

The Dynamics of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Media and the Private Sector in Vietnam

Nguyen Thanh Huong

Graduate Institute of Development Studies
National Chengchi University

Abstract: This paper examines the socialist-oriented market economy of artificial intelligence (AI) policies and the potential impact of AI dynamics through the lens of Vietnam's private media sector. It first reviews documents of key policies published by the central Vietnamese government, which show influential actors in national and regional strategies for AI development. Then, this study outlines three prominent private media agencies: DatvietVAC, VNG Corporation, and YeaH1 Group. These companies are selected to represent important aspects of Vietnam's development of media AI applications, including the influence of a well-established media and communications governance, and a growing interest in international corporate activities. The paper concludes that while the government focuses on using media to support its national AI strategy, private companies are taking the lead in driving new technology forward. They are using Vietnam's unique mix of state-led and market-driven approaches to grow quickly. However, this also highlights the challenge of balancing global influences with local needs, as Vietnam works to create a future where AI is innovative, fair, and true to its national identity.

Keywords: *Vietnam, AI, private sector, media and communications, the socialist-oriented market economy*

Introduction

The socialist-oriented market economy in Vietnam is a dynamic economic model that balances socialism's emphasis on state control in key sectors with the competitive drive of a market economy. Since the Doi Moi reforms in the late 1980s, Vietnam has revitalized its economy by maintaining state-owned enterprises in strategic industries while fostering private sector growth (Đặng, 2021). With the advent of Industry 4.0, AI has emerged as a critical pillar of Vietnam's economic advancement, particularly through nurturing private entrepreneurial technology sectors (Vũ Khuyên, 2024). This dual approach emphasizes not only public sector applications but also the essential role of private digital enterprises in driving technological progress (Trần, 2024). The adoption of AI-powered tools and the utilization of data-driven technologies within media networks exemplify these advancements. In Vietnam, this central relationship—between national governance and the influence of international economic markets—frames AI in media as part of a broader market economy of media technology deeply integrated into corporate strategies. At the same time, these strategies navigate challenges like foreign trade protectionism by balancing production and consumption issues within the media marketplace. Thus, Vietnam's transition from a centrally

planned economy to a socialist market economy offers a unique lens to examine how these dynamics unfold (Beresford, 2008; Saratchand, 2022).

Against this backdrop, this paper examines Vietnam's technological development ideology, where media plays a pivotal role in navigating and promoting innovation. The analysis focuses on the existing contexts in which policies and corporate media practices related to these technologies; the interplay between AI and media in Vietnam are considered by both conflict and consensus within a hybrid system; and AI technologies develop within established media and technology ecosystems, building on Vietnam's existing frameworks for growth and modernization. Accordingly, this research highlights the state-approved liberalization of media technology markets into industry and society, balancing competitiveness with ethical considerations. It further underscores how the dynamics of AI technologies in Vietnam are shaped by aligning media policy with economic strategy while incorporating entertainment and business activities into broader media models within the tech sector. In the subsequent sections, this paper will highlight key examples of government strategies and private media agencies to provide context and depth to the analysis.

AI Policies: A Vision for Transformation

Although Vietnam has long recognized AI as a driver of economic growth and technological progress, it was only in 2019 that the Political Bureau (Politburo) of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee officially prioritized AI with an ambitious roadmap. By 2025, Vietnam aims to become a key innovation hub in Asia, with the digital economy contributing 20% of GDP and widespread digital transformation. By 2030, the digital economy's contribution will rise to 30%, with a 7.5% annual increase in labor productivity, while Vietnam targets a top 40 ranking in the Global Innovation Index (Tuấn Anh, 2024). By 2045, the goal is for Vietnam to be a leader in innovation and achieve AI self-sufficiency (The Prime Minister, 2020).

To realize this vision, the government has issued key resolutions, including Resolution No. 50/NQ-CP and Decision No. 127/QĐ-TTg, to promote AI research and integration across sectors. This reflects Vietnam's strategy of leveraging AI for both productivity and societal benefits. Documents like Official Dispatch No. 7900/BGTVT-KHCN and Decision No. 1678/QĐ-BKHCN provide concrete AI implementation plans, while Decision No. 552/QĐ-BTP incorporates AI into the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In 2022, Decision No. 44/QĐ-BTC continually advanced AI under the National Strategy, focusing on competitiveness and public welfare. In 2023, Official Letter No. 4409/BKHCN-CNC reviewed AI progress, introducing standards like TCVN 13902:2023 for a trusted AI system. Additionally, policies such as Directive No. 83/CD-TTg and Decision No. 699/QĐ-BTTTT prioritize high-quality human resource training and the 2024 Action Plan to equip the workforce for the digital economy.

On the whole, these policies position AI as a tool to foster economic growth, tackle societal challenges, and create a digitally inclusive society while aligning with Vietnam's governance model. However, the policies also face significant challenges that could hinder their effectiveness, including the risk of ambitious targets outpacing the country's current technological infrastructure and capacity, as well as inefficiencies in bureaucratic processes. Addressing these obstacles is essential for Vietnam to achieve its ambitious AI-driven goals and establish itself as a regional leader in innovation. Therefore, it is imperative to define the role of the private sector as a mediator, bridging the gap between government strategies and public adoption, while driving innovation to ensure AI

technologies align with both national priorities and market demands. Their participation will be crucial in fostering a balanced ecosystem where public and private efforts converge to achieve sustainable technological progress.

Corporate AI in the Private Media Sector: Opportunities and Challenges

As the Vietnamese government outlines an ambitious AI development framework focused on self-reliance, inclusivity, and innovation, the private sector plays a key role in turning these policies into tangible outcomes. Particularly in the media field, AI policies have created significant opportunities for these agencies to emerge as one of the most transformative industries leveraging advanced technologies. This section examines how the three leading private companies, like DatvietVAC, YeaH1 Group, and VNG Corporation, integrate high technologies to align with government strategies and meet market demands.

DatvietVAC

DatvietVAC stands as the first privately owned media, entertainment, and technology group in Vietnam. Founded in 1994, DatvietVAC has transformed from a traditional media company into a leader in digital content production and technological innovation (Story Of Firsts, n.d.) This transformation reflects the era of Vietnam's broader economic shift toward a socialist-oriented market economy that balances private-sector innovation with national strategic priorities. Currently, DatvietVAC focuses on investing in its digital ventures business segment through the strong development of companies such as VieON, VieNETWORK, VieDIGITAL, and VieZ. Notably, with its flagship technology product, the super application VieON has set a library of 15,000 hours of content—80% of which is pure Vietnamese content—to exemplify DatvietVAC's commitment to both innovation and the promotion of Vietnam's cultural identity (Huyền, 2023).

DatvietVAC's success, however, highlights the complexity of operating within a framework that demands both innovation and alignment with national priorities. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, DatvietVAC collaborated with the Ministry of Information and Communications to promote the BlueZone app as part of Vietnam's national safety strategy (Peng, Yeung & Hung, 2021). This dual role—acting as both a cultural innovator and a partner in national initiatives—illustrates how private enterprises like DatvietVAC contribute to national goals while driving technological progress in media.

VNG Corporation

Founded in 2004, VNG Corporation has emerged as a leading technology company across four key segments: media, games, fintech, and digital business (VNG, n.d.). With AI becoming a central pillar of its growth strategy, VNG has strategically positioned itself at the forefront of Vietnam's digital transformation. Supported by a team of over 300 AI engineers, the company integrates AI across infrastructure, media platforms, and application layers, underpinned by one of the largest AI Cloud infrastructures in the country (VNG20, 2024). A significant milestone in its AI endeavors came in 2023 with the introduction of the Zalo Large Language Model (LLM). This model outperformed GPT-3.5 under Vietnamese Language Model Understanding (VMLU) standards, demonstrating VNG's commitment to delivering localized, high-quality AI applications tailored for Vietnamese users (Đậu Linh, 2024).

VNG's influence extends deeply into Vietnam's media landscape. As of November 2024, Zalo remains the nation's most popular messaging platform and a cornerstone of its media ecosystem. Complementing Zalo are other flagship platforms, such as Zing MP3, a leading music streaming service, and Zing Me, a social networking site (Bích Đào, 2024). These platforms exemplify how VNG integrates AI-driven innovations into everyday digital services, enhancing user experiences and cementing its leadership in Vietnam's media space.

Among Southeast Asia's leading tech enterprises, VNG is distinguished by its comprehensive and swift adoption of AI advancements. The company has made substantial investments across three critical layers: infrastructure, platforms, and applications. Through its VNG GreenNode subsidiary, it collaborates with NVIDIA to offer AI Cloud services to global clients, showcasing its capacity for international partnerships and its ambitions for expansion (HM, 2024). By leveraging its investments in AI, cloud infrastructure, and global collaborations, VNG not only solidifies its position as a regional technology leader but also aligns its growth with Vietnam's broader aspirations to become a prominent technology hub in Asia.

YeaH1 Group

Established in 2006, YeaH1 Group is a Vietnamese media giant that has recently gained widespread acclaim for its reality TV programs and global expansion through partnerships in South Korea, India, and the U.S (YeaH1, n.d.). In 2019, the acquisition of ScaleLab boosted its YouTube views to 6.9 billion and its global subscribers to 610 million (Phường Đông, 2019). These achievements reflect the growing demand for both localized and global digital content in a country known for its high internet penetration and widespread mobile device usage like Vietnam.

In line with national policies, YeaH1 has integrated AI as a key part of its operations. Since 2019, it has launched Appnews Vietnam, a platform helping local press agencies optimize mobile technology and enhance revenue (Trung Nguyễn, 2019). The platform's AI-driven features—such as content personalization, text-to-speech conversion, and offline news-reading—align with the government's AI strategy to make Vietnam a leader in AI research by 2030 (Hà Lan, 2019). However, such collaborations also bring to the fore challenges in balancing private-sector innovation with the state's ideological objectives. While YeaH1's technological advancements and global partnerships enhance its competitive edge, they also spark concerns about the potential erosion of Vietnamese cultural values and whether YeaH1's reliance on foreign collaborations and globalized content distribution might prioritize profit over national ideological goals. The partnerships with platforms like MangoTV and ScaleLab are typical of skepticism about the influence of global forces on the creation and dissemination of Vietnamese content. These concerns mirror broader tensions between the market-driven strategies of private companies and the state's commitment to preserving a socialist identity amidst globalization.

In general, each of these three private companies contributes distinctly to advancing AI technologies while navigating the complexities of Vietnam's socio-economic environment and the government's strategic priorities. DatvietVAC's innovative use of AI in content personalization redefines user engagement and operational efficiency. Similarly, YeaH1 Group's global partnerships and AI-powered content distribution highlight Vietnam's ability to merge local creativity with international reach. With its groundbreaking Zalo Large Language Model and cutting-edge AI applications, VNG

Corporation successfully meets the unique needs of Vietnamese society while fostering the nation's ambition to become a regional AI leader.

Beyond their individual contributions, these companies also collectively embody both the opportunities and challenges of Vietnam's dual commitment to technological innovation and cultural preservation. Their achievements are firmly rooted in the government's socialist-oriented market economy, which provides fertile ground for private-sector innovation while ensuring alignment with national goals. Despite that, this balance is not without challenges. The push for international collaborations and profit-driven strategies raises concerns about maintaining Vietnam's cultural identity in a globalized digital economy. These tensions reflect broader questions about how private enterprises can harmonize the demands of global markets with the state's ideological priorities.

Final Reflection

Despite its early stage, AI development in Vietnam is best characterized by tensions between national priorities, global pressures, and the aspirations of a post-colonial state. This nuanced dynamic resists straightforward adherence to a singular nationalistic strategy, highlighting how Vietnam negotiates the dual imperatives of justice and technological sovereignty in an era shaped by global power asymmetries. National AI policies increasingly position media agencies as pivotal mediators, serving as agents of transformation and platforms for cultivating the technical expertise necessary to sustain a technology-driven economy. As part of a collaborative ecosystem, AI development involves public institutions, disciplinary experts, and private-sector companies, reflecting both cooperation and underlying tensions.

Indeed, AI policies should not be viewed as entirely novel but rather as part of the broader historical trajectory of Vietnam's public and private media sectors. On one hand, the central and regional governments prioritize strategic research, training, and infrastructure development for AI, advancing a vision of a post-colonial state capable of technological self-determination. On the other hand, the competitive corporate sector—driven by substantial profits from the entertainment industry—propels AI innovation, influenced by external capital flows, global market demands, and dominant technological paradigms. These companies use media as a tool to amplify state narratives and trigger economic development. For all that, their strategies raise pressing questions about whose narratives and interests are prioritized in a globalized digital economy. Although contemporary policies have created favorable conditions for private enterprises to expand AI applications tailored to business objectives, their actions also reflect the struggle to balance market-driven ambitions with justice-oriented goals, particularly the decolonization of knowledge systems and the protection of Vietnam's cultural identity and sovereignty from erasure in transnational AI ecosystems. Together, these dynamics require Vietnam's state policies and corporate strategies to converge to drive technological transformation while striving to reclaim agency in an uncertain world. Only by doing so can Vietnam's media industry position itself at the forefront of a digitally driven future that serves as a site of resistance and reconstruction, reimagining AI as a force for social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

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