did not find it an attractive destination to visit or to plan to do business due to the assumptions about the war-ravaged and communist

status of the country, and its representation in mainstream media as basically a developing country. These negative perceptions have gradually changed and become better. The four analysed stories framed a Vietnam in regard to war, communist status and economic instability, and then signalled a better Vietnam.

It should be noted that the interview findings on the reluctance of people to travel and do business in Vietnam are also correlated with the decisions of the respondents of the CBI surveys during that period.

The thematic analysis of the embassy interviews then contributes to the answers to research questions such as what foreign mainstream media cover about Vietnam, how agenda-setting by foreign mainstream media relates to public perceptions of other nations, and what influence the agenda-setting of foreign media has on a country's reputation.

## CHAPTER 9

# CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

This study sought to investigate how the agenda-setting function of foreign mainstream media might relate to a country's reputation, with a case study of Vietnam. Television, radio, newspapers and online-only news outlets have become the key source of information for many people, as few have direct experience with foreign countries and world events. Obtaining news from mainstream media has become part of people's daily routine. In this context, there are concerns about journalists' ability to influence people's perceptions about a country. According to Bosch (2015), the importance of the media is significant as "they transmit, create and store information and in so doing influence perception, knowledge and memory. They put their seal on politics, economy and culture" (p. 1). This study started as an investigation of the relationship between foreign media coverage of a country and its reputation, by taking Vietnam as a case study. Vietnam was chosen as a case study because it provided an example of a developing country that had experienced some dramatic changes in its economy during the period 2012–2015, which presented an opportunity to investigate how the foreign media responded to these changes in its news coverage, particularly when Vietnam had been associated for so long with war in the 1960s and 1970s.

As discussed at the beginning of this thesis (Chapter 2), Vietnam achieved remarkable developments during 2012–2015 and was working towards a much more stable position in the world in terms of economy, investment, tourism and politics. However, except for its relationships with traditional partners such as the US, Japan and South Korea, Vietnam had yet to gain success in improving trading and tourism relationships

with new partners (World Bank, 2017). Vietnam was chosen for two main reasons. Firstly, it seemed to receive a great deal of international media coverage. Vietnam was within the awareness threshold of the world public, in that it was ranked the 15<sup>th</sup> most covered Asian country by the world mainstream media (Media Tenor, 2017). Secondly, it does not possess world-wide popular brands and is not influential in world politics and economy in the way that the US, the UK, China, Japan or Singapore are. People are reliant on news media for information about Vietnam. This means that audiences themselves mainly access their impressions of the country via mainstream media – that is, via indirect experience – and they have no or little direct experience with the country (Schatz & Kolmer, 2010). These two factors laid the base for me to investigate the agenda-setting function of the media in respect of a country’s reputation. While the question “How does the agenda-setting by foreign mainstream media relate to public perceptions of other nations?” was foremost in my mind, I realised that this would be beyond the scope of this doctoral research, so my study focused on finding the answers to research questions relating to Vietnam as a starting point that other researchers might depart from in investigations about other countries. My research questions therefore were:

1. What do foreign mainstream media cover in relation to Vietnam?
2. How does their agenda-setting relate to Vietnam’s reputation?

My thesis is an investigation into the international image of Vietnam during 2012–2015, conducted specifically with quantitative analysis (content analysis) of news coverage of the country, seeking to show whether there was a relationship between the content of foreign media stories about the country and its reputation. However, as explained in my research design and method chapter (Chapter 4), it also involved the

qualitative analysis of interviews with foreign trade experts from embassies and a non-governmental organisation in Vietnam, and the analysis of news stories. This was to add a further dimension to the research that would test the validity of the third-level of agenda-setting, the network agenda-setting model, moving beyond the traditional approaches to agenda-setting theory. This of course helped to address some of the criticisms of agenda-setting theory that there is a lack of qualitative studies proving the influence of media on public opinion and a lack of clarity on how factors affect the process in which some issues gain more attention than others. The combined methods improve the validity of the research and address the critique of agenda setting as its sole quantitative focus. My study aims at providing useful insights as to the important role of foreign media coverage when it comes to a country's image and how a positive reputation achieved this way might attract foreign investment and tourists.

The first part of this chapter summarises the main findings of the research and then discusses the main observations that can be made when reviewing the findings. The contributions I have made and the implications of the research are highlighted.

In the second part of the chapter, I address the limitations of the research and offer suggestions for future research which can build on my study on different levels relating to Vietnam, other countries and also agenda-setting theory.

### **9.1. War and conflicts – main focus of media coverage about Vietnam & its relationship with people's perceptions about the country**

The first research question concerned the international media coverage of Vietnam: the topics that were reported on and how they were reported. Understanding what topics dominated the coverage would help identify the image of Vietnam consistently presented to the audience by international media.

The findings of quantitative analysis of media content, drawn from the data collected through Media Tenor, indicate that the image of Vietnam being associated with war and conflict still remains in international media coverage, though there is some sign that a shift to a more positive impression is beginning to occur.

The general tone of media coverage of Vietnam, during the whole period analysed (2012–2015), is more negative than positive. It can be seen that 40 opinion-leading news media outlets focused their attention on particular negative issues such as wars, conflict or accidents, rather than many other positive events such as economic growth or innovation. The top topics covered mainly focus on safety and security and socio-environmental issues.

One of the findings when looking at the two time periods (2012–2013 and 2014–2015) was that there was a general shift in the attitude to Vietnam to a more positive view, even though this might not have been shifted by a huge amount.

The second question that the study intended to answer dealt with how media agenda-setting relates to a country's reputation. Mercer (1996) asserted that a country's reputation relates to how it is perceived by the public, which includes governments, organisations, businesses, various social groups and individuals. A country's reputation forms when other people's or organisations' assessments or judgements of that country are shared internationally by mainstream media. How a country is portrayed in the media can in turn significantly affect foreigners' willingness to travel there, to invest in it or even purchase products that are sourced from there (Jain & Winner, 2013). As the body of research into the factors that shape the formation of a country's reputation is limited, I conducted comparative analyses to see how the foreign

mainstream media coverage relates to country reputation using Vietnam as an example

I selected agenda-setting theory to serve as the theoretical and methodological base for my research because of the significant role it has played in many studies seeking to examine how media coverage relates to people's opinions/thoughts about presidential candidates or government policies. McCombs, one of the key proponents of this approach since the mid-1970s, suggested that agenda-setting is a process in which "audiences take note of the saliences of the news media, what is emphasized, what receives heavy play, and incorporate a similar set of weights into their personal agendas" (McCombs, 1976, p. 3). The mainstream media function in not only bringing an issue or a topic to some level of awareness among the public, but also turning the priorities of the press into the public's priorities, can be explained by the view that too many events and issues are happening at one time, therefore a society or community is reliant on the media to set an agenda to prioritise the issues (Dearing & Rogers, 1996).

However, to attract audiences whose readership and viewership leads to the investment of advertising in news outlets and platforms, there is a need for news organisations to target particular audiences and for journalists to frame their stories and thereby set the news agenda for them. With a clear picture of their audience based on the data that news organisations collect regarding readership, the media can set the agenda for the news based on what might appeal to their particular public. Journalists write for their targeted audience, based on who they 'imagine' them to be through the news organisations' readership data. Litt (2012) asserted that the concepts of the imagined audience laid a base for journalists' daily activities in

producing media content. Their thoughts, decisions and practices relating to their stories are led by their imagined audience. In the present media environment, technological tools, such as websites with a required registration step for the audience, contribute to providing hints for journalists about who is actually the potential audience (Litt, 2012). However, there is a common rule that breaking news, which sells newspapers, is usually bad news such as crime, political conflict, threats to the health of the public, sex scandals, dire economic forecasts, war, and death. According to Shoemaker (2006), “the bad news comes first, and then later news stories tell us about ‘developing’ aspects of the event. If developments are negative, they are more likely to become news” (p. 108). Stories will develop accordingly until the problems are solved. Shoemaker (2006) explained that it is by their nature that people pay attention to things that are dangerous, shocking or threatening. This is seen in my case study of Vietnam, where many events or issues have surfaced or taken place. Foreign media still focus their attention on negative topics such as past war, conflicts and catastrophes.

This study discussed the main factors determining the agenda-setting function of mainstream media deriving from both mainstream media and their audiences, which indicates the complexity of processes that impact on a country’s reputation. This ranges from journalism practices and mainstream media subsidisation forces to the audience NFO, exposure to mainstream media, and their personal characteristics and preferences. Three levels of agenda-setting have been introduced: object agenda-setting, attribute agenda setting and network agenda setting – the third level, the newest approach, being introduced in 2012 (Guo et al., 2012). As the first two levels have already been studied in great depth (Trigueros & Lacasa-Mas, 2018), my research

focused on the third, more recent level and its relationship with country reputation, which had received little analysis to date. The third level of agenda-setting answers the question: How do the characteristics of the objects connect to each other? Network agenda-setting suggests that “individuals’ cognitive representation of objects and attributes is presented as a network-like structure where any particular node will be connected to numerous other nodes” (Guo et al., 2012, p. 55). In traditional studies, objects and attributes are transferred separately from the media agenda to the public agenda. However, “the news media have the capability to construct a more integrated picture of the outside world to people’s heads” (Guo, 2013 p. 129). Issues and their attributes interact with each other and are connected together to form a detailed picture of an object, person or country, although these links are not easy to recognise in stories on mainstream media, and then in the public’s thoughts. When new attributes are presented in the media, new links are then established from the media agenda to the public agenda.

The findings in the case study of Vietnam shows that a relationship exists between mainstream media coverage and general attitudes of respondents in the CBI survey (2012–2015) toward Vietnam in both analysed periods, 2012–2013 and 2014–2015, in terms of general tone and topics of interest. The mainstream media coverage about Vietnam, mainly focusing on safety and security, the business environment and the socio-environmental issues of the country, was negative. Their articles revolve around these issues, in spite of whatever real events were happening in Vietnam. The CBI’s respondents also expressed their negative attitudes on these issues. It should be noticed that the foreign media that has been analysed in this study circulated in the countries of the respondents. Agenda-setting by foreign mainstream media closely

relates to public perceptions of other nations. There is a correspondence between how the mainstream media consistently covered the country and how the public looked at and perceived it; as McCombs (2003) explained, the mainstream media influences what the public needs to think about. The issues and their saliences are covered in the mainstream media and then can be seen in the public agendas. The ways the issues are presented and framed on media can then also be mirrored in the public's attitudes on those issues. The salience of an issue or a topic in the mass media determines that issue or topic to be important and how it should be framed in the public (Funkhouser, 1973; McCombs, 1976; Perse, 2001).

The findings of the study indicate that the media coverage of the wars in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s had a huge impact on changing the whole situation when people in the world were all against the war conducted by the US. This agenda-setting appears to have continued many decades later, as the war is still consistently referred to. Vietnam therefore appears to have an image problem when it comes to its past conflicts. There is a need for the country to be seen in a new and more positive light if it wishes to expand its trade, economy and tourism. And, as is seen in my quantitative and qualitative analysis, a gradual shift in media coverage and people's common perceptions of the country seems to be occurring.

The findings from interviews with five representatives from embassies and one from a chamber of commerce in Vietnam were obtained from people who had good knowledge of the country's reputation because of their dealings with their countries' businesses and people in regard to Vietnam, as well as their access to surveys, statistics and reports about Vietnam.. These findings from the interview analysis align with the findings from the media content analysis and the comparison between media

data and the public perceptions index. The shifts in people's perceptions toward the country are taking place at a time when there are changes in the image of the country framed by the mainstream media. Business and travel-related decisions are made accordingly. The steps in which the saliences of issues and changes in them move from the media agenda to the public agenda reflect the agenda-setting process. The interview analysis supports the view that agenda-setting plays a powerful role in selecting not only objects for attention but also attributes for characterising those objects (McCombs, 2004) and how the news media "can actually bundle different objects and attributes and make these bundles of elements salient in the public's mind simultaneously" (Guo et al., 2012, p. 55). The use of the selection, emphasis, exclusion, elaboration and connection of particular attributes makes the audiences acknowledge what the picture of an object is (McCombs, 2004). In the case of Vietnam, the picture of the country in the minds of people in foreign audiences reflects the picture shaped, detailed, coloured and presented by foreign mainstream media. This can be seen through the findings from the comparison of data sets mentioned above: the focus of the public toward the country corresponds with the focus of foreign media coverage.

Moreover, the findings of the framing analysis of four news stories that relate to two topics – the Vietnam War and the economy – similarly suggested that journalists' choices of vocabularies, quotes or sources can set the agenda for the audience by highlighting certain aspects of reality and pushing others into the background. These selections express a journalist's personality and aims, without any words expressing their subjective opinions. In this way, certain issues, attributes, judgements, and decisions are suggested. The findings indicated that a gradual shift has been seen in foreign media coverage, in a positive light being cast on negative topics, such as a new

beginning for a war victim. This aligns with Sissons (2006) comments about different journalists seeing and hearing the same event will retell or represent the even in different ways via their selections of sources, interviewees, details and story structure.

When the foreign media coverage about a country changes in terms of topics or tones, people's interests and opinions toward the country also change. When discussing the concept of public opinion, Davison (1998) highlighted the point that public opinion could be considered as a sum of views (the collective view) on issues, countries or people, which can be similar or different. Cooley (1918) assumed that public opinion is a result of the whole process of interaction and information exchange among community members. Davison (1998) highlighted that the influence of public opinion can go beyond the politics area, to various spheres such as culture, fashion and the arts. Vietnam's reputation is accordingly defined as how the country is perceived by the public (including governments, organisations, businesses, various social groups and individuals). The country's reputation forms as impressions and judgements of that country are internationally shared through mainstream media. Meanwhile, a country's brand is regarded as "a product of strategically communicated information of a nation-state about itself" (Buhmann, 2016, p. 40). Moreover, a nation brand originates from the culture of the country; it is not simply a logo or an advertising campaign. "The nation brand is defined as the unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences" (Dinnie, 2008, p. 15). Vietnam's reputation could be seen through what the media cover about the country and how they cover the country's issues. Foreign media have influence over a country's reputation. They are able to shift a country's reputation over time in response to changes in their information policies,

goals, entrusted tasks, target audiences, market targets or marketing deals. When Vietnam is presented positively in foreign media, the country's reputation changes to be better and vice versa. In this observation, the importance of the country's portrayal in foreign media is acknowledged.

All of my data indicate the start of a shift in Vietnam's international reputation. However, there is still much to be done if Vietnam wishes to establish itself on the world stage. Further research for periods beyond 2015 may show whether this trend has continued.

When reviewing the findings of my analysis, namely the content analysis, the interviews and the news story analysis, there seemed to be a common theme emerging – that a gradual shift in the perception of Vietnam was moving in a more positive direction. There was some indication that some change was beginning to emerge in the more positive tone of the news. This may suggest a change in attitudes to the country, as past wars and conflicts become more and more distant in time. It is possible that a new generation of journalists is taking a less critical approach because their experience of this distance, or because their exposure to information about the war may be minimal due to their age. According to recent statistics on journalists in the US, released in 2021, by Zippa, a recruitment company, the average age of employed journalists is 39, while research on journalists in the UK, by Thurman et al. (2016) showed that the average age of journalists is 40 for females and 45 for males. It can be observed that someone who is 45 in 2021 was born in 1976, a year after the end of the Vietnam War, which means it was not something they grew up, seeing in the news everyday.

More notably, the present research suggests that the content of foreign media stories about Vietnam and how that content relates to its image and reputation may well influence other countries' decision-making about developing trade and economic relationships with Vietnam. Tourism – an industry from which Vietnam would benefit greatly – could also be affected. My reflections on this result not only from examining the agenda-setting of foreign media when reporting stories about this nation, but also in considering the CBI, the country reputation index. While the people surveyed about Vietnam for the CBI were mostly international business people and travellers between the ages of 21 and 65, and therefore are not representative of all ages and stripes in publics that might have an opinion, my research still provides insights as to Vietnam's reputation when it comes to important areas relating to its economic growth.

## **9.2. Contributions of the study**

There are a number of contributions that this study has made to the understanding of the relationship between foreign media coverage and a country's reputation. This included specific knowledge about Vietnam's reputation as a case study that could be used as a basis for comparing the international media representation of other countries in future research. This study has also made a contribution to methodology.

### *9.2.1. Providing knowledge about Vietnam's reputation*

The significance of the research is that it has contributed further knowledge about how foreign media set the agenda when it comes to covering the nation of Vietnam, how this relates to the country's image, and whether it adequately reflects the nation and the improvements that have been made in the last few decades. Specifically, my research showed how foreign media appeared to focus on past wars, conflict or

catastrophes, instead of changes in the country's economy, business, education or tourism.

It should be noted that earlier studies on media coverage about Vietnam mainly focused on the media and the wars in Vietnam to investigate the role of the media in the Vietnam War (Spector, 2016), the media's influence on public opinion in the US about the war (Hadyniak, 2015), or the media's unparalleled power – the power to decide what the war means (Carpini, 1996). Spector (2016) explained this focus by noting that “the Vietnam conflict is often referred to as the first television war” and “reporting from Vietnam was indeed uncensored” so “American disillusionment with the war was a product of many causes, of which the media was the one” (para. 2-3).

There was a study about “Representation of Vietnam in 2006: A Comparative study between Western and Local Media”, conducted by Thanh (2010). The findings were that the articles moved away from the war stereotype and focused more on Vietnam's economy. However, these findings resulted from the fact that Thanh's study (2010) only looked at the two weekly magazines of *The Economist* and *TIME* (Asian magazine edition) in the year of 2006, which are written for a limited audience or more elite groups with many articles focusing on economic issues. So, when these two publications covered Vietnam, there was a greater focus on stories about the country's economy as an expected consequence. Meanwhile, my study with a much larger dataset from looking at 40 opinion-leading media outlets worldwide in a more recent time period, actually showed that there are still remnants of the Vietnam war that remain in the media. It offered an opportunity for a comprehensive look of Vietnam's image or a common trend of international coverage about the country in international media to be investigated.

So far as it has been possible to ascertain, there have not been any studies on the relations of media coverage and Vietnam's reputation or image (Media Tenor, 2017). My research contributes further knowledge that can be key to understanding the image of Vietnam as represented through the agenda-setting function of the media. Although the study was limited in that the agenda-setting data was only available up to 2015, there are still some key points worth noting that Vietnam, its government and its own decision-makers can benefit from. It is clear that when positive and interesting stories about a country are featured more prominently by foreign mainstream media, people will develop a better impression – particularly when it comes to choosing a country as a place to visit or to do business with. This suggests that government investment in advertising and marketing is a worthwhile pursuit in raising the positive image of Vietnam – though the government would need to take care that it is realistic and that it could not be accused of being propaganda. That is, people's experiences of Vietnam need to match what they are promised in advertising, marketing and trade documents.

The years of 2019–2020 have witnessed more focused advertising campaigns from Vietnam, which has created opportunities to popularise its positive image when it has hosted international events in recent years, according to the representatives of embassies of Argentina and Venezuela and the CEEC in the interviews. For example, the summit of President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un hosted by Vietnam in February 2019 was an important international event for improving Vietnam's image in the world community. More than 3,000 journalists from 40 countries gathered in Hanoi to cover the event. The news coverage extended to other activities of high-ranking officials who attended the summit, which saw them enjoying

Vietnamese food, visiting scenic locations, schools or factories. All these 'side-line' activities were organised by the Vietnamese Government, indicating that they acknowledge the opportunity and put in the effort to advance Vietnam's image in positive ways. For example, reporter Laignee Barron (2019) from *Time* wrote a long article describing the hotel in Hanoi where President Trump stayed, while a number of reporters such as those from CNN described the specialty foods of Hanoi: "Deep fried Hanoi-style spring rolls with shrimp, pork, vermicelli and vegetables served with a side of sweet and sour fish sauce and red chillies" (Griffiths, 2019, April 27, para. 3). Prior to this event, there were a lot of articles from international news agencies such as CNN, the BBC or the *Financial Times* analysing the importance of Vietnam in hosting international conferences and giving a more realistic representation of the global positioning of the country. For example, the reporter Bennett Murray (2019) from *Foreign Policy Magazine* introduced Vietnam as a popular host for international key summits such as the 2017 APEC summit which was attended by the US's Donald Trump, China's Xi Jinping, Russia's Vladimir Putin, and leaders from other countries both big and small. He then affirmed Vietnam as "a trusted member of the international community" to host the historical meeting between leaders of the US and North Korea, Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un (Murray, 2019).

Furthermore, based on the findings of my research about Vietnam, this study can offer a springboard for future studies to address the relationships that exist between agenda setting and the international public's perception of foreign countries. The study signalled that topics such as conflict and crises, elite figures and historical events become the focus of journalists. These findings gave an indication that other countries need to think about these points and even journalists themselves need to be better

informed. The 2013-14 CBI report suggests about countries to watch, that is, the countries which they felt would gain greater prominence in the future when it came to business and trade, especially countries such as China, South Korea or Vietnam, which require more attention from researchers. This may serve to acknowledge the importance of international news coverage in managing a country's image to enhance its reputation and benefit its international trade and tourism.

### *9.2.2. Providing verification for the validity of the latest agenda-setting level*

The research offers verification of the validity of the third level of agenda-setting theory, network agenda-setting, as previously the studies on this level were limited to the political issues of the US in relation to some domestic newspapers and public opinion on those issues.

The network agenda-setting model moves beyond the traditional approaches to agenda-setting theory in which "the audience perceives news agenda elements in a linear logical fashion and objects and attributes are transferred separately" (Guo, 2013, p. 129). Instead, "the news media have the capability to construct a more integrated picture of the outside world to people's heads" (Guo, 2013, p. 129). Network agenda-setting, the impact of the networked media agenda of objects or attributes on the networked public agenda of object or attribute salience, is the third level of agenda setting (McCombs et al., 2014). Issues, their attributes and attributes of the attributes interact with each other and are connected together, although these links are not easy to recognise in stories on mainstream media, and then in the public's thoughts and opinions. These relationships among elements of the media and public agendas are at the centre of the third level of agenda-setting. They used to be

considered as separate elements of the agenda-setting process in both theory and analysis (McCombs et al., 2014).

My study offered a further opportunity to test network agenda-setting in a different field: the relationship between mainstream media coverage and country reputation. When representing a country, a media agency, especially a leading one, focuses on covering events on the recurring issues with a particular tone or frame. Other media agencies also pay attention to the same issues and use the same tone. Some, though not all, specific issues relating to the country keep being repeated on foreign media, and they become the representative descriptions of or details about the country. I also acknowledge that negative topics are often regarded by journalists as having more news value and that they may put more focus on these to attract a greater readership. These issues, along with their attributes, do not appear separately or linearly, but are interconnected with each other and bundled in the minds of the members of the audience and form a picture of the country. When there are some gradual changes in coverage by these foreign media towards a country, such as their interest in the more recent economic situation in Vietnam or in a positive angle on the Vietnam War topic, these new attributes form new links – “new nodes” in the networked minds of the members of the audience. These “new nodes” form the new image of Vietnam accordingly. I acknowledge that media organisations are consistent in the ways in which they cover Vietnam and this is likely to be the same for other countries.

These findings support the theory of third-level agenda-setting as they suggest that it is the news media that are able to connect new information with the audience’s existing associative network memory and firm up the connections by “frequently activating pairs of constructs in tandem” (Guo et al., 2012, p. 56). The news media are

likely to construct new nodes on a network or control the strength of the existing relationships among different constructs to shape and reshape the audience's associative memory network. "The salience of the interrelationships among constructs – or the associative network regarding a certain topic – can be transferred from the media agenda to the public agenda" (Guo et al., 2012, p. 57). News media are likely to create the connections among agendas, thereby giving a central position to certain agenda elements in the public's mind. In the case study of Vietnam, these elements of media and public agendas can be seen to be correlated and interconnected. The image of Vietnam is represented and formed on foreign media only by way of some specific attributes, selected by journalists, and their interrelationships. These findings contribute to the verification of the third level of agenda-setting.

### *9.2.3. Addressing critics of agenda-setting theory*

Agenda-setting theory faces some critique for a lack of qualitative studies to prove the influence of the media on public opinion and a lack of clarity on how particular factors affect the process in which some issues get more attention than the others (Adams et al., 2014; Gooch, 1996; Manning, 2001). In the thesis, these limitations have been addressed.

Firstly, some leading scholars such as Manning (2001) have asserted that agenda-setting researchers have failed to conduct qualitative studies to prove their hypothesis on the influence of the media on public opinion. My research has included another layer of analysis involving qualitative work to explore further insights into what I found in the case of Vietnam in quantitative research regarding the agenda-setting process, and investigate how the mainstream media influences the country's reputation. In Chapter 7, I analysed four sample articles under the themes of war and economy, top

topics in the media coverage of Vietnam during the period of 2012–2015. The findings in the story framing analysis consolidated the findings of quantitative data analysis: the content of mainstream media stories is consistently correspondent with people's perceptions of the country. The findings from the qualitative analysis of the four stories also contributed to explaining how the stories influenced the audiences by demonstrating that it is the authors' choices of details, vocabularies, symbols and rhetorical devices that frame the stories to express what they want to tell audiences and how they want it to be told. The frames of these stories about Vietnam are also in correspondence with the findings in the qualitative analysis of the interviews on people's perceptions about the country.

Secondly, some critiques have assumed that studies of agenda-setting failed to answer crucial questions on factors that encourage particular sections of news audiences to rely more heavily upon the news for some issues but not others. The embassy representatives interviewed in this study expressed their opinion that mainstream media channels were the main sources that people used to update and check information. They also acknowledged journalism practices and other factors affecting the content of information delivered to people. According to these participants, it is journalists' choices of details, words and ways to shape stories that direct the audience's attention to particular issues and influence their feelings on those issues, persons or organisations as they are framed on mainstream media. Moreover, the findings of the framing analysis of news stories similarly suggested that journalists' choices of vocabularies, quotes or sources can affect audiences by stressing certain aspects of reality and pushing others into the background. In this way, certain issue attributes, judgements, and decisions are suggested. The interviews and the framing

analysis of news stories revealed the main factors encouraging audiences to rely more on particular stories or issues than others: story frames formed by journalists.

#### *9.2.4. Acknowledging the maintenance of the importance of mainstream media*

The findings of this study support an acknowledgement of the important role that mainstream media still retains in setting the news agenda, even as social media platforms become increasingly popular ways for users to receive their information. This is drawn from the relationship between people's perceptions of Vietnam and media coverage, coupled with the affirmation of the interviewees from the embassies and the chamber of commerce in their habits of checking the information received from social media sources through mainstream media.

This acknowledgment can be linked with a recent survey by Reuters Institutes, which showed that “news organisations remain central and news media are trusted by a majority” (Rekhi, 2020, para. 11), based on a survey of 8,000 respondents in six countries (Argentina, Germany, South Korea, Spain, the UK, and the US) which was released in April 2020. According to the survey, more people are relying on news organisations, which are deemed to be more trustworthy, rather than social media. The mainstream media is still the most reliable source for audiences to check the updates they get from social media platforms, especially given the fake news that is created on these platforms to influence views or for political motives.

Moreover, research carried out by the Media Insight Project of the American Press Institute and the Associated Press showed similar results in regard to people relying on news organisations and their reasons for doing so (American Press Institute, 2016). So, audiences tend to rely on the mainstream media channels to verify what they get from the social platforms. Thus, journalists or news organisations play their role as

information distributors and gatekeepers, in spite of their audiences having more choice.

Interestingly, reliability on mainstream news media outlets continues today and this has been particularly noticeable with the more recent Covid-19 pandemic which emerged in 2020. A study that was published after my research period, that looked at news media coverage of COVID-19, highlighted the crucial role of mainstream news media in “communicating public health and policy information” amidst increasing disinformation (Mach et al., 2021, p.1). While “managing the public health and societal risks of a pandemic requires iterative, informed decision-making by governments, individuals, and the private sector (p.8)” (Mach et al., 2021, p.8) is the authors commented that it was the mainstream news media that were deemed reliable when it came to accountability for decision-making and shaping public perceptions via their content and their tone. Rocha et al., (2021) also noted that when the social media platforms contributed to the spread of fake news during COVID-19 pandemic governments around the world were found to take on proactive campaigns in encouraging people to check information from trusted news organisations.

### **9.3. Limitations and recommendations for future research**

In this thesis, the case study drew on a comprehensive set of data that was accessed through Media Tenor, which provided information about the coverage of Vietnam by 40 media outlets around the world over a four-year period. Content analysis was used to delve deeply into this raw data, in investigating agenda setting. On top of this, I conducted a number of interviews in Vietnam and spent time doing a textual analysis of selected articles to make my research more robust.

While the contributions of my study have been outlined above, my research has certain limitations in time and the availability of other resources. So, I believe that each limitation opens up a possibility for further research to build on what I have achieved and reported in this thesis.

As the focus of my research was on the relationship between the agenda-setting function of foreign media and country reputation, and due to the limitations of time, I used a prominent existing country reputation index which included Vietnam. Further research could conduct additional surveys about Vietnam's reputation with relevant questions for respondents. These questions could be tailored to match the analysis of media content.

Moreover, while the findings of the present study are useful in understanding the reputation of Vietnam, this does not necessarily mean the agenda-setting function has worked in an identical manner with other countries. I suggest conducting further case studies, beyond Vietnam, to investigate whether the relationship between foreign mainstream media coverage and country reputation, which can be seen in the case of Vietnam, is found for other countries. Contributions to agenda-setting theory will be then more robust and generalised.

While this research was limited to the analysis of mainstream media, further research could expand its reach to social media platforms, by examining how these networks operate in regard to the agenda-setting function and how these networks affect the agenda-setting function of mainstream media. At this present time, social media networks overwhelm people's other activities and take up their time. It is the right time to have agenda-setting studies on social networks.

My research also used a case study to test out the latest level of agenda setting, combined with interviews and the textual analysis of articles; this is an approach which can be applied to other countries to understand the relation between the international media coverage and the reputations of these other countries. But cross-country comparisons have the potential to identify different levels of relations between international media coverage and countries' reputations, and the ways in which countries build up their international image through international coverage.

Although the data collected from the Embassy interviews relied on a relatively small group of trade experts in this research, this still provided some important insights into perceptions of Vietnam based on their experience and sound knowledge. This, however, provides an opportunity for future research to widen the scope of people interviewed which could include trade experts from other embassies. When it came to the framing analysis of stories, future research could also involve interviews with journalists to gain a deeper understanding of their choices of topics and the angle of stories based on newsworthiness.

In addition, this study has highlighted the opportunity for more in-depth investigation into the link between other important factors within the agenda-setting process, such as journalism practices, mainstream media subsidisation forces, NFO, exposure to mainstream media, and the personal characteristics of audiences, when it comes to the image of various countries. This could be conducted through observation and/or interviews with journalists, news organisations and the audience (i.e., consumers of news) to provide a greater all-round assessment.

Overall, my research answered questions on foreign media coverage about Vietnam and its relationship to the country's reputation. It is expected to be a springboard for

future research on the impacts of agenda-setting on country reputation at a comprehensive scale.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 – Viewership/readership of analysed mainstream media outlets

Media Type	Country of Origin	Name	Circulations/ Viewers/ Ratings	Sources
TV news	Austria	ORF ZIB 2	21.6% of nationwide audiences (2016)	mediendaten.orf.at
	Canada	CBC The National (CBC News)	3.8 million (2014)	www.cbc.radio-canada.ca/site/annual-reports
	China	CCTV One	1.2 billion (2012)	Thenewpress.com
	France	TF1 Le Journal (Le Journal 20.00)	<b>3 million (2014)</b>	Tf1.fr
	Germany	ARD Tagesschau	3 million (2017)	TVNEWSER
		ARD Tagesthemen	2.5 million (2017)	TVNEWSER
		ZDF heute	3.89 million (2016)	TVNEWSER
		ZDF heute journal	4 million (2016)	TVNEWSER
		RTL aktuell	3.91 million (2010)	TVNEWSER
	Italy	RAI Uno Telegiornale (RAI 1 – TGI)	17% of nationwide audiences (2016)	www.auditel.it/media
	South Africa	SABC 2 Afrikaans News	1.48 million (2016)	News24.com
		SABC 1 Zulu/Xhosa News	4.15 million (2016)	News24.com
		SABC 3 News @ 18h30	1.36 million (2016)	News24.com
		E-TV Prime Time News	3.2 million (2016)	News24.com
		SABC 2 Sesotho News	1.15 million (2016)	News24.com
		SABC 3 News @ One	1.1 million (2016)	News24.com

	Spain	TVE Telediario 2 (21.00)	3.2 million (2013)	rtve.es/commercial/channels-sales/
	Switzerland	SRF Tagesschau (Neue Zuercher Zeitung) (Berner Zeitung) 405.000	331,000	
	U.K.	BBC One Ten o'clock News	4.6 million (2017)	bbc.co.uk/mediacentre
		BBC Two Newsnight	450,000 (2017)	Bbc.co.uk/mediacentre
		ITV News at 10	2.8 million (2017)	Radiotimes.com
	US	CBS Evening News	6.5 million (2017)	statista.com
		NBC Nightly News	7.6 million (2017)	
		FOX Special Report w/ Bret Baier	2.1 million (2015)	
		CBN Financial Nightline		
		ABC World News Tonight	7.7 milion (2017)	
	Japan	NHK Newsline	300 million households	www.globenewswire.com/news- release
<b>NEWSP APER MAGA ZINE NEWS WEBSITE</b>	France	Les Echos	132,000 (2017)	Dailymail.co.uk
	Germany	Handelsblatt	103,000 (2016)	eurotopics.net
		Bild-Zeitung	2.45 million (2017)	Netnewscheck
		Spiegel	840,000 (2017)	Netnewscheck
		Focus	441,805 (2017)	Netnewscheck
		Bild am Sonntag	1.1 million (2016)	Netnewscheck
		FAZ	400,000 (2017)	Netnewscheck
		Welt am Sonntag	477,000 (2017)	Netnewscheck
	U.K.	Financial Times Europe	850,000 (2017)	Netnewscheck
		The Economist	1.56 million (2017)	Netnewscheck

RADIO	US	BBC	148 million unique visitors	cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/
		The Wall Street Journal	2.4 million (2013) 2.52 million (2017)	Statista.com
		Forbes	7 million (2017)	Statista.com
		CNN.COM	<b>166 Million Multiplatform Unique Visitors</b>	cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/
	South Africa	Financial Mail	12,673 (2017)	Statista.com
	Germany	<b>Deutschlandfunk 07:00 News</b>	1.6 million listeners, one of four main radio channels	eurotopics.net

## Appendix 2 – Coding sheet

The screenshot displays the MediaTutor CodingApp interface. The top section contains a form for entering article details, including Medium Name, Date, Headline, Page Number, Article Number, Style, and Source/Journalist. The middle section features a 'Combined Article' tab with various coding options like Protagonist, Time, Source, Area, and Explicit/Implicit Rating. The right side shows a 'Project List' and a search function for 'asean'. Below the form is a table of coded data for the article.

Project ID	Main Protagonist	Main Article Topic	Main Topic	Protagonist Typ	Protagonist	Source	Area	Topic	About Me / About Others	Exp Rating	Impl Rating	Delete	Edit
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		Vietnam	State	All Journalists	other country, several cou...	Trade agreements	1	0	1	Delete Edit
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		Institutions	Asian Economic Commu...	All Journalists	Vietnam	Trade agreements	1	0	0	Delete Edit
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		Vietnam	several Companies	All Journalists	Vietnam	Economic conditione in g...	1	0	1	Delete Edit

The upper left-hand side shows the entries for the formal variables of the news stories, the authors, the cited media and experts and the marking-up of MT projects.

The lower left-hand side shows the entries for the content variables for profile coding – combined article coding – and for other projects that can be selected via the tabs.

The lower part of the screen (in the above screenshot the grey area) shows the data that is coded for one news story.

The right-hand side shows the various coding lists that appear when a coding field is accessed and activated. Using the coding lists is facilitated by a search function in the search bar above the list (enter at least three characters).

Coding is done by typing the codes into the appropriate fields on the left-hand side or by selecting from the lists on the left hand side. The clear text of the coded value is shown in the coding mask as well.

### Appendix 3 – Table of transcripts and codes

Embassy	War-related quotes	Codes
Argentina	<p>1. About war and conflicts, that was only the images of people that were informed about Vietnam 5 or several years ago. They saw that and said: oh Vietnam, there is war there.</p> <p>2. When I told my friends and family that I was coming to Vietnam (<i>in 2015</i>). They asked me: are you sure?</p> <p>3. But while South Korea (<i>in conflicts with North Korea</i>) is still doing well with their business so little by little, recently, businessmen know Vietnam has potentials, not wars. Realised that they started coming.</p> <p>4. Vietnam's reputation changed in comparison with about 5 years ago. It got more trust from other countries that the country is growing fast.</p> <p>5. During 2012-15, media talked about wars in Vietnam. But now statistics show Vietnam different.</p> <p>6. My generation showed in the move. War is something past. It is not something they think about when travelling or doing business. When they think about business, think about future, not the past.</p> <p>7. We now get images of wars of Vietnam but we also look for other sources.</p>	<p>1. Mainstream media coverage about Vietnam focused on war and conflicts.</p> <p>2. Audiences saw Vietnam as a war place.</p> <p>3. Audiences' reluctance to come to Vietnam.</p> <p>4. People's perceptions about Vietnam change: a lot of potentials without wars.</p> <p>5. Changes in people's perceptions about Vietnam lead changes in their travelling decisions</p> <p>6. Vietnam's reputation changes: more trust from other countries</p> <p>7. Main topic of media about Vietnam: wars.</p> <p>8. Changes in people's perceptions about Vietnam lead shifts in their businesses: war in the past, business in the present.</p> <p>9. People make a double check about war-related image of Vietnam.</p>

Venezuela	<p>8. Some years ago, Vietnam was in films and media with images of war. People were so scared and said: oh, no, it is in the war.</p> <p>9. During 2012-15, when thinking about Vietnam, people assumed that it was still attached with wars and conflicts and so it was unsafe and backward. Vietnam's reputation at that time was really different from the present.</p>	<p>10. War images of Vietnam circulated on media</p> <p>11. Audiences' perceptions about Vietnam as a war place, influenced by media.</p> <p>12. Vietnam's associations attached with wars and conflicts.</p> <p>13. Vietnam's reputation: unsafe and backward.</p> <p>14. Vietnam's current reputation changed better.</p>
CEEC	<p>10. Vietnam had associations with war, for my generation and the older one. For me, when thinking about Vietnam, the picture of a naked girl running away from Napalm bomb appears in my mind. This is what other people also have in their mind. It is a human interest.</p> <p>11. Vietnam was known for resistance, braveness and the victory in American war.</p> <p>Vietnam's reputation is good: brave, resistant: associates with Vietnam. Some figures in history shows your country.</p>	<p>15. People keep thinking Vietnam relevant with wars.</p> <p>16. War pictures of Vietnam on media obsessed people's mind.</p> <p>17. Vietnam's reputation: resistance and braveness.</p> <p>18. Vietnam's reputation: good</p>
Denmark	<p>13. Some years ago, before 2015, many people thought that Vietnam was in connection with the war. That was they remembered from the news in Denmark.</p> <p>14. But the younger now knows that was in the past, they started thinking about different</p>	<p>19. People assumed Vietnam to be in wars.</p> <p>20. People's perceptions of Vietnam as a war place, shaped by media.</p> <p>21. Changes in people's perceptions of Vietnam: no war</p>
New Zealand	<p>15. The over-writing vision of Vietnam among New Zealander was associated with the war in some way.</p>	<p>22. People associate Vietnam with wars.</p> <p>23. Media coverage influences people's perception of Vietnam as a war place.</p>

	<p>16. Business owners were often reluctant to consider Vietnam as a destination for their products or services</p> <p>17. The embassy tried to change perception of New Zealanders about Vietnam: deep in wars and conflicts.</p> <p>The embassy tried awareness and change perception of New Zealanders about Vietnam and so when I presented to a group of people in New Zealand, I would show images of beautiful women, riding a bike; show statistics; show high buildings...</p>	<p>24. Businesses do not see Vietnam as a potential place.</p> <p>25. Embassy's efforts to change people's perceptions of Vietnam as a war and conflict place.</p>
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Embassy	Trade and Tourism-related Quotes	Codes
Argentina	<p>18. They came to China for years as they thought Vietnam did not have good conditions</p> <p>19. They see the trends in international commerce. They see the development of countries including Vietnam which are officially and publicly announced with datas and numbers</p> <p>20. It is so easy for me to sell Vietnam because they only need to see the numbers: your GDP, your growth index. Market researches show that all of the markets in Vietnam are growing. So, only showing the numbers, statistics, trends – that is all I need to do. They convinced themselves: by comparing Vietnam with other countries.</p> <p>Things are working here in Vietnam.</p> <p>21. Vietnam's reputation is really good. Being stable, are growing fast, experiencing wars for years, you are reliable. You are neutral, important, here make things happen when</p>	<p>26. Businesses' assumptions about Vietnam: unfavourable conditions for doing business.</p> <p>27. Vietnam's potentials and growth are published via data and numbers.</p> <p>28. People's perceptions about Vietnam start changing: a lot of potentials and good conditions.</p>

	<p>Trump-Un summit happens here in Hanoi with international media agencies coming.</p> <p>22. You have a government not changing the rules everyday. You have a path, a five-year plan and you just need to follow them and that is really stable make companies to trust you.</p> <p>23. Why not Vietnam? neutral, reliable, has a lot of potential, well-organised, you do what you promised.</p> <p>24. Vietnam's reputation changed in comparison with some years ago: got more trust from other countries that the country is growing fast.</p> <p>5 years ago, about war, traffic. But now statistics show Vietnam different</p> <p>My generation: showed once in the move. Vietnam is an amazing country: beautiful beaches.</p> <p>War is something past. It is not in the media now.</p> <p>It is not something they think about when traveling or doing business. When they think about business, think about future, not the past. Vietnam has the future.</p> <p>When they want to have holidays, they want some place with no worries, and there are no worries in Vietnam: safety and stable.</p> <p>25. You are doing a good job in promoting yourself.</p> <p>More and more Vietnamese restaurants are opening, introducing your countries.</p>	<p>29. Vietnam's current reputation: good, reliable, stable and growing fast.</p> <p>30. International media covered Vietnam with major diplomatic events and developments.</p> <p>31. Vietnam's reputation: a trusting and well-planned government</p> <p>32. Vietnam's good reputation: reliable and well-organised with a lot of potentials.</p> <p>33. Businesses have more trust in Vietnam</p> <p>34. Vietnam's potentials: an amazing country and beautiful beaches.</p> <p>35. Media coverage no longer focuses on wars.</p> <p>36. People see Vietnam have a promising future for business and tourism.</p> <p>37. Vietnam's reputation: worry-free, safe and stable.</p> <p>38. Vietnam's government and people are advertising its image.</p>
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Venezuela	<p>26. Businessmen are still considering Vietnam as a communism country.</p> <p>27. Vietnamese play an important role in showing others that what they have, your potentials, facilities, ready...Those questions we have to know</p> <p>28. Vietnam changes: to show the new versions of Vietnam, don't let the media just do it.</p> <p>29. Now: Venezuelan people have better ideas about Vietnam</p> <p>Vietnam's reputation is okie now</p> <p>But some years ago, it is different</p>	<p>39. Businessmen's perceptions of Vietnam as a communist country.</p> <p>40. Vietnam's government is promoting the country's potentials and facilities.</p> <p>41. Vietnam engages in its appearance on media.</p> <p>42. People's perceptions about Vietnam: better than the past.</p>
CEEC	<p>30. How certain information powers left: very unclear: they ask us questions like: tell us the truth about the country, how it is working, whatever matters. What is the level of corruption? The legal system?</p> <p>It is difficult to find such kind of information. Although there is a lot of stories.</p> <p>They come with a lot of questions and suspects.</p> <p>They are not clear without statistics.</p> <p>Two years ago, Cheating and bad public service, overcharging: the promises were not kept by relevant authorities.</p> <p>31. Now: more companies are interested in Vietnam.</p> <p>More tourists with big tourism companies: financial, insurance and education companies</p> <p>32. Vietnam's reputation: is good: brave, resistant.</p> <p>33. Reputation is very important: that is what I see</p>	<p>43. People's perceptions about the country: corruption and matters of legal system.</p> <p>44. People's suspects about the country's potentials and government.</p> <p>45. Media's impacts on people's perceptions about Vietnam.</p> <p>46. Vietnam's reputation: bad public services and untrusting authorities.</p> <p>47. Businesses become more interested in Vietnam.</p> <p>48. Vietnam's reputation: good, brave and resistant</p> <p>49. Importance of country reputation</p>

Denmark	<p>34. Before coming here, I thought Vietnam is a developing country: that was my perception at that time.</p> <p>35. Vietnam's reputation: very good: safe, not crowded, good destination</p>	<p>50. People's perceptions about Vietnam: a developing country.</p> <p>51. Vietnam's current reputation: good and safe</p>
New Zealand	<p>36. People still tend to think Vietnam quite a basic developing economy, still agriculturally-based one.</p> <p>37. Now, Vietnam's economic stories, Vietnam's growth and confidence make New Zealand see its potentials, see the opportunities to start trading with Vietnam.</p> <p>38. International media are covering Vietnam in different ways, particularly financial news agencies as they understand the story of Vietnam now.</p>	<p>52. People assume Vietnam as a basic developing country with an agriculturally-based economy</p> <p>53. People see opportunities in trading with Vietnam</p> <p>54. Media coverage focus on different stories of Vietnam, including finance and economy.</p>
Austria	<p>39. Vietnam has managed to create an image of being a very dynamic market and reliable business and investment partner.</p>	<p>54. Vietnam manages its image on media: a very dynamic market</p>

Embassy	Mainstream media-related quotes	Codes
Argentina	<p>40. However, the official media channels, especially for tourists are super important.</p> <p>The TV show started broadcasting a tourism program in Vietnam after I left. So, that is why it became trendy.</p> <p>41. Also a lot of article in newspapers, travel sections, TV series about travel, they talked about Vietnam. Because of its beauty, safety, somehow cheaper than other destinations, unique culture, traditions, religion. These things are really attractive. So, people also started talking about Vietnam.</p> <p>42. Embassy accesses the information from the international news organisations. But we use a lot of</p>	<p>56. Importance of mainstream media in promoting tourism</p> <p>57. Media shape people's perceptions about Vietnam: its beauty, safety and unique culture.</p>

	<p>official statistics.</p> <p>43. We are concerned about the developments in the world: our own politics, Venezuela, Brazil, Brexit, trade war between China-Argentina, we read the media daily: newspapers.</p> <p>44. When I read something happening on Facebook or Twitter, Wait wait, is It true? I google it, if there is a lot of articles, from different agencies reporting the same thing, that means it is happening.</p> <p>If not, just someone is joking.</p>	<p>58. News organisations are used as a main information source for officials.</p> <p>59. People mainly depend on newspapers for information updates.</p> <p>60. Mainstream media as a trusting source for information check.</p>
Venezuela	<p>45. News from the international media: affect people’s mind.</p> <p>46. Big news organisations manipulate news, they can manage whatever they want, this is very important. Of course, tourism is very important in mainstream media. But countries like Vietnam, Venezuela cant not have access to them. For example, the big articles from the international media agency.</p> <p>47. How they used the mainstream media: popular, mainly depend.</p>	<p>61. Mainstream media impact people’s mind.</p> <p>62. Manipulation of big news organisations on news coverage.</p> <p>63. Marketing campaigns of countries, especially big ones on media channels.</p> <p>64. People mainly depend on mainstream media for information.</p>
Denmark	<p>48. People come to us to ask us about general information about Vietnam.</p> <p>49. Countries make big campaigns in CNN. Marketing campaign about the image of the country. Vietnam did not have such campaigns</p> <p>50. Documentaries in TV play an important role in drawing people to Vietnam</p> <p>51. People in Denmark commonly watch news channels or read from newspaper hompages to get news.</p>	<p>65. Lack of information about Vietnam.</p> <p>66. Importance of marketing campaigns of countries on popular news channels.</p> <p>67. Vietnam lacks marketing campaigns on mainstream media.</p> <p>68. Importance of TV programs about Vietnam to attract tourists.</p>

		69. News channels and websites serve as a main source for people.
CEEC	<p>52. We have to find the right things in Vietnam this is the biggest challenge. That what they ask for</p> <p>You can be lost with the information in the internet. Everything can be opposite.</p> <p>53. There is no strongly promoted reporter for Vietnam.</p> <p>Reports from news agencies: Bloomberg about Vietnam. But normally they appear from certain events or by editorials coming from particular government, campaign, they want to spread out information to news agencies.</p> <p>54. Events like APEC... or visits of bigger countries to Vietnam should be considered as a chance to popularise the image of your country</p> <p>Long interviews or articles from these news agencies.</p> <p>55. But I don't see any strong one message for business from Vietnam on these news agencies or information.</p>	<p>70. People do not trust the information from the Internet.</p> <p>71. Vietnam is not active in framing and promoting its image on media.</p> <p>72. Necessity of taking big events or diplomatic as chance to popularise its image.</p> <p>73. Importance of big articles on media.</p> <p>74. Vietnam has yet to be successful at delivering its messages on media to foreign businesses.</p>
New Zealand	<p>56. New Zealand mainly got information from official media channels.</p> <p>57. They did not have quality information from media about Vietnam.</p> <p>I did see the information gap: We did not have an official media channel authorised to use to educate New Zealander.</p> <p>58. Traditional news media: have</p>	<p>75. Official media channels are used as a main information source.</p> <p>76. Vietnam's image was not well-presented on media.</p>

	<p>influence on people's decisions</p> <p>59. There are quality stories about Vietnam, hot topic: foods</p> <p>An official newspaper's homepage posted a series of articles about Vietnam's tourism attractions with vivid photos and videos. these articles were also posted on the newspaper's Facebook which drew interactions and comments from audiences. Many left such comments that they never thought Vietnam was so amazing, charming and morden</p>	<p>77. Impacts of mainstream media on people's decisions.</p> <p>78. Quality stories cover Vietnam, especially its potentials and unique.</p> <p>79. Media shift people's perceptions about Vietnam: charming, modern and amazing.</p>
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<b>Embassy</b>	<b>Social media Platforms-related quotes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Argentina	<p>60. Vietnam is also socialising that we are having a good relationship. That is why more people are coming.</p> <p>61. Social networks: important.</p> <p>62. Some like tornadoes or earthquakes are updated on twitter or facebook faster than official media channels.</p>	<p>80. Vietnam uses social media to popularise its image.</p> <p>81. Importance of social networks.</p> <p>82. Advantages of social networks in comparison with official media channels.</p>
Venezuela	<p>63. Middle and high class: use social media</p>	<p>83. Social media users: middle and high classes</p>
Denmark	<p>64. Social networks: you hear from your friends. when your friends come and show it is interesting, you want to go.</p> <p>Facebook make differences.</p> <p>65. Social media: play an important role</p>	<p>84. Influences of social networks on people's decisions.</p> <p>85. Importance of social networks on people's life</p>
New Zealand	<p>66. Tourists are coming to Vietnam from New Zealand, so that is generating much more awareness. New Zealanders come here and go away with their own stories about Vietnam and their experiences.</p>	<p>86. Importance of social networks on promoting Vietnam's tourism.</p>

	67. Social media play more important with New Zealand audience	87. More people use social media
Austria	<p>68. I think the importance of Internet platforms, electronic newsletters and also social media sources has increased a lot over the last couple of years. The access to these sources of information has improved a lot, it is now cheap and quick to get up-to-date information about remote markets.</p> <p>Facebook, twitter and blogs play a very important role nowadays mostly for the travel industry, it influences very much the decision making specifically of young tourists.</p> <p>Facebook, Twitter and blogs help young people a lot to get a better and more profound image of the country, not only the images of wars and conflicts.</p>	<p>88. Advantages of social networks in comparison with traditional media: cheap and quick to get up-to-date information</p> <p>89. Importance of social forums in travel industry</p> <p>90. Influences of information from social network on young tourists.</p>

## Appendix 4 – Table of codes and themes

Codes	Main Theme
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mainstream media coverage about Vietnam focused on war and conflicts.</li> <li>2. Audiences saw Vietnam as a war place.</li> <li>3. Audiences' reluctance to come to Vietnam.</li> <li>4. People's perceptions about Vietnam change: a lot of potentials without wars.</li> <li>5. Changes in people's perceptions about Vietnam lead changes in their travelling decisions</li> <li>6. Vietnam's reputation changes: more trust from other countries</li> <li>7. Main topic of media about Vietnam: wars.</li> <li>8. Changes in people's perceptions about Vietnam lead shifts in their businesses: war in the past, business in the present.</li> <li>9. People make a double check about war-related image of Vietnam.</li> <li>10. War images of Vietnam circulated on media</li> <li>11. Audiences' perceptions about Vietnam as a war place, influenced by media.</li> <li>12. Vietnam's associations attached with wars and conflicts.</li> <li>13. Vietnam's reputation: unsafe and backward.</li> <li>14. Vietnam's current reputation changed better.</li> <li>15. People keep thinking Vietnam relevant with wars.</li> <li>16. War pictures of Vietnam on media obsessed people's mind.</li> <li>17. Vietnam's reputation: resistance and braveness.</li> <li>18. Vietnam's reputation: good</li> <li>19. People assumed Vietnam to be in wars.</li> <li>20. People's perceptions of Vietnam as a war place, shaped by media.</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>War memories and their impact on perception of Vietnam</b></p>

<p>21. Changes in people's perceptions of Vietnam: no war</p> <p>22. People associate Vietnam with wars.</p> <p>23. Media coverage influences people's perception of Vietnam as a war place.</p> <p>24. Businesses do not see Vietnam as a potential place.</p> <p>25. Embassy's efforts to change people's perceptions of Vietnam as a war and conflict place.</p>	
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Codes	Main theme
<p>26. Businesses' assumptions about Vietnam: unfavourable conditions for doing business.</p> <p>27. Vietnam's potentials and growth are published via data and numbers.</p> <p>28. People's perceptions about Vietnam start changing: a lot of potentials and good conditions.</p> <p>29. Vietnam's current reputation: good, reliable, stable and growing fast.</p> <p>30. International media covered Vietnam with major diplomatic events and developments.</p> <p>31. Vietnam's reputation: a trusting and well-planned government</p> <p>32. Vietnam's good reputation: reliable and well-organised with a lot of potentials.</p> <p>33. Businesses have more trust in Vietnam</p> <p>34. Vietnam's potentials: an amazing country</p>	<p><b>A shift in perception about Vietnam for trade and tourism</b></p>

and beautiful beaches.

35. Media coverage no longer focuses on wars.

36. People see Vietnam have a promising future for business and tourism.

37. Vietnam's reputation: worry-free, safe and stable.

38. Vietnam's government and people are advertising its image.

39. Businessmen's perceptions of Vietnam as a communist country.

40. Vietnam's government is promoting the country's potentials and facilities.

41. Vietnam engages in its appearance on media.

42. People's perceptions about Vietnam: better than the past.

43. People's perceptions about the country: corruption and matters of legal system.

44. People's suspects about the country's potentials and government.

45. Media's impacts on people's perceptions about Vietnam.

46. Vietnam's reputation: bad public services and untrusting authorities.

47. Businesses become more interested in Vietnam.

<p>48. Vietnam's reputation: good, brave and resistant</p> <p>49. Importance of country reputation</p> <p>50. People's perceptions about Vietnam: a developing country.</p> <p>51. Vietnam's current reputation: good and safe</p> <p>52. People assume Vietnam as a basic developing country with an agriculturally-based economy</p> <p>53. People see opportunities in trading with Vietnam</p> <p>54. Media coverage focus on different stories of Vietnam, including finance and economy.</p> <p>55. Vietnam manages its image on media: a very dynamic market</p>	
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Codes	Main Theme
<p>56. Importance of mainstream media in promoting tourism</p> <p>57. Media shape people's perceptions about Vietnam: its beauty, safety and unique culture.</p> <p>58. News organisations are used as a main information source for officials.</p> <p>59. People mainly depend on newspapers for information updates.</p> <p>60. Mainstream media as a trusting source for information check.</p> <p>61. Mainstream media impact people's mind.</p>	<p><b>The changing media landscape's impact on Vietnam</b></p>

62. Manipulation of big news organisations on news coverage.

63. Marketing campaigns of countries, especially big ones on media channels.

64. People mainly depend on mainstream media for information.

65. Lack of information about Vietnam.

66. Importance of marketing campaigns of countries on popular news channels.

67. Vietnam lacks marketing campaigns on mainstream media.

68. Importance of TV programs about Vietnam to attract tourists.

69. News channels and websites serve as a main source for people.

70. People do not trust the information from the internet.

71. Vietnam is not active in framing and promoting its image on media.

72. Necessity of taking big events or diplomatic as chance to popularise its image.

73. Importance of big articles on media.

74. Vietnam has yet to be successful at delivering its messages on media to foreign businesses.

75. Official media channels are used as a main information source.

76. Vietnam's image was not well-presented on media.

77. Impacts of mainstream media on people's decisions.

78. Quality stories cover Vietnam, especially its potentials and unique.

79. Media shift people's perceptions about Vietnam: charming, modern and amazing.

## Appendix 5 – Ethics approval



TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MĀKAU RAU

**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)**

Auckland University of Technology  
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ  
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316  
E: [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)  
[www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics](http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics)

14 November 2018

Philippa Smith  
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Philippa

Re Ethics Application: **18/388 Foreign media and their impact on a country's reputation - Vietnam: A case study**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 12 November 2021.

**Standard Conditions of Approval**

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation, then you are responsible for obtaining it. If the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all locality legal and ethical obligations and requirements. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries, please contact [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)

Yours sincerely,



Kate O'Connor  
Executive Manager  
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: [hien.nt31215@gmail.com](mailto:hien.nt31215@gmail.com); Verica Rupar

## Participant Information Sheet

### Participants: Representatives of Foreign Embassies

#### Date Information Sheet Produced:

05/10/2018

#### Project Title

Foreign media and their impact on a country's reputation

#### An Invitation

Xin chao. I am Hien Nguyen. I used to be a journalist at Viet Nam News Newspaper for nearly 8 years and now I am doing my PhD at Auckland University of Technology. I would like to invite you to attend an interview, an important part of my research, which helps me to investigate the research questions:

How does agenda-setting by foreign mass media relate to public perceptions of other nations?

What do foreign mass media cover about Vietnam?

How does their agenda-setting relate to Vietnam's reputation?

#### What is the purpose of this research?

Few people have direct experience with foreign countries and world events. For many their only source of information is through the mainstream media and it is here that concerns have been raised about journalists' ability to influence our perceptions about a nation. Many countries, especially developing ones, are often ignorant and too passive in their dealings with the international media.

The rationale for this study is that a country's reputation is potentially at risk depending on how it is represented by international news organisations, so understanding the impact of the media is worthy of investigation-

The focus of my study, therefore is on Vietnam where it has been established that the media's fascination with its war history continues to dominate the coverage of this nation-

For Vietnam, specifically, the findings will offer greater insights into its current international reputation based on its international media coverage.

The research, a part of my PhD qualification, will be published in a communications journal.

#### How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

I would like to invite you as you, in the embassy, are in charge of trade and investment issues between Vietnam and your country, which maintains a longstanding relationship with Vietnam.

#### How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you would like to participate in this research, I will send you a Consent Form before the interview is conducted.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you

## INDICATIVE QUESTIONS:

### Indicative questions for representatives of foreign embassies:

1. Please give me background information as to your experience within the Embassy, your current position and how long have you been in Vietnam in this role.

2. How important is Vietnam's reputation when it comes to your country's relationship with it?
3. How do the embassy, businesses and people from your country access information about Vietnam – and for what purpose?
4. Which media channels do your businesses and people mainly use to understand Vietnam as a new destination for trading and tourism?
5. How does the information that they access through the media affect their impression about Vietnam and business and travel decisions to the country?
6. What do you think about social networks like facebook or blogs when looking for some information compared with traditional media outlets?

wsj.com

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

# Vietnamese Military Mastermind Gen. Giap Dies



Gen. Giap in 1996  
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

By [James Hookway](#)  
Updated Oct. 4, 2013 7:05 pm ET

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Fifty-nine years ago, Vietnam's Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap rang a death knell for Western colonialism in Asia, masterminding the defeat of France's armed forces at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in northern Vietnam. He later went on to play a crucial role in forcing the U.S. out of Vietnam, burnishing his standing as one of the 20th century's most important military leaders.

But at the time of his death—in a Hanoi military hospital Friday at the age of 102—Gen. Giap was engaged in a fresh battle: This time, to protect Vietnam's fragile ecology from the strip mining driven by its fast-growing economy and that of its giant neighbor, China.

Gen. Giap's re-emergence as an eco-warrior in his twilight years was typical of his unconventional style, and demonstrated how he never quite fit in with the Communist Party ideologues who later came to run Vietnam, even as they promoted the nationalist cult



that soon grew up around the feisty commander.

"There's no doubt the Vietnamese authorities have made the most of his reputation," says Carlyle Thayer, a Vietnam expert and emeritus professor at the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra. "But Gen. Giap has also run into political trouble in the party. After Vietnam was partitioned into north and south, decisions were made collectively and one can discern moments when he was left on the outside."

A schoolteacher and journalist in his 20s and 30s, Gen. Giap had no military training prior to joining Ho Chi Minh and Vietnam's nationalist Viet Minh forces in China, to evade French colonial authorities. While Gen. Giap was in exile, his wife was arrested and later died in prison, he told historian Cecil B. Currey in 1988. His sister-in-law and



Gen. Giap executed a ruse, sending Viet Minh forces toward Laos to lure French troops into the area in a bid to cut them off. The general then built a series of trenches around the French garrison to starve his opponents of food and ammunition, in a brutal 57-day siege. The French artillery commander, overcome with guilt at underestimating the Viet Minh's prowess, blew himself up with a grenade.

The battle of Dien Bien Phu was, many historians say, a turning point in post-World War II history. Gen. Giap himself said in a 1999 interview with the U.S. Public Broadcasting System that it was "the first great victory for a weak, colonized people struggling against the full strength of modern Western forces. This is why it was the first great defeat for the West. It shook the foundations of colonialism and called on people to fight for their freedom."

grandfather were executed.

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## A GENERAL'S CAREER

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**General Giap Defeated France, then helped the North speed fall of Saigon and the South in the Vietnam War.**

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He returned to Vietnam in the 1940s as a top military commander, hoping to take advantage of Japan's defeat to prevent France reasserting control. A close student of Mao Zedong's guerrilla tactics in China, he argued for gradually wearing down French colonists before abruptly switching tactics at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in the far north of Vietnam, near the border with Laos in 1954. It was the battle that would make his name.



Gen. Giap executed a ruse, sending Viet Minh forces toward Laos to lure French troops into the area in a bid to cut them off. The general then built a series of trenches around the French garrison to starve his opponents of food and ammunition, in a brutal 57-day siege. The French artillery commander, overcome with guilt at underestimating the Viet Minh's prowess, blew himself up with a grenade.

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Later, he drew plans for the 2,000-mile-long Ho Chi Minh trail—a snaking series of roads and jungle paths that became one of the most-bombed stretches of land in the history of warfare and a vital supply chain from northern Vietnam to the Viet Cong guerrillas fighting U.S.-backed forces in the south of the country. People win wars, Gen. Giap was fond of saying, not weapons.

Still, Gen. Giap had his rifts with other leading members of the Communists' ruling politburo. One of the most serious was over the planning of the Tet Offensive in 1968, which eventually helped turn the course of the war—although not in the way Gen. Giap and other top generals intended.

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A number of historians say Gen. Giap wasn't as keen as some of his colleagues on the plan, which called for a massive land assault on the

southern Vietnamese government in the hope of provoking a popular uprising and bringing a rapid end to the war against the U.S.-backed forces. Instead, Gen. Giap and other moderates preferred to build up the North Vietnam economy and gradually wear down the enemy by engaging in a protracted, guerrilla-style and political campaign.



Gen. Giap is seen in the center walking close behind Ho Chi Minh, while visiting an army unit in 1957.

AP

Conservatives in Hanoi overruled Gen. Giap, who was by then defense minister, and he was

---

left to oversee the implementation of the plan.

The Tet Offensive was, at many levels, a failure. It didn't trigger the uprising that the Communist Party mandarins in Hanoi had hoped for. It also cost the lives of several tens of thousands of troops, not to mention the many thousands of civilians who died. The offensive did, however, undermine U.S. public opinion toward supporting the war in Vietnam and, as southern Vietnamese forces retreated to defend the cities, the countryside was left for the Viet Cong guerrillas to control. The war dragged on for another seven years.

One of Gen. Giap's main antagonists, U.S. Gen. William Westmoreland, who died in 2005, was critical of his counterpart's apparent readiness to send tens of thousands of his own men to their deaths. "Such a disregard for human life may make a formidable adversary, but it does not make a military genius," Gen. Westmoreland told George

magazine in 1998.

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Nonetheless, in his later years, Gen. Giap began to focus heavily on environmental causes. Like other older Vietnamese, he worried that the breakneck pace of modernization in the country was uprooting traditional ways of life. He also was concerned about China's growing economic and political influence on Hanoi.

His particular grudge was against open-cast mining for bauxite, an ore used in the production of aluminum, which is highly sought after in China. Vietnam's Communist leaders for years have pushed the extraction and export of bauxite as a means of developing the economy of the remote Central Highlands region, an area that is home to many ethnic minorities and in which travel is severely restricted. Gen. Giap wrote a number

of open letters to the government protesting the development of bauxite mining, and emerged as the symbolic patriarch of Vietnam's fledgling green movement, which is also supported by bloggers and other online activists.

Vietnam's leaders have been reverential toward Gen. Giap's efforts, going out of their way to refer to him as "a national treasure."

Gen. Giap's last stand could end in defeat, however: Vietnam's government says it is determined to pursue its mining plans.

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## iconic Vietnam photo, begins new treatment

By [Alina Machado](#), CNN

🕒 Updated 1835 GMT (0235 HKT) November 10, 2015



Laser treatment for Vietnam War napalm attack victim 02:53

### Story highlights

Kim Phuc is well-known as the terrified young girl in an iconic photo from the Vietnam War

A Miami doctor is treating her scars with laser therapy

**Miami (CNN)** — You've probably seen the [iconic photograph](#): a little girl, naked and crying, running on a road after a napalm bomb attack during the Vietnam War.

The girl in the famous 1972 [picture](#) was badly burned but survived. If you met her today, [Kim Phuc's warm smile](#) would grab your attention before you even noticed her scars. You also would never know that she is in constant pain -- from the moment she wakes up in the morning, to her last thought at night.

"I just pray God help me and I dreamed that one day in heaven, I don't have any more pain and anymore scars," Phuc says. "But now, right now, it's my dream come true. Heaven on Earth for me ... and I'm so happy, happy, happy."

happy, happy, happy.



**Photos:** Vietnam napalm attack

1 of 12

Show Caption 

Phuc has found new hope, thanks to fractional ablative laser therapy. Dr. Jill Waibel, a board-certified dermatologist in Miami, says the treatment, which was initially developed to reduce wrinkles, can help burn and trauma patients heal their scars.

"We're literally going to steam the scar tissue away," she said. "And those little, tiny holes where we vaporize the scar, the body will heal as normal skin."

The results, Waibel said, go beyond what the eye can see.

"The first improvements we usually see in our burn and trauma patients is their itching and their pain is decreased," she said.

"Then a few weeks after the laser, you'll see an improvement in the texture (of the skin.) It'll get smoother. And somewhere in between there, range of motion will improve. We have patients that call us literally the next day to say, 'I can move my arm. I haven't been able to do this in 10 years.' "

Each session costs from \$500 to \$3,000, and Waibel said the treatment isn't typically covered by insurance. She is giving Phuc the treatments for free.

"She's such a beautiful soul," Waibel said.

"She's so spiritual, and for someone that's been through her journey, I was really very impressed with her."

## 'I hated my life'

Phuc's journey hasn't been easy. For years, she struggled to come to terms with what happened. She was just 9 years old when the napalm disfigured parts of her body. Her childhood was destroyed.



**Related Video:** Girl in iconic Vietnam photo still carries scars 02:28

"My heart was full of hatred, I hated my life," Phuc said. "Every time I look at my scar, I hated it and every time I got the pain ... I couldn't bear that. I almost give up, but then it's amazing turning point, when I prayed, 'God, please help me.' "

Phuc, who became a Christian at 19, turned to her faith to heal her emotional wounds.

"(Faith) has helped me, give me thankful heart," she said. "To be here in this life and to have another chance in my life, it's a miracle. I was supposed to be dead."

[Related: Kim Phuc's journey from war to forgiveness](#)

But the physical pain associated with the scars remains. Phuc stopped taking pain medication 14 years ago, choosing instead to work through the pain by going for a walk, talking on the phone or even singing a song.

"I learned to distract my mind when the pain comes. I never focus on the pain," she said. "I just learned that when I focus on the pain, it gets bigger and bigger and bigger. I stopped thinking about that."

Phuc is married and has two grown sons. She and her husband claimed asylum in Canada more than 20 years ago, and they travel the globe for the [Kim Foundation International](#). Its mission is to help children touched by war. The pain makes traveling difficult.

"It's not really fun, you know, when I just endure with the pain," she said.

So far, Phuc has had two laser therapy sessions at Waibel's Miami office. She has several more to go. Even though the entire treatment will probably take a year to complete, she has already noticed some improvement in the texture of her skin. She's excited about the possibility of a pain-free life.

"I really want to get better, better in my life in order I can do more things," Phuc said. "I look forward in the future, one day ... no pain. That will be wonderful."

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Appendix 8 – News story from the *Financial Times* used for analysis

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## Vietnam opens door to hard money and soft power

Hanoi welcomes Japanese and South Korean advances as it looks to revive the nation's economy



*Neighbourliness: the government in Hanoi (pictured) is keen to encourage investment as Asean nations prepare to launch a common market*

March 1, 2015 12:56 pm by Michael Peel in Bangkok, **Kana Inagaki** in Tokyo and **Simon Mundy** in Seoul

The tale of a Vietnamese transgender entrepreneur's adventures has become the country's biggest film hit — and sparked domestic debate about whether it plays to



stereotypes. But the movie *Let Hoi Decide* has made waves for another reason: it is co-produced by CJ E&M, the South Korean leisure group, which has burrowed its way to the heart of the [Vietnamese market](#).

“Korea is very strong in entertainment,” says Hana Dang, a Vietnamese media executive, who also cites the proliferation of South Korean soap operas and K-Pop music. “They are getting more internationalised.”

CJ’s Vietnamese cinematic coup is part of a stream of new Japanese and South Korean investment in the country, amid goodwill that contrasts with the troubled relationship between Hanoi and Beijing. While anti-Chinese rioters ransacked hundreds of [foreign companies in Vietnam](#) last year after maritime skirmishes between the two countries, Seoul and Tokyo were quietly brandishing hard money and soft power.

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Analysts say the push by the two east Asian



Analysts say the push by the two east Asian economic leaders reflects a dovetailing of commercial and strategic interests that has a broader regional importance. While Hanoi wants to limit its dependence on Beijing, Japan and South Korea wish to tighten their embrace with the 10 countries of the [Asean Southeast Asian grouping](#) that are preparing — some say optimistically — to launch a single market of more than 500m people later this year.

“In the past few years, most of the new foreign investment in Vietnam came from Korea and Japan,” said Nguyen Xuan Thanh, director of the Fulbright Economics Teaching Program in Ho Chi Minh City. “And that is for both business and geopolitical reasons.”

The tale of the Japanese and South Korean advances has unfolded without the noise of the fallout from [Vietnam’s maritime dispute with China](#) over the ownership of the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea. But



it is visible in trends ranging from the extraordinary expansion of Samsung Electronics, to the Ho Chi Minh City banners proclaiming the Vietnam-Japan co-operation to construct a landmark urban rail network.

Japan and South Korea are building on a long interest in a country notable for its cheap labour and 90m-strong consumer market. From Hanoi's point of view, there is a political imperative to draw more foreign investment because of structural economic problems such as bad debts and inefficient state companies, which have dragged Vietnam's growth down from above 7 per cent a year before the western financial crisis to 5.4 per cent in 2013.

Fred Burke, a corporate lawyer in Ho Chi Minh City, said Vietnam looked "a lot like Thailand was 20 years ago" to Japanese and South Korean executives seeking a "long-term strategic partner they can work with".

One manifestation of that is Vietnam's emergence as the second-biggest recipient of Japanese official development assistance in 2013, after Myanmar. Loans and grants to Hanoi — many of them for infrastructure projects, such as the gleaming international terminal at the city's commercial airport — totalled \$1.3bn, according to the OECD.

“

I am certain that Vietnam will be that next major power

**Motoya Okada, Aeon CEO**

Direct investment by Japanese businesses in [Vietnam](#) more than tripled to \$9bn between 2011 and 2014, compared with the previous four years, according to the Japan External Trade Organisation. South Korean investment in Vietnam in 2013 and last year totalled \$2.6bn, almost a third higher than in the previous two years.

Notable Japanese corporate entrants in Vietnam include Haseko, the property

developer, which is about to start building a \$17m rental apartment complex in Hanoi. [Aeon](#), Japan and Asia's biggest retailer, opened two big shopping centres in Vietnam last year and has bought stakes in two large local supermarket chains.

“We need a next big pillar,” Motoya Okada, Aeon's chief executive, said recently, referring to the company's plan to expand beyond its traditional overseas markets of China and Malaysia. “I am certain that Vietnam will be that next major power.”

Leading the charge for South Korea is [Samsung](#). The electronics company has taken advantage of tax and regulatory incentives to open two vast mobile phone assembly plants and has started construction on factories for display panels, home appliances and electrical components. This helped make phones and components account for 16 per cent of Vietnam's exports in 2013.



Other South Korean businesses such as LG Electronics and Kumho Tire have also expanded in Vietnam, as the attractions of low wage costs, reasonable infrastructure and political stability resonate with Seoul's desire for more regional clout. The supermarket Lotte Mart, which has incurred heavy losses amid its efforts to expand in China, is now aggressively pushing across the frontier with Vietnam instead. It increased its store numbers in the country from six to 10 last year, while its sister company, fast-food chain Lotteria, has grown from 100 outlets in 2011 to 207 in 2014.

Vietnam is unlikely to escape the dependence in its complex relationship with China, in which cultural, political and trade ties chafe against conflicts ranging from a 1979 border war to last year's high sea dispute and industrial estate mayhem.

But the surge by South Korea and Japan is an early sign of how regional relationships



But the surge by South Korea and Japan is an early sign of how regional relationships are also being shaped by a focus on foreign investment and trade that may grow stronger still if the Asean single market ever becomes reality.

“Countries are aware of the dangers of being too dependent on a single economic partner,” said Moe Thuzar, a fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore. “Probably diversification is going to be the game they will play.”

*Additional reporting by Tae-jun Kang in Seoul*

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# Nguyen Duc Kien's arrest in Vietnam prompts ACB fears

23 August 2012



Customers have withdrawn hundreds of millions of dollars from ACB bank since Monday

**Depositors in Vietnam have withdrawn hundreds of millions of dollars from one of the country's largest banks after the arrest of one of its founders.**

Nguyen Duc Kien, one of Vietnam's richest businessmen, was arrested in Hanoi on Monday on suspicion of "economic violations".

Shares in Asia Commercial Bank slid as a result, causing depositors to panic.

The State Bank has pumped millions into the bank to reassure depositors.

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Large crowds of customers have gathered outside branches of ACB in Ho Chi Minh City.

The government has said that Mr Kien, who owns just under a 5% stake in ACB, is not

involved in the day-to-day running of the bank.

Mr Kien, whose family is one of the richest in Vietnam, co-founded ACB in the 1990s. He is seen as a politically well-connected tycoon.

## **CEO concerns**

The allegations against him concern other investment companies that he owns, but there is also concern about the whereabouts of ACB's chief executive officer Ly Xuan Hai.

Some reports say it is widely believed that Mr Hai is also under arrest or may have resigned.

Mr Hai's deputy, Do Minh Toan, has been quoted as telling state media that depositors withdrew about five trillion dong (\$240m) from ACB on Wednesday.

The bank run has also put pressure on the dong and has led to an increase in the price of gold - traditionally seen as a safe-haven investment at times of economic instability.

Since Wednesday the State Bank of Vietnam has

and the market.

The BBC's Charles Scanlon says Mr Kien's sudden arrest has prompted speculation about a power struggle in communist-run Vietnam, and a suspected plot to curb the power of Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, to whom Mr Kien has close ties.

ACB faced a run on its deposits in 2003 after rumours, which were later proved false, spread about the arrest of one of its executives at the time.

Mr Kien is also a shareholder in other commercial banks, including Kien Long Commercial Joint Stock Bank and the Vietnam Export-Import Commercial Joint Stock Bank

He has also invested heavily in Vietnam's professional football league.

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