

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
AND TRAINING  
ACADEMY OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION**

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**PROFESSIONAL ETHICS ISSUES OF CORPORATE  
COMMUNICATIONS PRACTITIONERS IN VIETNAM TODAY**

**SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION  
IN PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**HANOI - 2026**

The dissertation was completed at the Academy of Journalism and Communication

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**Reviewer 2:** .....

**Reviewer 3:** .....

The dissertation will be defended before the Institution-level Dissertation Defense Council, Academy of Journalism and Communication – Hanoi, in ..... 2026

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Rationale

In the context of Vietnam's deep economic integration and the profound impacts of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, businesses are facing not only increasing competitive pressures but also rigorous scrutiny from the public, media, and regulatory bodies. Consequently, reputation and social trust are no longer secondary factors but have become prerequisites for sustainable corporate development, with corporate communication playing a pivotal role in creating, reinforcing, or undermining such trust. Policy documents, such as Resolution No. 41-NQ/TW (2023), have emphasized the roles of ethics and social responsibility in business operations, while setting requirements to enhance corporate responsibility toward the community.

Concurrently, the Vietnamese legal framework is increasingly refined to regulate communication activities, particularly in the digital environment, with provisions in the Law on Cybersecurity, the Law on Advertising, and the Law on Protection of Consumers' Rights, all of which underscore the principles of honesty and information transparency. However, these regulations primarily serve as ex-post punitive measures, while the core issue regarding the awareness and professional ethical foundation of communication practitioners remains unaddressed in a systematic manner. Practical evidence indicates a rising and increasingly sophisticated trend of unethical practices in corporate communication, especially in the digital sphere.

Notably, the field of corporate communication in Vietnam currently lacks a formal and widely recognized code of professional ethics, in contrast to journalism or international professional associations. Furthermore, academic research on professional ethics in this field remains limited, failing to establish an integrated theoretical framework to explain the relationship between perception, attitude, and behavior.

The author's own survey results during the research process demonstrate that this is not a latent issue but an ongoing reality in professional practice, as 86.2% of surveyed communication practitioners reported having experienced conflicts between work requirements and professional ethical standards. This figure suggests that ethical conflicts are not isolated incidents but a common experience among the majority of practitioners, creating an urgent need to establish a systematic code of professional ethics with implementation mechanisms suitable for the Vietnamese context.

Addressing these gaps, the research topic “Professional ethics issues of communication practitioners in Vietnamese enterprises today” has been selected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field.

## **2. Research Objectives and Tasks**

The purpose of this dissertation is to develop a theoretical framework for the professional ethics of communication practitioners in enterprises. This includes establishing a conceptual system, constructing a set of core professional ethical criteria suitable for the Vietnamese context, and applying the KAB model in combination with the Person-Situation Interaction Model as the analytical framework. Based on this framework, the dissertation aims to measure and analyze the current state of ethical awareness, attitudes, and behaviors of communication practitioners in Vietnamese enterprises; examine the relationships among these three components; evaluate the impacts of individual and organizational factors; and identify prominent ethical issues as well as their underlying causes. On that basis, the dissertation proposes a multi-level system of solutions at the individual, organizational, and societal levels to enhance the professional ethics of communication practitioners in Vietnamese enterprises today.

To achieve this objective, the dissertation addresses the following tasks:

*First*, it systematizes the theoretical foundations of the professional ethics of communication practitioners in enterprises by clarifying fundamental concepts, analyzing the roles and ethical requirements of the profession, constructing a set of core professional ethical criteria based on a synthesis of international codes of ethics and Vietnamese legal documents, and developing the research model and research instruments.

*Second*, it measures and analyzes the current state of ethical awareness, attitudes, and behaviors of communication practitioners in Vietnamese enterprises according to the established criteria, examines the relationships among these three components, and evaluates the impacts of individual and organizational factors on professional ethics.

*Third*, it identifies and analyzes the prominent professional ethical issues in the current practice of corporate communication in Vietnam, clarifies their causes, and assesses their consequences.

*Fourth*, it comprehensively evaluates the achievements and limitations in the current state of professional ethics, identifies the challenges involved in improving the professional ethics of communication practitioners in Vietnamese enterprises today, and thereby proposes a multi-level system of solutions at the

individual, organizational, and societal levels to enhance the professional ethics of this workforce.

### **3. Research Object, Subject, and Scope**

Research object: Professional ethics issues of corporate communications practitioners in Vietnamese enterprises today.

Primary research subjects: Communications practitioners at Vietnamese enterprises of all sizes. These subjects were invited to participate in questionnaire surveys, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews. Supplementary subjects included leaders of communications and business associations in Vietnam, corporate lawyers, and corporate communications training experts.

Geographic scope: Three provinces and cities representing the three regions: Hanoi, Thanh Hoa, and Ho Chi Minh City.

Temporal scope: The dissertation was conducted from 2023 to 2026; quantitative survey and qualitative interview data were collected from October 2023 to March 2026.

Substantive scope: The survey focused on international professional ethics codes for communications and the Vietnamese legal instruments relevant to communications. The dissertation also analyzed representative ethics violation cases in Vietnamese corporate communications.

### **4. Theoretical Foundations and Research Methodology**

The study is grounded in the theoretical foundations of Marxism–Leninism, Ho Chi Minh's thought, and the orientations and policies of the Communist Party and State of Vietnam on ethics, communications, and enterprise. It also draws on key disciplinary theories, particularly Trevino's person-situation interactionist model and the Knowledge–Attitude–Behavior (KAB) model, which serve as the basis for constructing the analytical framework and measurement instruments.

Methodologically, the dissertation employs a sequential mixed-methods approach: qualitative–quantitative–qualitative. The quantitative phase involved a questionnaire survey of 631 respondents using a Likert scale and statistical techniques including Cronbach's Alpha, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, Pearson correlation, T-tests, one-way ANOVA with Games-Howell post-hoc tests, and linear regression, including regression assumption diagnostics. The qualitative phase involved document analysis, content analysis of legal and policy texts, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and case studies to contextualize and complement the quantitative

findings. This mixed-methods design enables a comprehensive approach that ensures both statistical reliability and depth of contextual insight.

### **5. Analytical Framework and Research Questions**

The dissertation's analytical framework takes an integrated approach, with the KAB model and Trevino's person-situation interactionist theory as its core, and extends this to encompass three groups of influencing factors: individual characteristics, organizational environment, and socio-economic context. On this basis, the study focuses on a system of 10 professional ethics criteria for corporate communications practitioners, derived through content analysis of documents, focus group discussions, and expert interviews. This framework enables examination of the relationships among ethical knowledge, attitudes, and behavior, as well as assessment of how external factors affect each element of the model.

From this framework, the study formulates several central research questions: identifying typical professional ethics issues in Vietnamese corporate communications practice; analyzing the relationships among practitioners' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors; assessing the degree of influence of individual and organizational factors; and proposing solutions for improving professional ethics in the current context. These questions not only shape the research hypotheses but also provide the basis for designing data collection and analysis instruments.

### **6. Theoretical and Practical Significance**

Theoretically, the study contributes to advancing the approach to professional ethics in corporate communications by integrating the KAB model with individual and organizational factors within a unified analytical framework. In so doing, the dissertation clarifies the interaction mechanisms among knowledge, attitudes, and behavior - particularly the causal chain from knowledge to behavior in the Vietnamese corporate context. The construction of a system of 10 core professional ethics criteria based on analysis of international and domestic documents also fills a significant theoretical gap in this field.

Practically, the study provides empirical evidence on the current state of professional ethics among corporate communications practitioners in Vietnam, thereby supporting stakeholders in developing appropriate policies and regulations. The research findings can serve as reference material for enterprises in formulating internal codes of conduct, for professional associations in developing ethics codes, and for educational institutions in integrating professional ethics content into curricula. The violation cases analyzed can also

be used as practical scenarios for developing practitioners' awareness and ethical decision-making skills.

### **7. New Scientific Contributions of the Dissertation**

The dissertation makes several notable new contributions, both theoretical and practical. First, the study constructs a system of 10 core professional ethics criteria for corporate communications practitioners in Vietnam, based on systematic analysis and synthesis of international legal instruments and ethics codes, and validated through empirical data. Second, the dissertation pioneers the application of the KAB model to the study of communications professional ethics, thereby providing empirical evidence on the relationships among knowledge, attitudes, and behavior in the Vietnamese corporate context.

Additionally, the study contributes to identifying and analyzing common professional ethics issues in practice through case study methodology and expert interviews, thereby clarifying the forms of violation and their consequences for corporate reputation and public trust. The dissertation also supplements the evidence base on a field that has received limited systematic research attention in Vietnam, and proposes a methodological approach through a sequential mixed-methods research design that can serve as a reference for subsequent studies.

### **8. Structure of the Dissertation**

In addition to the Introduction, Conclusion, and References, the content of the dissertation is organized into 4 chapters and 13 sections.

## **CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1.1. Research on Communication and Corporate Communication**

Domestic and international scholarly works have established a solid theoretical foundation for communication, from classical communication models to modern approaches to corporate communication. International research reflects a developmental trajectory from one-way communication models toward multi-directional interaction, affirming communication's role as a strategic management function linked to reputation management and stakeholder relations. In recent years, research has focused on strategic communication, digital transformation, and the impact of artificial intelligence, reflecting the field's adaptation to the rapidly changing communications environment.

In Vietnam, communications research has evolved from a focus on political and social objectives toward applications in the market economy and digital transformation. The corpus of work has grown increasingly diverse,

spanning mass communication, corporate communication, and internal communication, reflecting gradual convergence with international research trends.

## **1.2. Research on Ethics and Professional Ethics**

Research on ethics and professional ethics has developed from classical philosophical foundations to applications across many professional fields. International scholarship reflects a shift from ethical theory toward the construction of applied ethical standards for specific occupations, particularly in the context of digital technology and globalization. Recent studies have also emphasized the relationship between professional ethics and organizational performance.

In Vietnam, research on professional ethics has moved from general philosophical theory toward specialized disciplinary studies, with a notable increase in professional ethics textbooks and training materials across many fields. This trend reflects the growing demand for professional ethics standardization in an era of increasing integration and specialization.

## **1.3. Research on Communications Ethics and the Professional Ethics of Corporate Communications Practitioners**

International research on communications ethics has built a theoretical foundation combining philosophy and professional practice, emphasizing ethics' role in building organizational trust and legitimacy. Recent studies have particularly focused on ethical challenges in the digital communications environment, including misinformation, information asymmetry, and the impact of artificial intelligence.

In Vietnam, research on communications ethics has concentrated mainly on journalism, with a significant body of work developing professional ethics standards for journalists. However, studies on professional ethics in PR, advertising, and corporate communications remain limited and have not yet produced a complete theoretical and practical framework. This reveals a research gap with respect to corporate communications practitioners - a professional group that is growing rapidly and exerts significant societal influence.

## **1.4. Critical Review and Research Gaps**

### ***1.4.1. Critical Review***

Overall, domestic and international works have constructed an important theoretical foundation on communication, professional ethics, and communications ethics, providing a scientific basis for this study.

In the field of communication and corporate communication, international research has accumulated progressively from classical communication models to

modern strategic communication, linked to reputation management and organizational effectiveness. Recent trends focus on digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and sustainable development. In Vietnam, research has shifted from serving political-social objectives toward applications in the market economy and digital transformation, with an increase in works on corporate and internal communication.

With respect to ethics and professional ethics, international research has passed through three phases: from philosophical foundations, to applied ethical standards, and more recently to expansion into interdisciplinary issues in the digital context. Vietnamese research has moved from general theory toward occupational specialization, with a notable recent increase in discipline-specific professional ethics textbooks.

In the field of communications ethics, international research has shifted from normative to empirical approaches, focusing on ethical challenges in the digital environment. In Vietnam, research has concentrated mainly on journalism ethics, with initial extensions into advertising, copyright, and digital communication, but a persistent absence of specialized research on corporate communications.

#### ***1.4.2. Research Gaps***

*First*, Vietnamese research has focused primarily on journalism ethics, while professional ethics for corporate communications practitioners remains largely absent from the academic record, despite this group's growing influence.

*Second*, there is no standardized professional ethics criteria system specifically designed for corporate communications practitioners, resulting in the absence of a unified reference framework for research and practice.

*Third*, existing research lacks an empirical approach, particularly the simultaneous measurement of knowledge, attitudes, and behavior through the KAB model and testing of the relationships among these elements.

*Fourth*, no study has tested the role of individual and organizational factors in shaping professional ethics in the Vietnamese corporate context, leaving recommendations insufficiently context-specific.

*Fifth*, systematic case-based analysis of ethics violations in corporate communications is absent, limiting the identification and prevention of ethics risks.

Chapter Summary: Chapter 1 reviewed the literature across three main streams: communication and corporate communication; ethics and professional ethics; and communications ethics and professional ethics of corporate

communications practitioners. Both domestic and international works have established a relatively complete theoretical foundation - from classical communication models to modern strategic communication, from philosophical ethics to discipline-specific professional ethics - while providing initial empirical evidence on the factors influencing ethics in communications. On this basis, Chapter 1 identified five principal research gaps and established the research questions, analytical framework, and methodological orientations that form the foundation for developing the theoretical framework and conducting the study in subsequent chapters.

## **CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS ISSUES OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS PRACTITIONERS IN VIETNAM TODAY**

### **2.1. Key Concepts**

#### ***2.1.1. Communication, Enterprise, and Corporate Communication***

*First*, communication is the process of exchanging information, ideas, and emotions among subjects with the aim of creating shared understanding within a given social context. Modern communication is no longer a one-way process but is multi-directional, responsive, and subject to cultural and social influences.

*Second*, an enterprise is an economic organization operating for profit, and simultaneously a social actor subject to oversight by the public and stakeholders. In the digital context, enterprises face increasingly high expectations of transparency and social responsibility.

*Third*, corporate communication is a strategic management function that coordinates internal and external communication activities, with the objective of building reputation and maintaining relationships with stakeholders. This activity is integrative in nature and closely tied to the enterprise's development strategy.

#### ***2.1.2. Ethics and Professional Ethics***

*First*, ethics is the system of social norms that guide human behavior; it is historically contingent and regulated by conscience and social opinion.

*Second*, professional ethics is the system of norms that govern the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of practitioners, reflecting the social responsibilities of that profession.

*Third*, professional ethics issues in corporate communications are the contradictions that arise when communications practitioners must balance

enterprise interests against their responsibilities to the public, particularly in situations involving honesty, transparency, and legal compliance.

## **2.2. Theoretical Issues**

### ***2.2.1. Schools of Ethical Thought***

*First*, deontological ethics emphasizes adherence to universal moral principles, elevating honesty and respect for persons.

*Second*, utilitarianism evaluates actions on the basis of the greatest benefit for the greatest number, orienting toward social welfare.

*Third*, virtue ethics focuses on individual character traits such as honesty, responsibility, and fairness, viewing these as the foundation of ethical behavior.

### ***2.2.2. Roles and Responsibilities of Corporate Communications***

#### ***Practitioners***

*First*, corporate communications practitioners hold an increasingly strategic role in a competitive and digitally transforming environment. They not only perform the function of conveying information but also participate in planning and executing communications strategies aligned with the enterprise's development objectives. Through communications, they contribute to building the organization's image, reputation, and brand value.

*Second*, communications practitioners serve as the bridge between the enterprise and its stakeholders, including customers, partners, regulators, and the community. Through information management and public interaction, they help the enterprise maintain relationships, strengthen trust, and manage issues as they arise.

*Third*, in the digital communications environment, communications practitioners also carry responsibility for information management and crisis response. They must monitor public opinion, respond promptly to negative developments, and orient information flows to minimize organizational risk.

In terms of tasks, communications practitioners primarily engage in building communications strategies, managing reputation, producing content, operating communications channels, managing internal communications, measuring effectiveness, and advising leadership. These tasks demand not only professional competence but also a high degree of professional ethics.

### ***2.2.3. System of Professional Ethics Criteria***

*First*, on the basis of analysis of legal instruments, international ethics codes, and qualitative research, the dissertation constructs a system of 10 professional ethics criteria as a normative framework for assessing corporate communications practitioners.

*Second*, the 10 criteria are: (1) Honesty and accuracy; (2) Confidentiality and information protection; (3) Avoidance of conflicts of interest; (4) Public interest; (5) Respect and non-discrimination; (6) Legal compliance; (7) Transparency and disclosure; (8) Error correction and accountability; (9) Respect for copyright and intellectual property; (10) Verification and information confirmation.

*Third*, these criteria form a unified system in which principles such as honesty, transparency, and legal compliance serve as foundational, while the remaining criteria reflect the specific requirements of corporate communications in the contemporary context.

#### ***2.2.4. Research Model and Hypotheses***

*First*, the dissertation applies the KAB (Knowledge–Attitude–Behavior) model as the foundation for analyzing professional ethics. Knowledge of ethical standards influences attitudes, which in turn affect the behavior of communications practitioners. However, a gap may exist between knowledge and behavior, making it necessary to analyze all three elements simultaneously.

*Second*, the dissertation applies Trevino's (1986) person-situation interactionist model to explain the factors influencing ethical behavior. Under this model, ethical behavior depends not only on individual cognition but also on the organizational environment.

With this integration, the researcher proposes a quantitative research model with eight hypotheses: H1a, H1b, H1c (individual factors positively influence knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors); H2a, H2b, H2c (organizational factors positively influence knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors); H3 (knowledge positively influences attitudes); H4 (attitudes positively influence behaviors); H5 (knowledge positively influences behaviors).

### **2.3. Practical Foundations for Professional Ethics of Corporate Communications Practitioners**

#### ***2.3.1. Political and Legal Foundations in Vietnam***

*First*, corporate communications in Vietnam is closely governed by the political-legal system, in which regulations carry not only legal but also ideological weight, requiring communications to align with national and social interests.

*Second*, regarding the political-ideological basis, documents such as the 2013 Constitution, Party Resolutions (particularly Resolution 33-NQ/TW), and Directive 05-CT/TW establish requirements for communications practitioners to ensure truthfulness, spread positive cultural values, and avoid causing negative social impacts.

*Third*, in terms of law, corporate communications activities are governed by numerous important statutes including the Press Law, the Advertising Law, the Cybersecurity Law, the Consumer Protection Law, the Intellectual Property Law, and the Civil and Criminal Codes. These provisions emphasize requirements for honesty, transparency, consumer protection, and the legal liability of communications practitioners. The political-legal system thus functions both as a binding constraint and as a normative foundation for evaluating professional ethics.

### ***2.3.2. Professional Ethics Codes in Communications, PR, and Advertising***

*First*, professional ethics in communications functions as a “self-regulatory mechanism,” helping to balance freedom of information against social responsibility, particularly in the digital communications context, where risks such as misinformation and public opinion manipulation are prevalent.

*Second*, globally, relatively complete professional ethics codes have been established, notably: IPRA emphasizes honesty, transparency, and accountability to the public; PRSA elevates honesty, independence, fairness, and transparency; ICC requires advertising not to mislead and to respect persons; WFA emphasizes data transparency and accountability in the digital environment.

*Third*, in Vietnam, ethical standards exist primarily in the journalism and advertising sectors, while PR and corporate communications lack dedicated ethics codes. This creates a normative gap in which communications practitioners must draw references from other fields, leading to inconsistency and generating numerous ethical issues. This is an important institutional gap with direct implications for professional practice.

### ***2.3.3. Five Central Professional Ethics Issues Facing Corporate Communications Practitioners in Vietnam Today***

Drawing on a synthesis of research on communications practitioners' professional ethics, public relations generally, and the Vietnamese context specifically, five central ethical issues are identified:

(1) *Lack of shared ethical standards*: The corporate communications sector lacks a unified ethics code, leading to inconsistency and difficulty in controlling professional conduct.

(2) *Lack of professional competence and professional responsibility*: Training remains limited; many communications practitioners lack strategic thinking and the capacity to identify ethical issues.

(3) *Lack of transparency and disclosure of interests*: The practice of “paying for media coverage” and disguised advertising continues to exist, undermining public trust. In addition, the development of artificial intelligence has introduced a new dimension to the issue of transparency: when communication practitioners use generative AI to produce content without disclosure, the public loses the ability to assess the origin and credibility of information. Moreover, the use of AI trained on copyrighted data may lead to intellectual property violations without users being aware of it.

(4) *Lack of accountability and two-way dialogue*: Communications is predominantly one-directional; enterprises avoid dialogue, particularly in crisis situations.

(5) *Lack of honesty and accuracy*: “Half-truths,” misleading language, and information concealment are evident.

Regarding the relationship between the 10 criteria and the 5 issues: the 10 criteria are the ideal standards used to measure knowledge, attitudes, and behavior; the 5 ethical issues are practical barriers that impede adherence to those criteria; between these two systems there exists a causal relationship in which practical issues weaken criterion compliance, while the absence of clear criteria aggravates ethical issues.

Chapter Summary: Chapter 2 constructed the theoretical foundations of the study by clarifying the core concepts of communication, enterprise, corporate communication, and communications practitioner, and by distinguishing among ethics, professional ethics, and professional ethics issues. On this basis, professional ethics issues were defined as the contradictions arising when communications practitioners must balance organizational objectives against their responsibility to provide truthful, transparent information. Regarding the theoretical framework, the chapter integrated classical ethical schools of thought with the KAB model and the person-situation interactionist model, constructing an analytical framework comprising the three elements of knowledge, attitudes, and behavior together with individual and organizational factors, which serve as the basis for formulating the research hypotheses. The chapter also established the system of 10 professional ethics criteria through a three-phase research process, analyzed the legal and practical context in Vietnam, and identified five central ethical issues. These contents provide a solid theoretical and practical foundation for analyzing the current state and testing the research model in subsequent chapters.

## **CHAPTER 3: CURRENT STATE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS ISSUES OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS PRACTITIONERS IN VIETNAM TODAY**

### **3.1. Sample Characteristics**

The quantitative sample comprised 631 corporate communications practitioners at Vietnamese enterprises, drawn from two sampling frames: the BNI Vietnam network (representing small and medium enterprises - selected for its verifiable member database, structured industry diversity per internal regulations, and presence across all three regions) and the VNR500 ranking (representing large enterprises - selected as Vietnam's most credible, publicly accessible, and independently verifiable corporate ranking).

Sample composition: By gender - female 64.5%, male 35.5%. By education- university 72.7%, postgraduate 20.0%, associate/vocational 7.3%. By enterprise size - small (under 100 employees) 74.8%, medium (101–200) 10.0%, large (over 200) 15.2%. By region - primarily northern operations 33.3%, southern 31.2%, central 24.6%, national and international 11.0%.

Qualitative data comprised 19 in-depth interviews including: 9 communications practitioners from three regions (ages 25–51, experience 2–25 years); 2 professional association leaders (Secretary-General of a business association and President of a national advertising association); 1 communications training expert; 1 corporate lawyer; and 4 communications experts with 8–18 years of experience. Two focus group discussions (7 and 8 participants respectively) were organized with diversity in position, experience, and enterprise size.

### **3.2. Survey of the Current State of Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors**

#### ***3.2.1. Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors Regarding Professional Ethics***

##### ***3.2.1.1. Knowledge of the 10 Professional Ethics Criteria***

First, survey results show that the mean ethics knowledge score reached 4.00/5, with 77.7% of respondents in agreement - reflecting a relatively high level of knowledge. This indicates that the majority of communications practitioners have a clear understanding of the fundamental ethical principles they are expected to uphold.

Second, the criteria with the highest knowledge scores relate to social responsibility and error correction; the criterion "timely correction of errors"

reached 4.06 points with 81.1% agreement, reflecting a strongly recognized sense of responsibility.

Third, however, criteria related to law and conflicts of interest scored lower; “understanding and keeping up with relevant legal regulations” reached only 3.92 points with 74.5% agreement, revealing a gap in legal knowledge.

### *3.2.1.2. Attitudes Toward the 10 Professional Ethics Criteria*

First, ethical attitudes reached a mean of 4.03/5 with 77.9% agreement - slightly higher than knowledge - indicating that communications practitioners not only understand but also endorse the ethical standards.

Second, the highest-scoring criteria were honesty (4.08), information confidentiality (4.07), and information verification (4.05), reflecting strong consensus with core values.

Third, however, the criterion “willingness to accept responsibility and proactively correct errors” had the lowest score (3.97; 75.4% agreement), indicating a degree of hesitancy regarding personal accountability. Criteria relating to public interest and source transparency (approximately 4.00) also scored below the mean, reflecting tensions between ethical standards and corporate pressures.

### *3.2.1.3. Behaviors Toward the 10 Professional Ethics Criteria*

*First*, actual behaviors reached a mean of 3.87/5 - lower than knowledge (4.00) and attitudes (4.03) - creating an ethics gap of approximately 0.16 points, reflecting the divergence between “knowing - believing – doing” in practice.

*Second*, behaviors performed more consistently include removing biased content (3.92), information security (3.91), and not distorting the truth (3.90), reflecting content that is more controllable within standard workflows.

*Third*, the weakest behaviors all scored at 3.83: reporting conflicts of interest (67.8%), legal compliance checking (68.0%), and source verification (69.3%) - behaviors requiring time, professional expertise, and organizational support.

*Fourth*, notably, 86.2% of communications practitioners have experienced ethical conflicts, with 47.2% encountering them with regular or occasional frequency, indicating that this is a widespread issue in professional practice.

## **3.2.2. Relationships Among Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors**

*First*, knowledge has a very strong influence on attitudes ( $\beta=0.756$ ), explaining 57.2% of variance in attitudes. This means that as the level of understanding of professional ethics increases, practitioners' attitudes toward ethical standards become correspondingly more positive. In other words, more

than half of the variation in attitudes among individuals can be explained by their level of knowledge, confirming knowledge as the most important foundation for shaping ethical attitudes.

*Second*, attitudes strongly influence behaviors ( $\beta=0.744$ ), explaining 55.3% of behavioral variance. This shows that when practitioners not only understand but genuinely believe in the value of professional ethics, they tend to behave more appropriately in practice. However, the fact that attitudes explain only about half of behavior also indicates that many other factors (such as work pressure or organizational environment) hinder the translation of attitudes into action.

*Third*, knowledge also has a direct influence on behaviors ( $\beta=0.722$ ), explaining 52.1% of behavioral variance. This shows that enhancing understanding not only exerts an indirect effect through attitudes but can also directly improve behavior. When communications practitioners are equipped with clear and specific knowledge of ethical standards, they may apply that knowledge immediately in practice without necessarily undergoing a marked change in attitudes.

### ***3.2.3. Factors Influencing Professional Ethics (Summary)***

#### ***3.2.3.1. Individual Factors***

*First*, all scales achieved high reliability (Cronbach's Alpha from 0.706 to 0.886), meeting the conditions for analysis.

*Second*, regression results show that individual factors have a positive influence on knowledge ( $\beta=0.580$ ;  $R^2=33.7\%$ ), attitudes ( $\beta=0.555$ ;  $R^2=30.8\%$ ), and behaviors ( $\beta=0.532$ ;  $R^2=28.3\%$ ); hypotheses H1a, H1b, and H1c were all confirmed.

*Third*, this indicates that personal ethical values are foundational, shaping how practitioners understand and evaluate professional ethics, while also exerting a meaningful influence on actual behaviors.

#### ***3.2.3.2. Organizational Factors***

*First*, organizational factors also positively influence knowledge ( $\beta=0.503$ ;  $R^2=25.3\%$ ), attitudes ( $\beta=0.482$ ;  $R^2=23.2\%$ ), and - most strongly - behaviors ( $\beta=0.575$ ;  $R^2=33.1\%$ ); hypotheses H2a, H2b, and H2c were all confirmed.

*Second*, of the three dimensions, organizational factors exert the strongest influence on behaviors, indicating that the corporate environment (reward-and-punishment mechanisms, culture, leadership) plays a determining role in how employees actually conduct themselves in practice.

### 3.2.3.3. Comparison of Individual and Organizational Factors

*First*, individual factors exert a stronger influence on knowledge (0.580 > 0.503) and attitudes (0.555 > 0.482), indicating that internal ethics are primarily shaped by the personal value system.

*Second*, organizational factors exert a stronger influence on behavior (0.575 > 0.532), indicating that actual conduct depends heavily on the working environment. In particular, the four components of organizational factors - organizational recognition and rewards, mechanisms for sanctioning violations, perceptions of colleagues' ethical behavior, and the integrity of supervisors - all have statistically significant impacts on behavior. This demonstrates that ethical behavior is determined not only by individual qualities but also by the overall organizational context, ranging from formal mechanisms to informal norms shaped by leaders and colleagues.

*Third*, this finding reveals an important point: communications practitioners may know the right thing and believe the right thing, yet their behavior is strongly shaped by the organization - thereby clearly explaining the gap between knowledge, attitudes, and behavior in the study.

### 3.2.3.4. Influence of Other Factors

*First*, gender and level of education have clear influences; women and those with higher education levels show higher KAB scores.

*Second*, years of work experience show a negative correlation with knowledge and behavior, suggesting that more experienced practitioners may adapt to practical realities rather than adhering to normative standards.

*Third*, enterprise size has a significant effect; small enterprises show lower KAB scores, particularly for behaviors.

*Fourth*, training factors (especially ethics training) correlate positively with all three KAB dimensions, and the degree of emphasis on ethics in training is the factor with the strongest influence on behaviors.

*Fifth*, societal factors also exert a positive influence, reflecting the role of professional norms and public pressure.

## 3.3. Five Typical Professional Ethics Issues of Corporate Communications Practitioners in Vietnam Today

### 3.3.1. Lack of Shared Ethical Standards

*First*, the corporate communications sector in Vietnam currently lacks a binding professional ethics code comparable to that in journalism, resulting in the absence of monitoring mechanisms and processes for addressing violations.

*Second*, many violations occur in the areas of marketing, internal communications, and CSR, but there are no clear professional sanctions, making the right-versus-wrong boundary ambiguous.

*Third*, the consequence is the formation of a vicious cycle: no standards → easy violations → loss of trust → difficulty building standards - with negative effects on younger practitioners entering the profession.

### ***3.3.2. Lack of Professional Competence and Professional Responsibility***

*First*, many communications practitioners lack practical skills, particularly in crisis management, leading to contradictory messages, a lack of transparency, and public confusion.

*Second*, underlying causes include a training system that is overly theory-heavy with insufficient practical training, alongside a tendency to conflate professional communications with short-term marketing.

*Third*, the consequences include declining communications quality, reduced industry credibility, and a limited capacity to handle complex real-world situations.

### ***3.3.3. Lack of Transparency and Disclosure of Interests***

*First*, disguised advertising and undisclosed financial relationships with brands are prevalent, especially on social media.

*Second*, practices such as “disguised PR” or providing media payments create conflicts of interest and undermine informational objectivity.

*Third*, the consequences include consumer deception, declining trust in communications, and the creation of an uncompetitive environment in which unethical behavior may become an informal “norm.”

### ***3.3.4. Lack of Accountability and Avoidance of Dialogue***

*First*, many enterprises tend to deny, respond slowly, or avoid dialogue when crises occur, rather than being transparent and accountable.

*Second*, the absence of internal listening mechanisms and direct leadership engagement in crisis response aggravates the severity of crises and results in a loss of communications control.

*Third*, the consequences are a serious erosion of public trust, impacts that extend across the entire industry, and the exposure of deeper problems in organizational culture.

### ***3.3.5. Lack of Honesty and Accuracy***

*First*, serious violations concentrate in false advertising, particularly in functional foods and cosmetic services, using celebrities and fabricated professional credentials to establish credibility.

*Second*, these are not inadvertent errors but rather systematic and deliberate actions aimed at profit maximization.

*Third*, the consequences are severe: consumer harm, the destruction of individual and brand reputation, and negative effects on the broader market. However, these incidents have also helped drive improvements to the legal framework, especially in advertising regulation and accountability for influencers.

Chapter Summary: Chapter 3 analyzed the current state of professional ethics among corporate communications practitioners in Vietnam using mixed-methods data comprising 631 surveys, 17 in-depth interviews, and representative case analyses. Results show that knowledge (4.00/5) and attitudes (4.03/5) are both at high levels, while behaviors are lower (3.87/5), creating an “ethics gap” of 0.16 points. In addition, 86.2% of communications practitioners have experienced conflicts between job requirements and ethical principles. All relationships in the KAB model are statistically significant: knowledge strongly influences attitudes ( $\beta=0.756$ ), attitudes influence behaviors ( $\beta=0.744$ ), and knowledge also directly influences behaviors ( $\beta=0.722$ ). Both individual and organizational factors influence professional ethics; individual factors have a stronger effect on knowledge and attitudes, while organizational factors are more important for behaviors. The study also identified five typical ethical issues: lack of shared standards, limited professional competence, lack of transparency, lack of accountability, and lack of honesty. These findings provide empirical evidence on the current state and the mechanisms underlying ethical behavior formation, serving as the basis for proposing solutions in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4: ASSESSMENT, LIMITATIONS, AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE PROFESSIONAL ETHICS OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS PRACTITIONERS IN VIETNAM**

### **4.1. Overall Assessment of the Current State**

#### ***4.1.1. Achievements***

The study records three positive points. First, knowledge reached 4.00/5 with 77.7% agreement, with criteria relating to social responsibility scoring particularly highly; “awareness of the need to correct errors promptly” reached 81.1% agreement. Second, attitudes reached 4.03/5 with 77.9% positive, with high consistency across criteria (a range of only 0.11 points), reflecting a stable value system within the professional community. Third, the KAB model

demonstrates good explanatory power with  $\beta$  values from 0.722 to 0.756, providing a solid scientific foundation for ethics improvement interventions.

#### ***4.1.2. Limitations and Causes***

The most significant limitation is the 0.16-point ethics gap between attitudes (4.03) and behaviors (3.87), reflecting the reality that 86.2% of communications practitioners face conflicts between work demands and ethical principles. The second limitation is that ethics violations remain widely observable in practice. The third limitation is persistent weakness in specific behaviors (conflict-of-interest reporting 67.8%, legal compliance checking 68.0%, source verification 69.3%).

The causes can be identified at three levels.

*At the individual level*, there is a lack of in-depth training in professional ethics and insufficient legal competence, particularly reflected in the lowest awareness scores for understanding and updating legal regulations (3.92) and recognizing conflicts of interest (3.96). In addition, there is a tendency for individuals to gradually adapt to less-than-ideal norms over time, as reflected in the negative correlation between years of experience and ethical behavior.

*At the organizational level*, the organizational ethical environment is not strong enough to transform ethical awareness into actual behavior. Pressure from short-term business objectives is often prioritized over social values, resulting in inconsistencies between declared corporate social responsibility and everyday communication practices. Furthermore, small enterprises often lack sufficient resources to establish standardized ethical systems.

*At the societal level*, there is an absence of professional organizations with sufficient authority to issue and enforce ethical standards. The legal framework remains fragmented and unclear, particularly as legal gaps in the governance of digital communication and AI-generated content are expanding more rapidly than the development of regulations. In addition, mechanisms for supervision and sanctions remain ineffective. Pressure from the digital media environment, where algorithms prioritize emotionally charged content, also creates structural pressure on communication practitioners, forcing them to choose between speed and verification, and between honesty and wide dissemination.

#### ***4.1.3. Five Issues Requiring Solutions***

(1) How to translate positive knowledge and attitudes into consistent ethical behaviors, not by further raising knowledge but by removing structural barriers? (2) How to build professional ethics competence when formal training has significant limitations? (3) How to create an organizational environment that

supports rather than impedes ethical behavior? (4) How to develop shared industry ethics standards without a strong professional organization? (5) How to balance legal regulation with professional self-regulation?

#### **4.2. Orientations and Principles**

Five general orientations: (1) Close the ethics gap through structural intervention; (2) Systematically build ethical competence - training is the foundation of the entire system; (3) Strengthen the organizational role - improving the work environment is the most effective lever for changing behavior; (4) Develop shared standards and a self-regulation mechanism; (5) Harmonize legal regulation with professional self-regulation.

Six guiding principles: evidence-based; multi-level and integrated; practice-focused over theory-focused; contextually appropriate for Vietnam; sustainability-oriented; and actively involving the professional community.

#### **4.3. Solutions for Improving the Professional Ethics of Corporate Communications Practitioners in Vietnam Today**

##### ***4.3.1. Individual-Level Solutions***

The individual-level solutions focus on what communication practitioners themselves can and should proactively undertake. Five main solutions are proposed: proactively engaging in self-training and continuously updating knowledge of ethics and relevant laws, which is particularly important because years of experience show a negative correlation with ethical behavior, suggesting the need to “renew” ethical commitment over time; developing personal ethical principles and practicing self-assessment before making decisions; strengthening the ability to recognize conflicts of interest and professionally refuse unethical requests; participating in professional networks to maintain ethical standards; and fostering a sense of personal responsibility in the digital communication environment by refraining from using unverified AI-generated content and avoiding participation in campaigns that involve deceiving the public.

The implementation roadmap is divided into three phases. During the first three to six months, communication practitioners should assess their knowledge gaps and develop a set of self-assessment questions suitable for their job positions. From six months to two years, they should apply the self-assessment system in daily practice, participate in professional networks, and seek mentors. From the second year onward, professional ethics should become part of their personal identity, enabling communication practitioners to take on mentoring roles for younger generations entering the profession.

### ***4.3.2. Organizational-Level Solutions***

The organizational-level solutions focus on building a working environment that supports ethical behavior, as organizational factors have the strongest impact on behavior ( $\beta = 0.575$ ), exceeding the influence of individual factors ( $\beta = 0.532$ ). The primary actors responsible for implementation are senior management and human resources departments.

The eight proposed solutions include: developing and enforcing an internal code of ethics - addressing the demand expressed by 51.8% of communication practitioners; establishing mechanisms to reward ethical behavior and fairly sanction violations regardless of rank; integrating ethical review procedures into standard workflows, including verification of AI-generated content sources; creating a safe environment for reporting ethical concerns; training leaders on their role in enforcement and ethical role-modeling rather than merely issuing regulations; integrating ethical criteria into performance evaluation systems; organizing regular discussions on ethical dilemmas; and issuing policies on the ethical use of AI and user data.

The implementation roadmap consists of three phases. During the first year, organizational leaders should issue an internal code of ethics, establish mandatory information verification procedures, and create confidential reporting channels. In the second and third years, the organization should strengthen its ethical culture through leadership training, regular ethical discussions, and the introduction of AI ethics policies. From the fourth year onward, ethics should become part of the organization's identity, enabling enterprises to participate in ethical certification programs issued by professional associations.

### ***4.3.3. Societal-Level Solutions***

The societal-level solutions focus on building an ecosystem that supports professional ethics. The principal actors include the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, professional associations, and educational institutions.

The eight proposed solutions include: strengthening professional organizations with three core functions - developing ethical codes, providing training and certification, and receiving and handling complaints; establishing a roadmap to connect educational institutions with professional associations, with priority given to the two criteria that received the lowest awareness scores, namely legal knowledge and conflict-of-interest recognition; improving the legal framework, particularly through guidance for implementing Law No. 75/2025/QH15 and addressing legal gaps related to AI-generated content; enhancing supervision and ensuring timely, strict, and transparent handling of

violations; strengthening the supervisory role of the press and the public; building a public database of violations; encouraging academic research on corporate communication ethics; and promoting international cooperation with PRSA, IABC, IPRA, and the Global Alliance.

The implementation roadmap is divided into three phases. During the first two years, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism should issue comprehensive guidelines on corporate communication law, while VNPR and the Vietnam Advertising Association initiate consultations to develop a common code of ethics. From the third to the fifth year, the official code of ethics should be promulgated, professional ethics certification programs implemented, a public database of violations established, and an ethics council formed. From the sixth year onward, the goal is to develop a sustainable ethical ecosystem in which ethical certification is recognized by enterprises in recruitment processes and Vietnam actively participates in international communication ethics networks.

Chapter Summary: Chapter 4 comprehensively evaluated the current state of the professional ethics of communication practitioners in Vietnamese enterprises, identifying both positive aspects and existing limitations. Communication practitioners demonstrate relatively high levels of ethical awareness and attitudes, while the KAB model was confirmed to have strong explanatory value. However, a major limitation is the existence of an “ethical gap” between awareness, attitudes, and behavior, together with the reality that many practitioners face conflicts between job requirements and ethical principles.

The causes of these issues were identified at three levels: individual, organizational, and societal. On that basis, the chapter proposes a multi-level system of solutions consisting of three groups: individual-level, organizational-level, and societal-level solutions. These solutions are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, with their effectiveness depending on coordination among stakeholders and the availability of implementation resources. The proposed solutions are designed according to a roadmap ranging from short-term to long-term implementation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The dissertation, entitled “Professional Ethics Issues of Corporate Communication Practitioners in Vietnam Today,” achieved its research objectives through a mixed-methods study involving 631 survey respondents, 19 in-depth interviews, 2 focus group discussions, and an analysis of 7 representative cases of ethical violations.

On Research Question 1, the dissertation identifies five typical professional ethics issues reflecting systemic weaknesses in the professional ethics ecosystem: lack of shared standards, lack of practical competence, lack of transparency, lack of accountability, and lack of commitment to honesty - forming a vicious cycle in which violations become a systemic rather than exceptional phenomenon.

On Research Question 2, the KAB model is confirmed to have high explanatory value. Practitioners demonstrate relatively good knowledge (4.00) and positive attitudes (4.03), but behaviors (3.87) produce a 0.16-point gap. KAB relationships are confirmed with  $\beta$  values from 0.722 to 0.756 ( $p < 0.001$ ). Good knowledge genuinely leads to better attitudes and behaviors, but the transformation process is impeded by external factors, particularly organizational pressure.

On Research Question 3, both individual and organizational factors positively influence KAB. The breakthrough finding is that organizational factors exert a stronger influence on behaviors ( $\beta = 0.575$ ) than individual factors ( $\beta = 0.532$ ), while individual factors more strongly determine knowledge and attitudes. This carries an important policy implication: to change ethical behaviors, improving the organizational environment is the most direct and effective lever.

On Research Question 4, the dissertation proposes a comprehensive system of 21 solutions across three levels - individual (5 solutions), organizational (8 solutions), and societal (8 solutions), in which training serves as the foundation, organizational environment provides direct motivation, and societal norms provide the guiding framework. Solutions are designed to reinforce each other: individual training is more effective when the organizational environment is supportive; the organizational environment provides clearer direction when societal norms exist; and societal norms are better enforced when both individuals and organizations are committed.

Regarding scientific contributions: the dissertation advances professional ethics theory in the Vietnamese corporate communications context through (i) confirming the explanatory value of the KAB model integrated with the Trevino framework; (ii) constructing 10 professional ethics criteria that can serve as a reference standard; and (iii) quantifying the role of multi-level factors, with the breakthrough finding on the superiority of organizational factors in shaping ethical behavior.

Regarding limitations: the convenience sampling method may affect representativeness; the cross-sectional design prevents establishing strict causality; self-reported behavioral data may be subject to social desirability bias; the three-province scope does not fully represent national diversity; and regression models explain 20–34% of variance, indicating additional unexplored factors.

Future research directions: longitudinal studies to establish causality; geographic expansion; objective behavioral measurement methods; industry-specific deep studies; cross-national comparative research; and evaluation of specific intervention program effectiveness.

This dissertation aims to have provided a comprehensive, scientifically grounded portrait of professional ethics issues among corporate communications practitioners in Vietnam today. Its findings and proposals carry both scholarly significance and high practical applicability, contributing to the development of a professional, responsible, and ethical corporate communications workforce, thereby raising the quality of the business environment and social trust in Vietnam.

## LIST OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH WORKS

No.	Title of Article / Scientific Work	Journal or Conference	Author	Date
1	Ethics of corporate communications practitioners: Theory of ethics and codes of professional conduct	Political Theory and Communications Journal	Author	2/2025
2	Core roles and responsibilities of communications practitioners in the modern corporate environment	Political Theory and Communications Journal	Author	6/2025
3	Political theory training for corporate communications teams: An urgent need from professional ethics practice	International Conference on Political Theory Training in Vietnam and Laos: Practice and Experience (ISBN: 978-604-44-7988-0)	Author	11/2025
4	Integrating AI Literacy and ethical competence into communication education in Vietnam	International Conference on Communication Education in the Age of AI and Digital Transformation 2025 (ISBN: 978-604-45-2379-8)	Author	12/2025
5	Current state of professional ethics among corporate communications practitioners in Vietnam: Evidence through the KAB model	Political Theory and Communications Online Journal	Author	1/2026
6	Ethical decision-making models in corporate communications: From Western theory to Vietnamese practice	Political Theory and Communications Journal	Author	2/2026