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Current Situation and Potential of Infographics for Vietnamese Online Press through Reader's Viewpoints

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Abstract:

This research is conducted to indicate the situation of application of graphic in press of Vietnamese online journalism through the view of readers. This article orients a new problem in Vietnamese journalism and looking for a way to promote online newspapers of Vietnam to use more graphic materials to transfer information, so they can diversify kinds of journalistic works for readers. Based on experiences and ideas of readers about this kind, the articles will also foresee its developing potential and the position of infographics in Vietnamese journalism in the future.

Keywords: *Infographics, journalism, online newspapers, readers*

1. Introduction

Information technology is a great innovation, which has changes the human history and the life of mankind. In the journalism field, it has launched new evolution in the way of creating works, covering news of reporters and receiving news of readers. A new kind of press that has been born in information technology and Internet era is online press – “the fourth kind of journalism that differs in its characteristics from traditional types of journalism” (Deuze, 2001). Concretely, “online newspapers have emerged by merging prints’ unidirectional and text-based tradition with networked computing’s interactive and (more recently) multimedia potentials” (Boczkowski, 2015, p.4). This tendency allows people can get information through all senses. They not only read news but also listen, watch or combine these actions in one article. Apart from text news, slide images, videos and audios, the most surprising thing that online press brings is visualizing information easily. Traditionally, text news is the backbone of any newspapers, but reader may be bored of thick letters on pages. So now, news is presented in unique way with colors, funny icons which interest everyone. Many reporters and designers turn news into graphic images which bring readers new experience in journalism, and a soft of this presentation called infographics.

Infographics or information graphics are considered as graphic visual representations of information, data or knowledge intended to represent information quickly and clearly. In the book “Advertising & IMC: Principles and Practice” (2011), Sandra Moriarty, Nancy Mitchell and William Wells said that: “Visuals do some things better than words, such as demonstrate something” (p.291). In journalism particularly, infographic is a term which indicates a kind of article on online newspapers. In other words, this is when information or news presented by graphic images instead of text. This type makes transforming information to readers more easily and attractively. To create a tremendous infographics, reporters must have good graphic skill and delicacy of colors, because “attractive, easy to understand, easy to remember are 3 basic requirements for an infographic” (NhatAnh, 2014). These infographics really make readers exciting to discover news in a different way. There are many newspapers in the world use it regularly, but unfortunately although Vietnamese online press is developing strongly, becoming an indispensable part in many people’s lives, infographics have not appeared as much as expectation. This is really a serious disadvantage of Vietnamese online newspapers. This results in narrowing the ability of spreading domestic news to the world since images have effects in transferring information to foreign readers. This situation will create difficulties for Vietnamese newspapers to integrate with others in global time. Besides, one of strong points of online press is multimedia that has not utilized effectively.

This paper has two main objectives. The first is to analyze current situation of the application of graphic and using infographics in Vietnamese online newspapers, and the second one is to propose solutions to increase technological application in online newspapers.

2. Literature Review

Infographic is used on online newspapers of many countries and it is a unique way to present information. Currently, there are many researches about online newspapers, applications of technology in journalism or journalism in general in the world and researches about infographics contain a large amount. In Vietnam, general researches about infographics are still rare not popular.

According to Smiciklas (2012), the concept of an infographic is “a visualization of data or ideas that tries to convey complex information to an audience in a manner that can be quickly consumed and easily understood” (p.3).

In the article ‘8 types of infographics: Which is right for you?’ on Pikitochart by Natalija S. (2014), there are 8 kinds of infographics as below:

- Visualized article
- Flowchart
- The timeline
- Useful Bait
- Versus infographic
- Number porn
- Photo infographic
- Data Vis

Also on Pikitochart, the article ‘6 types of infographics and how to get started’ by Aaron indicated 6 types such as: flowchart, the timeline, versus infographics, data visualization and number ‘crunch’, photo infographics, research infographics.

From these previous definitions, this paper draws a concept of infographic in journalism as below: Infographic is a type of articles which using pictures, colors, design skills to present news, information or data to attract readers.

For characteristics of infographics, the objective of the paper is to understand current situation and potential of infographics on Vietnamese online newspapers through surveys about readers’ demands, interests and remarks of infographics, which are characteristics of infographics.

Moreover, this survey not only focuses on advantages of infographics but also show suitable contents for this journalistic type. As mentioned in the introduction, content for infographics is very diversified, so indicating the rate of which field is presented in infographics will give readers a view of what field is easy to be turned into infographics. Besides, infographics can be showed in different kinds, such as: images, videos, or small comics. All of them have a common aim is providing readers with hot news and knowledge, that why this measure is useful to reflect the whole view of infographics in online journalism nowadays. Firstly, reader’s demands are the most important information for newspapers to search and adjust their article systems to satisfy their readers. As for infographics, this paper focuses on reader’s feelings and thoughts about this type currently. This information will indicate if readers liked infographics and which fields they like reading infographics. Based on this, this paper can point out which the fields have advantages in developing infographics. Secondly, the survey concentrates on the strong points of infographics compared with other type of articles, especially text. These ideas could emphasize its importance and encourage newspapers to create more infographics. Finally, readers also show qualities which every editors need to make infographics as well as contribute some solutions for these problems.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Data and Sample

First, this paper has based on figures and data from previous researches and academic papers. This data include data such as: the number of infographics’ types, the level of visual attraction with people, the rate about each type of design infographics, etc.

Secondly, this paper will use figures collected from survey for respondents. These data is the foundation to determine the potential development of infographics on Vietnamese online journalism.

This measure was used to collect answers of respondents about what they thought and what they want with graphic in press. Besides, their results reflect the fact that how graphic was applied in journalism and its effects. These materials would build a complete picture about the application of graphic to make infographics published on online newspapers.

The questions in survey are below:

- Profile of respondents (age, sex)
- Frequency of reading online newspapers
- Whether they’ve read an infographics on online newspapers.

- Favorite level of infographics.
- Ideas about advantages of infographics
- Names of preferred fields for infographics.
- Needs of Vietnam online newspapers for development of infographics.
- Solutions to promote infographics to appear more often.
- Private ideas of readers to improve current situation of infographics.

The survey focuses on participants who have read online newspapers, because they could point out lacks of websites and feelings about infographics which are only used on online newspapers. The time when survey was conducted was on July, 2015 in Vietnam.

There are 107 feedbacks about infographics. Based on these answers, this paper has an overview to generalize the situation and suggest solutions to promote the development of Vietnamese infographics.

3.2. Analysis Methodology

After collecting all data from respondents, they will be presented by tables. The forms of statistics are variety (descriptive and comparison) to handle the purpose of this paper and determine the problems and solutions of this problem.

4. Analysis Results

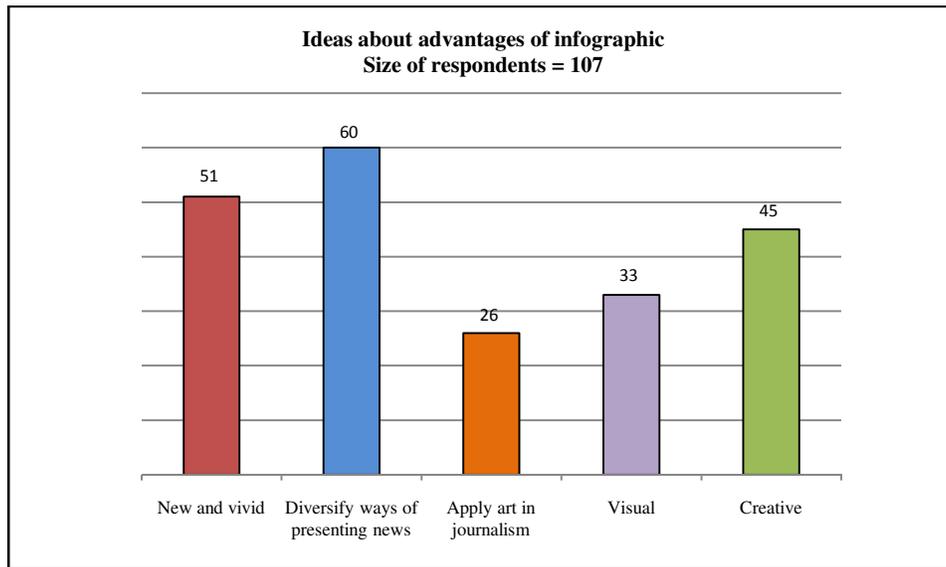


Table 1: Ideas about advantages of infographics

Diversify ways of presenting news has taken the majority from respondents (60) with approximately 56.2%. Apart from it, readers voted for visual feature and unique feature of infographics the second most. Therefore, they are 3 factors which have decided the attention from readers.

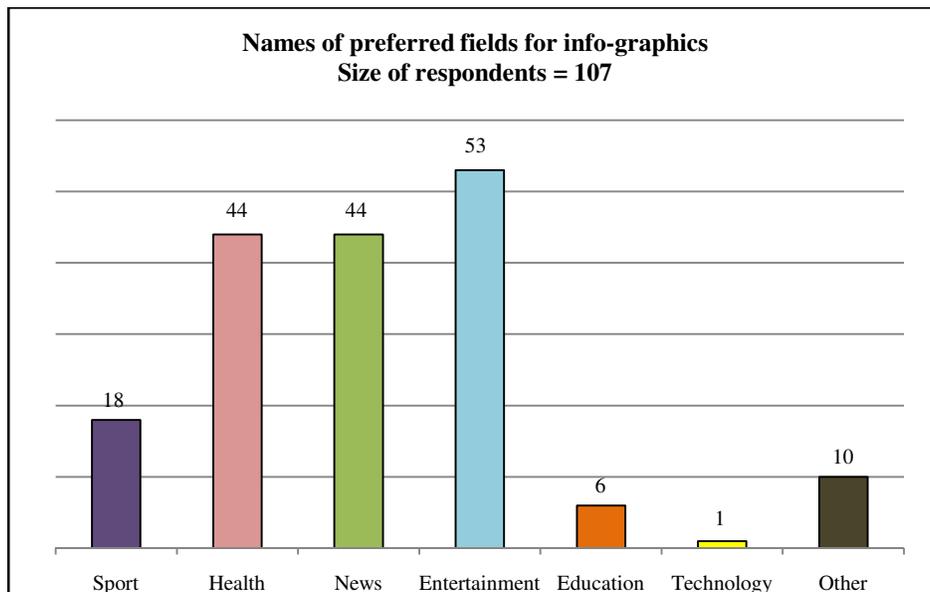


Table 2: Names of preferred fields for infographics

Entertainment is the most favourite field of many respondents, and infographics related to this column also attract the largest number of readers. Infographics of Health and News have got the same votes and ranked after Entertainment. This situation showed that most of fields could be presented by infographics, and the creator have to choose suitable content to attract readers.

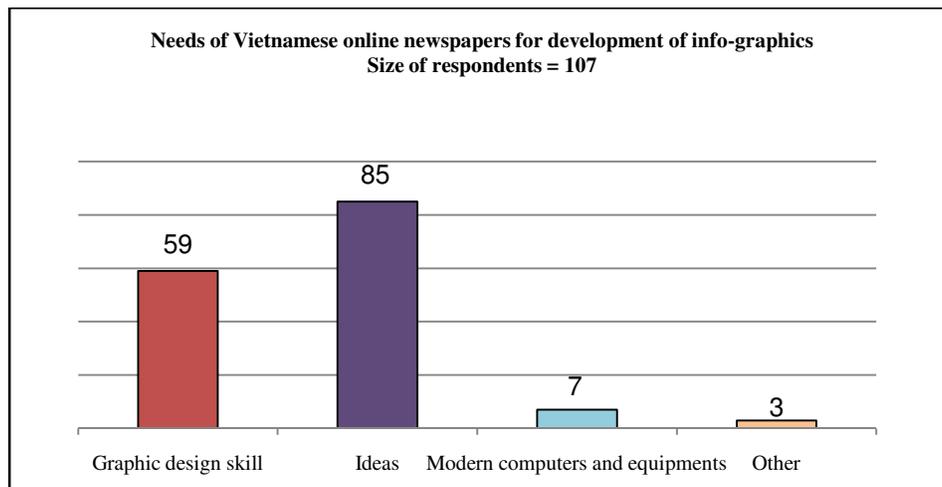


Table 3: Needs of Vietnam online newspapers for development of infographics

Ideas for creative infographics are biggest challenge which contains 85 responses of readers. The second weakest point is the shortage design skill of some Vietnamese editors. The lack of modern technology and other factors have contributed the modest development of infographics in Vietnamese journalism nowadays.

5. Discussion and Implications

Currently, online journalism is getting more and more developed, so diversified sorts of articles would make readers relaxed and interested in surfing online newspapers. Infographic was born as a new and unique art which is suitable with this modern journalistic kind. But to find a way of development for it, public’s opinion is an integral part of this process. These research findings can help readers understand about art in journalism and play an essential role for further development of journalism.

Among more than 100 respondents asked, there are many positive ideas for the development of infographics in particular and Vietnamese online press in general. Most of them showed their interest in reading infographics that improved this kind of article has a certain position in journalism in general. The idea of approve with infographics is approximately

97.2%, it is equivalent with 104 respondents. This is a good signal because readers like reading infographics and it is a motive for this unique type of article to be in a worthy position on front pages of online newspapers.

Many of respondents have read infographics and have been impressed by this presentation and really enjoy the more intense frequency. Doris Yee (2012) in "How Not to Suck at Designing Infographics" pointed out that rate of every chart style used: bar chart (32%), line chart (24%), pictorial chart (24%) and pie chart (22%). The feature of infographics which is approved by most of all respondents is diversifying the way of presenting information on online newspapers. This proved the power of graphic in press. According to MIT Research - Brain Processing of Visual Information (1996), "half of the human brain is devoted directly or indirectly to vision", so images and colors have strong effects on readers from the first look. Images always make people access news easily, and "colors is a highly subjective and powerful means of communicating ideas" (Lester, 2013, p.20). Infographics will make online newspapers more attractive and visual. Readers have images and colors that not only help them receive news faster but also become a useful tool for the elder who face difficulties in reading text. Moreover, infographics are suitable for online newspapers because readers who are always busy they just scan news to save time.

Infographics have many usages to present data, they can "frame a story, which could be about various topics, such as a product, process, fundraising initiative, legislative bill, social issue, or research study" (Gallicano, Ekachai and Freberg, 2014). For Vietnamese readers, they like reading infographics of different fields, but entertainment is the most attractive one. It proves that entertaining news is favorite fields of a lot of people, and presenting them under infographics makes them become more popular. Entertaining news is usually short and attracts reader's attention widely because problems around superstars are always enchanted, so choosing entertaining news to create infographics is a good idea. Stories of celebrities or news about hot movies could be visualized vividly and become attractive spots on homepage of any online newspapers. In addition, infographics can be presented through videos, comics, etc. It increases the advantages of infographics and helps them appear more frequently on Internet for suitable readers.

Although the number of infographics on Vietnamese online newspapers is increasing, there is shortage of creative ideas in designing infographics, which has led to the dependence on foreign sources. Editors need both the sensation of news and artistic mind to create works which meet the demand of readers.

Infographics is not a normal kind of articles, it presents information through graphic images, so it requires the person who is in charge of creativity and must have an artistic sense to connect with news. Unfortunately, infographics made by Vietnam are not too popular now although many newspapers have published their own products. Idea is the most vital factor of an infographic because it decided how information could be presented and attracts readers. Therefore, Vietnamese editors should be encouraged to find new path for their works instead of relying only on foreign sources.

Although many people like reading infographics on online newspapers, there is a fact that Vietnamese editors are lack of computer skills and graphic knowledge to create infographics, which is the main reason which results in the shortage of infographics on Vietnamese online press currently. And they hope reporters and editors would be equipped those necessary skills to meet the need of readers.

As for Vietnamese editors, their lack of technological skills is fairly serious, especially high-skilled techniques like graphic design. One of the sources of infographics on Vietnamese online newspapers is foreign websites and the rest they have to do is translating information from foreign languages to Vietnamese. Therefore, graphic design skill is the leading one needed to provide to editors. Graphic design skill should be added to journalistic curriculum in universities. Students have to study about graphic skills and trained their artistic minds to catch up with development of online newspapers currently. Maybe these lessons from schools are not professional enough for editors to create complex infographics, they would need more practices through courses organized during their work. Hence, chief editors should attach special importance to organize training courses for their staffs to enhance their graphic design standard. In addition, collaborators who have contributed to success of newspapers everyday can be trained these knowledge and skills about infographics to catch up with this new soft of articles.

Apart from studying graphic design skill, editors and journalism students have to be sensitive with technology and update the latest infographics making tools to serve their works. Besides, heads of online newspapers can recruit professional designers as collaborators who specialize on making this journalistic type. This solution can change the appearance of infographic columns of their newspapers.

6. Conclusion

Vietnamese journalism has lots of chances to develop in global time, especially kind of online newspapers. This is the sort of journalism which could approach a wide range of readers who require a great number of articles to satisfy their information need. And infographics is really a new step in the development process of Vietnamese journalism. Through this research, it can be said that Vietnamese readers have good impression with infographics and desire it to develop in the future.

The findings show that there are some main problems that should be solved to promote Vietnamese infographics. They are ideas, graphic design skills of editors. From two these factors, infographics can be produced more; especially it does not have to rely on foreign sources. Besides, when we have enough skills to create our own works, infographics of Vietnamese online newspapers will have a unique mark in readers. This is a durable foundation for the development of this kind of article in the future in Vietnam.

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