

# Identifying the function of social supervision and social criticism of Vietnamese press

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**Abstract:** *Social supervision and social criticism are two important functions of press. Identifying just these two functions is a basis for scientific and objective evaluation of social supervision and criticism role of Vietnamese press today. This paper focuses on presenting the viewpoints of two related subject groups that are journalists and public on the function of social supervision and social criticism of press, targeting at promotion and further enhancement of quality of social supervision and social criticism of press and media that are not only social institution but also a “power force” in national politico-economic system.*

**Keywords:** Social supervision, Social criticism, Press.

In the socioeconomic context of Vietnam today, social supervision and criticism role of press is a more than ever urgent problem. The subjects such as insufficiencies of policymaking, contradictory viewpoints between legislative and executive organs, between executive organs and citizens; conflicts of interest groups; trend to commercialization of non-economic activities; possibility of provision and payment, as well as needs and aspirations of people... are attracting the interests of entire society. In this situation, social supervision and criticism of press is seen as effective activities, contributing to control

and regulation system and to resolve the complicated problems of society. However, how to conceive the social supervision and social criticism of Vietnamese press? Is the understanding of social groups about social supervision and social criticism unanimous? In targeting at identification of function of social supervision and social criticism of press, we have implemented a social survey to two subject groups: (1) the public of press; and (2) those who work in press activities (journalists, reporters, editors, technicians, managers, researchers, university students, postgraduates related to press and

communication nationwide). Contents of indicators on social supervision and criticism used in this paper are synthesized from available scientific documents.

### **1. General conception of social supervision and criticism**

*Social supervision is to monitor the making, promulgation, deployment and enforcement of laws and policies of Party and State.*

After application of basic indicators of social supervision to measure the interests of two groups of subjects surveyed by the project, collected data were divided into three levels. Most interesting level is *the monitoring of the making, promulgation, deployment and enforcement of laws and policies of Party and State* (76.7% of public samples and 91.1% of journalists). Secondly interesting level is *the monitoring of civil institutions like culture, economy, education, legislation...* (51.5% of public samples and 63.5% of journalists). Other contents and levels of identifying the social supervision scope have only less than 50% of interests.

So, most of public and even journalists only conceive that social supervision is monitoring and supervising the legislation and administration activities of State. In their view, the activities of civil groups or mass media are not subjects for social supervision. In referring to general conception and definition of social supervision (see Hoàng Phê, 1997; Nguyễn Văn Dũng, 2017; James A. Robinson, Daron Aemoglu, 2013), we saw that most of surveyed samples see social supervision

from the view of people toward state activities and do not know that this notion also denotes the inverse sense, that is the supervision of conformation to state regulations and policies from the part of citizen groups.

It is remarkable that, even in conception of social supervision scope, there is a rather much difference in awareness of the two surveyed subject groups. Press activists identify the more wide scope of social supervision than usual public group. Almost the indexes of identification of press activists group are about 10% higher than those of public group. This because the function of providing information of press requires the exactitude, timeliness and comprehensiveness in order to satisfy diverse needs and tastes of public groups. So the press community has a considerably wider conception of social supervision scope than that of public groups. However there is a small difference that while there are even 45.9% of public samples that consider the *monitoring of mass media* as an issue of social supervision, then the ratio of press activists is 10% lower. It can be seen it seem the press community does not want the society to supervise press information. *Social criticism is to criticize and struggle against the negative phenomena, overcoming the insufficiencies, backwardness and stagnancy.*

After application of basic indicators of social criticism to measure the interests of two groups of surveyed subjects, collected data were divided into many levels. Most interesting level comprises four issues such as: (1) *Manifesting viewpoint on a*

*social problem; (2) Criticizing and struggling against a negative phenomenon in society; (3) Evaluating a policy of Party or of State; (4) Proposing a solution to adjust and overcome the insufficiencies, backwardness and stagnancy.* Choice ratio for these issues is about 60%-70% of surveyed samples, showing that awareness of social criticism is higher than that of social supervision.

Like conception of social supervision, conception of social criticism from the part of press community has a ratio of about 10% higher than that of public group, especially in the issues of suggestions for great policies or for overcoming the backwardness and stagnancy.

## 2. Conception of social supervision and social criticism of press

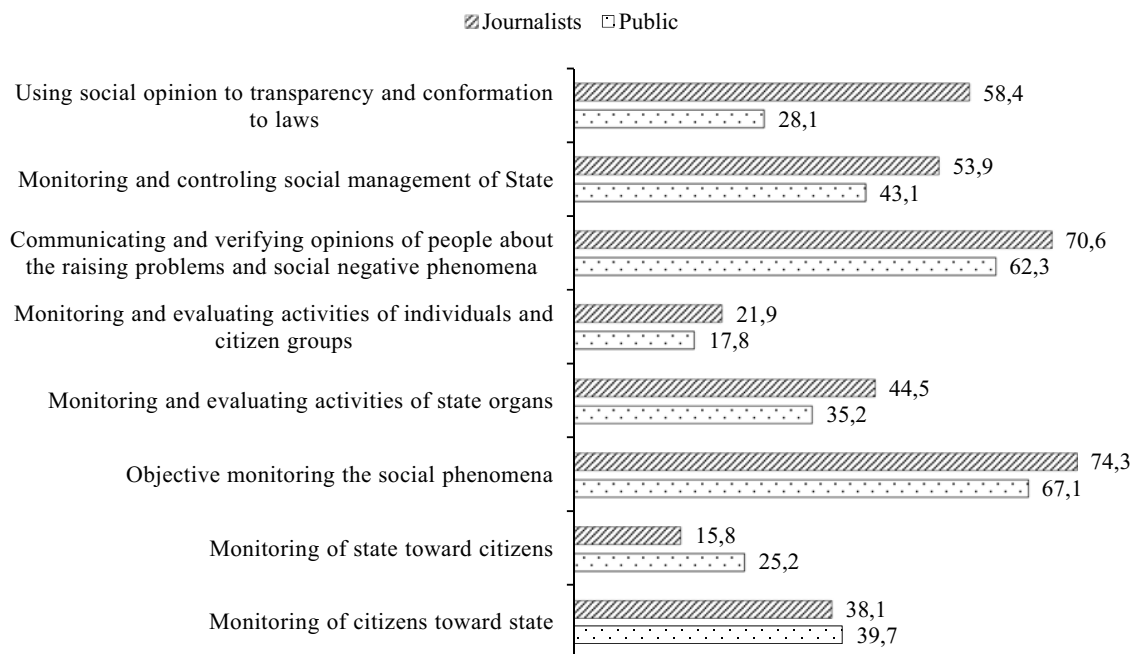
*Social supervision of press is conceived to have three missions: (1) Objective*

*monitoring the social phenomena; (2) Controlling the process of state management; and (3) Reflecting the opinions of people.*

Figure 1 shows that, those functions of social supervision of press that are most recognized consist of: (1) *Objective monitoring and orienting the social phenomena; (2) Verifying and communicating the opinions of people about the raising problems and social negative phenomena.* Ratio of choices for these functions reaches from 60% to 70% of surveyed samples.

It can be said that the objectivity is one of urgent requirements of society to press. As for managers, objective information of press help them understand exactly situation, thence they can put forth the adequate solutions and policies. As for public, objective information of press help them with useful information for their life,

**Figure 1: Conception of social supervision function of press (%)**



jobs and education. As for market, objective information of press help exchanges, trade and services be transparent, favourable. So the requirement of objectivity of information of press in communicating the opinions and verifying the feedback of people about social problems is not only the duty and morals of journalists but also the basic and core issue of social supervision of press. Group of indicators of social supervision of press that focuses on supervision of activities and process of management of political and state organs and organizations received a lower choice ratio. There are about 40 - 50% of surveyed subjects who see the social supervision of press as *Monitoring and controlling the process of management of State and monitoring and evaluating the activities of state organs and organizations*.

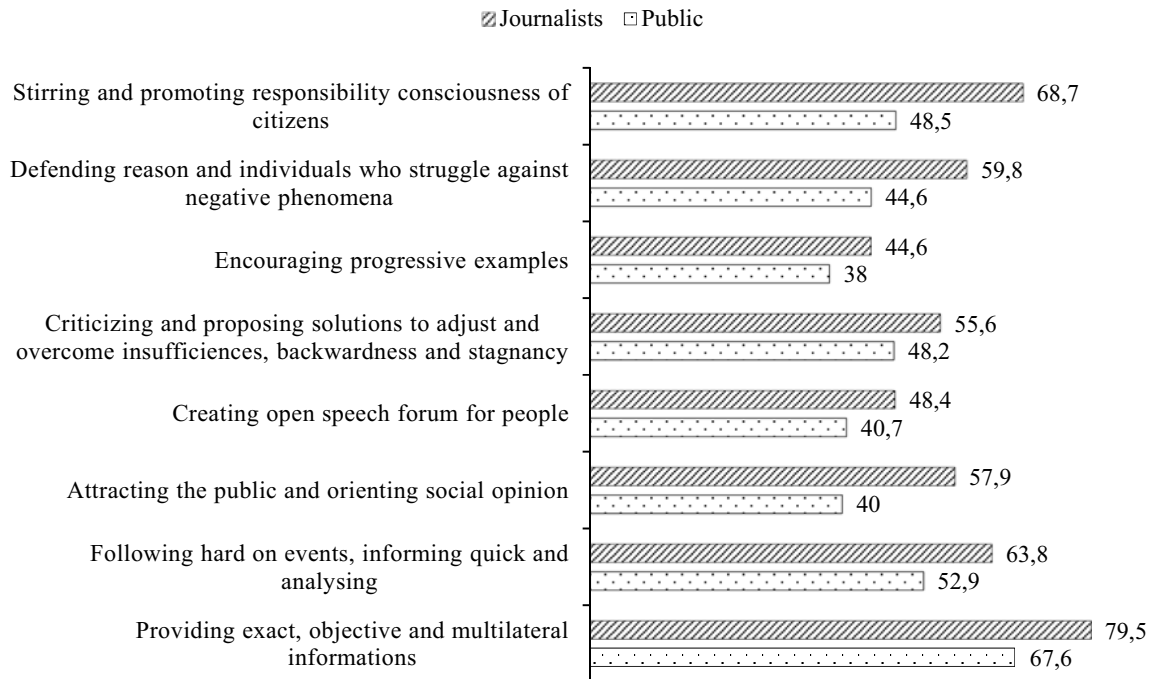
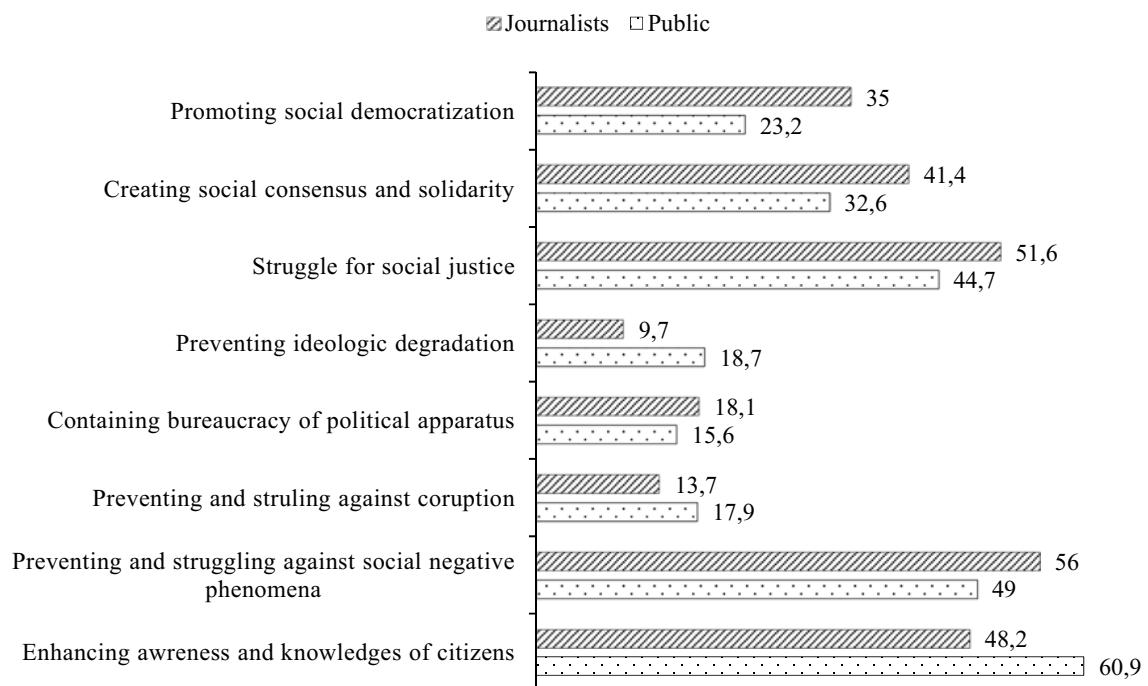
Besides that, like the general conception of social supervision, press group has a considerably wider conception than that of public group on the function of social supervision of press. Almost principal indexes are 10% higher. Especially, the issue defining that *press uses social opinions to impose transparency and confirmation to laws* received an overwhelming higher ratio (58.4% in comparison with 28.1%). This ratio difference again confirms social responsibility and ability of press community to provide rich, multilateral and objective information. As a specific professional group, press community determines itself on being ready to face the difficulties and challenges.

*Social criticism of press is recognized for four missions: (1) Providing exact information; (2) Following hard on main events and problems; (3) Promoting consciousness of social responsibility; and (4) Defending the reason.*

As seen above, the key missions of social supervision of press are monitoring and controlling the social phenomena, the process of state management and reflecting the feedback of people. To well carry out these missions, the requirements of press information put for social criticism by sample groups are quite proper and logic. Concretely speaking, two most interesting issues of social criticism of press are: (1) providing the information must be exact, objective, multilateral; (2) following hard on events, informing quick and in time, analysing right the main problems (see Figure 2).

So, social criticism of press must be associated closely with social supervision. Quality of activities of monitoring and controlling the social phenomena, of state management and of reflecting the feedback of people in social supervision could be ensured only when press provides the exact, objective, and multilateral information that follow hard on events and problems. Thus, it can be said, social criticism of press is the basis of social supervision.

In parallel with that, there are also the great requirements that public put for the function of social criticism of press and that are as follows: (1) *Stirring and promoting responsibility consciousness of citizens; and (2) Defending the reason and individuals who struggle against*

**Figure 2: Conception of social criticism function of press (%)****Figure 3: Conception of press role in social supervision and criticism (%)**

*negative phenomena* (see Figure 2). These requirements are quite practical because in the today context of market economy, the cultural standards, morals, life-style and political ideal of a part of people, especially of the youth, are degrading. Besides that, a portion of officials abuses their power for profit and corruption, bureaucracy, revenging subalterns, violating the principles of leadership and management, and violating laws severely. Thus, as a social institution, with specific functions, role and mechanism of impact (direct and strong), press and media are required to enhance the responsibility of citizens, defend the reason and struggle against the negative phenomena.

These above-mentioned conceptions point out that social criticism of press can associate the basic functions of press with social responsibility and role that press assumes. Expectation of public and even responsibility consciousness of press activists have trend to see social criticism of press as the defence of reason and promotion of responsibility consciousness of citizens.

In comparing the two surveyed subject groups, we saw the overwhelming awareness of press group on the function of social criticism of press in comparison with that of popular public group. Ratio difference is about from 10 to 20%. Press community imposes its responsibility of social criticism to many aspects of life, even to thorny and delicate problems. However, this difference also shows the reserved expectation of public toward press.

*There is a considerable difference between conceptions of role of press in social supervision and social criticism.*

With the choice ratio being from 50 to 60%, three essential interesting roles of press in social supervision and social criticism are: (1) *To prevent negative social phenomena*; (2) *To enhance awareness and knowledge of individuals*; and (3) *To struggle for social justice*. However, Figure 3 shows a considerable difference of conceptions between the two surveyed subject groups.

Meanwhile the press group heightens the role of struggle and prevention of negative phenomena for the sake of social justice, then the popular public is interested in enhancement of awareness and provision of knowledge for public. On the other side, meanwhile popular public emphasises the role of corruption prevention, then press orients itself to create solidarity and social consensus.

These differences of conceptions show the different aims and requirements between the two related subject groups. People wants press and media to promote the concrete and practical roles in enhancement of social awareness level to individuals or in controlling public expenditure and protection of public assets through activities of prevention and struggle against corruption. Meanwhile press community wants to give macro-contributions like promotion of social democratization, struggle for justice and creation of social consensus.

These differences must be explained in the context of many socioeconomic changes. Intellectual level and social

awareness of people on the rights and duties of citizens are still limited. Meanwhile, corruption is becoming a serious difficult problem with a series of loss of thousands billion VND of public assets and finance. Thus, public (people) wants to confide to press the urgent and concrete roles. In essence, the requirement is that the press must defend personal interests of people.

In comparing the press activists of Hochiminh city, Cần Thơ, Hanoi, Quảng Ninh, we can see the very obvious difference in viewpoint of press community between Hochiminh city and three other localities.

The Table shows that the ratio of journalists of Hochiminh city who are much interested in the roles of press in *Prevention and struggle against*

**Table 1: Comparison of viewpoint of journalists on the role of press in social supervision and social criticism, by localities (%)**

		Province/City			
		Hanoi	Quảng Ninh	HCM City	Cần Thơ
1	Enhancing awareness and knowledges of people	41.2	48.5	<b>60.9</b>	36.4
2	Struggling for justice	42.5	50.5	<b>60.4</b>	48.9
3	Preventing and struggling against corruption	10.5	10.7	<b>20.8</b>	3.4
4	Preventing and struggling against negative social phenomena	<b>64.1</b>	<b>61.2</b>	52.6	44.3
5	Creating social consensus and solidarity	<b>49.0</b>	<b>47.6</b>	25.5	<b>58.0</b>

On the other side, as a social institution, press approaches the problems from the macro-view. So it orients itself towards general issues such as the justice, the consensus, the prevention and struggle against negative phenomena in general. This is due to the professional characteristics of journalism. Press reflects concrete phenomena, events and persons in order to generalize the communication messages on the scale of entire society. Therefore, journalists are interested in information topics of great scale.

*corruption*, in *Struggle for justice*, and in *Enhancement of knowledge and awareness of people*, reaches up to 60%, being considerably higher than that of three other localities. Especially, the role of press in *Prevention and struggle against corruption* receives double interest of press community of Hochiminh city in comparison with that of Hanoi and Quảng Ninh; and sevenfold higher than that of Cần Thơ.

Here there is an obvious difference in press community between Hochiminh city

and Cần Thơ. Meanwhile press community of Hochiminh city is highly interested in those above-mentioned roles, then Cần Thơ press community shows quite inverse attitude. Difference of Cần Thơ is also not similar to the difference of Hanoi and Quảng Ninh. Many of its indexes have the trend to be inverse to those of other localities. It can be said that the viewpoint on the role of press in social supervision and social criticism in Cần Thơ is still rather narrow due to the fact that Cần Thơ is newly recognized as a central first-level city, needing interests and great investments from central Government. So its authority still “fears” the conflicts and therefore its social criticism is low. Meanwhile the three other localities have already obvious socio- and politico-economic stableness, therefore the viewpoint of journalists is also more open and active.

Situation of press community of Hanoi and Quảng Ninh shows that the short distance from the central power has impacted on the prudence of press when it is a question related to State such as *Prevention and struggle against corruption*. So, their press essentially focuses on vague social roles like *Preventing and struggling against negative social phenomena* or *Creating social consensus and solidarity*. So, the difference in opinion on the role of press in social supervision and social criticism is not only between public and journalists, but also between journalists themselves.

In summary, on the basis of analyzed results, the notions of social supervision and social criticism have been clarified

through conceptions of the two surveyed subject groups such as press community and public. Generally speaking, social supervision of press is considered as objective monitoring the social phenomena, controlling the process of social management of State and reflecting the feedback of people. Social criticism of press is providing the exact information, following hard on events and main problems, promoting the consciousness of social responsibility and defending the reason. Public wants the press and media to promote the concrete and practical roles in enhancement of social awareness level of individuals or in control of public expenditure, and in protection of public assets through activities of prevention and struggle against corruption. Meanwhile press community wants to make the macro-contributions such as promotion of social democratization, struggle for justice and creation of social consensus.

The fact that the two related subject groups such as journalists and public have both similar considerations for functions of social supervision and social criticism and different viewpoints on the role of social supervision and social criticism shows that the topic of social supervision and criticism will still attract the special interest of public opinion and society. This is a necessity for promotion and further enhancement of quality of social supervision and criticism of Vietnamese press and media □

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