

Online Media and the Emergence of
Young Vietnamese Citizens as
Environmental Activists

A Case Study of the 'Save Son Doong' Movement

By

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ABSTRACT

Various youth initiated grassroots environmental campaigns have emerged within Vietnam's complicated political and media context over the past few years. This raises questions regarding how Vietnamese youth have taken advantage of the Internet to protect the environment. Guided by the research question "*How do young Vietnamese citizens use online media for environmental activism?*" and using the 'Save Son Doong' movement as the case study, this research evaluates the effort of the 'Save Son Doong' activists in using online media to run the movement. This research also generally explores the opportunities and challenges for grassroots groups to run environmental movements in the Vietnamese context.

In-depth individual interviews and a focus group with the 'Save Son Doong' activists were employed as the main data collection methods. Content mapping and content analysis were also applied in order to produce a comprehensive assessment of the movement activities.

Research findings indicate that young, highly educated and tech savvy activists have been very diligent in taking advantage of the Internet to circumvent the state-controlled mainstream media system and lack of resources to run the 'Save Son Doong' movement. By employing online media to organize advocacy activities (petitioning, media advocacy and obtaining endorsement from well-known people), social mobilization activities (building coalition and mobilizing resources) and public will campaigns, they succeeded in raising public awareness, provoking public discourse about the issue, stimulating the mainstream media into massively covering the story and pressuring the decision makers into responding to the matter.

However, their weak-tie connections, as well as the shortage of finance and human resources, are reasons for the unsustainability of the movement. It is recommended that the 'Save Son Doong' working group consider institutionalizing their organization.

The 'Save Son Doong' movement has become an inspiration for other online grassroots movements to emerge in Vietnam. However, activists will most likely

encounter some obstacles including hacking, the digital divide, state cyber surveillance or the illegitimacy of online activism in Vietnam.

The research's focus has been on discovering the 'Save Son Doong' activists' methods and perceptions of online activism. An evaluation of the impact of the movement from the perspective(s) of the public audience, as well as the mainstream media, would be helpful, as it will provide a more objective view of how effectively the activists have used online media in this movement. Future research can also expand on this topic by scaling up the case study, or by adopting a quantitative method that supplies scholars and activists with a broader view of the Vietnamese context of citizen online activism in general, and grassroots environmental activism in particular.



DECLARATION

Name of candidate: **Ly Thi-Cam Nguyen**

This thesis entitled: "Online media and the emergence of young Vietnamese citizens as environmental activists – a case study of the 'Save Son Doong' movement" is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of:

Master of International Communication

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I confirm that:

- This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2016-1010

Candidate Signature: Date: 18 April 2017

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Recognizing the co-evolution of information and communication technologies and environmental movements for the last two decades, a rising number of researchers have started examining the roles of the Internet in grassroots environmental activism. While most of these researchers choose to analyze online practices of environmental non-governmental organizations [eNGOs], a few focus on the adoption of social media to promote and recruit supporters for grassroots campaigns organized by ordinary citizens, who are not affiliated with any pre-existing eNGO. In recent years, I have witnessed the emergence of a few grassroots online environmental movements such as 'Save Son Doong', '6700 People for 6700 Trees,' or 'Save Dong Nai River,' together with other grassroots online campaigns related to various issues in Vietnam. Among these campaigns, the 'Save Son Doong' movement is the most outstanding to me because it was initiated by a group of young Vietnamese citizens who were able to engage over a hundred thousand people in discussing and advocating for their cause by using online media (mostly Facebook and a website) as the main communication channels and as mobilizing tools. Moreover, the 'Save Son Doong' movement has attracted much attention and support not only from the public audience, but also from scientists, journalists and celebrities (SaveSonDoong, 2014; VTC, 2014; Diep & Do, 2016; Nguyen, 2014). This triggered my curiosity and provided an incentive to explore how young Vietnamese citizen activists can use online media to run environmental campaigns by using the 'Save Son Doong' movement as a case study.

The research aims of the 'Save Son Doong' case study are to evaluate the effort of the affiliated activists in using online media to run an environmental movement and to explore the opportunities and challenges facing the emergence of online citizen activism in the Vietnamese political and media contexts.

To conduct a comprehensive study, I have utilized a mixed methodology that includes in-depth individual interviews and a focus group as the main data collection methods,

complemented by content mapping and content analysis to seek answers to the following research question(s):

RQ: *How do young¹ Vietnamese citizens use online media for environmental activism?*

Findings relating to the following sub-questions will help provide a comprehensive set of data that answer the above leading research question:

- *RQ1: What is the profile² of the young Vietnamese citizen activists that initiated the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement?*
- *RQ2: What movement activities have they performed since its inception to date?*
- *RQ3: What outcomes have they achieved?*
- *RQ4: How does the use of online media impact their performances of the movement activities and their achievements of the outcomes?*
- *RQ5: What are their perceptions of using online media for activism purposes?*
- *RQ6: What can we learn from their operation about online citizen activism in Vietnam?*

Thesis structure

Chapter 1 provides background information that helps the readers to have an overview of the Vietnamese context in which the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement emerged, such as the lack of freedom of speech or freedom of press, the development of the Internet and a young Internet population, the citizens’ growing concerns for national development issues in general and for environmental problems in particular. Chapter 2 provides the reader with a literature review of topics related to this research including online activism and communication for social change approaches (advocacy, social mobilization, and public will campaign). Chapter 3 introduces the mixed methodology, which is comprised of interviews, a focus group, content mapping and content analysis

¹ young: under 35 years of age

² profile: socio-economic, educational, professional and cyber backgrounds

that have been used to collect data for the research. It also introduces the evaluation frameworks that have guided my analysis in this project. Chapter 4 presents my findings after spending three weeks in Vietnam to conduct three in-depth, individual interviews and a focus group, together with several months investigating the online media channels of the movement. Chapter 5 is a discussion based on the key findings and the analysis supported by relevant literature. The summary of this chapter provides answers to the sub research questions. The last chapter, chapter 6, concludes the project with answers to the main research question, recommendations for the activists of the 'Save Son Doong' movement, as well as suggestions for future research.

1.2 The Vietnamese context of online activism

Under the one-party rule, Vietnamese citizens barely get access to freedom of speech, expression, press, association, assembly or movement. In such conditions, the development of the Internet, together with the growing popularity of social media, opens up an opportunity for Vietnamese people to raise their voices and express their concerns for national security and different social and environmental issues. In the past few years, there has been an increasing number of social movements and environmental campaigns that emerged online such as the '6700 trees' movement³, the 'Todocabi' campaign⁴ or the 'I do' campaign⁵. Using these new cyber tools, young Vietnamese citizens are becoming significantly vocal about such issues. Vietnam in the 2010s can be described as a country with a young Internet population that embraces various concerns for the sake of national development.

³ The '6700 People for 6700 Trees' movement was against a government's project to cut 6700 mature trees in Hanoi city without consulting the citizens or giving a science-based explanation for such action.

⁴ The 'Todocabi' campaign educated young people about tax money and the transparency of the state budget.

⁵ The 'I Do' campaign advocates for the legislation of same-sex marriage in Vietnam.

1.2.1 Lack of democracy, inadequacy of human rights, and tight control of the Internet in Vietnam

Vietnamese people are challenged by the lack of democracy and inadequacy of human rights protection in Vietnam. Freedom of expression, opinion and information is limited, and freedom of assembly, association, and movement is highly controlled (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Freedom of press is also highly restricted (*Figure 1.1*). According to the 2014 report from Reporters Without Borders, “Vietnam continues to be the world’s second largest prison for (political) bloggers and netizens⁶. Of the 34 bloggers currently detained, 25 were arrested since ... January 2011” (Reporters Without Borders, 2014). Kerkvliet (2012) found that most of the Vietnamese prisoners of conscience were arrested under Article 258⁷ for “abusing freedom and democracy to infringe upon the interests of the State” (as cited in Gray, 2015, p. 6).

From 2009 until 2011, Facebook was banned in Vietnam by the Communist Party in response to the risks posed by overseas political Facebook groups who called upon the Vietnamese to overthrow the government (Gray, 2015; Freedom House, 2015). In September 2013, the government tightened the control of social media by passing Decree 72 on the ‘Management, Provision, Use of Internet Services and Information Content Online,’ which requires:

Internet companies in Vietnam to cooperate with the government to enforce its information controls; makes it illegal to distribute any materials online that harms national security or opposes the government; and bans the distribution of news from any social media outlet through social media. With Decree 72 in place, sharing or ‘liking’ a news story on Facebook – any domestic news story – is, strictly speaking, illegal (Gray, 2015, p. 10).

⁶ Netizen: a person who uses the Internet a lot (“Netizen,” 2017)

⁷ As addressed in Article 258, the Penal Code of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam - released in 1999, “Abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State” is a crime. Retrieved from: http://un-act.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Vietnam-Penal-Code.1999.en_.pdf



Figure 1.1. Vietnam (below China) is marked black indicating that the country’s freedom of the press is in a very serious situation (Leboucher & Ratovo, 2014)

However, as Vietnamese citizens managed to unblock the site by changing their DNS settings to enable access from alternative IP addresses, the government has finally given up their attempt to ban Facebook (Gray, 2015). In January 2015, Vietnam’s Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung declared that banning social media sites is impossible and suggested authorities adopt it as an information exchange gate between the governmental offices and citizens (Vu, 2015).

1.2.2 The development of Internet and young population of Internet users in Vietnam

The netizens’ determination to break through the government’s control of the Internet demonstrates a strong growth of the Vietnamese online community and their rapid adoption of information and communication technology. Since 2000 the number of Internet users in Vietnam has grown from 0.2 million to 39.8 million (at January 2015) and Vietnam is now ranked 14th in the world for its number of Internet users (Internet

live stats, 2015). This number (39.8 million) accounts for 44% of the country's total population (Figure 1.2). Out of these 39.8 million users, about 75% are people aged 15 to 34 years. 95% of 15-24 year-olds and 70% of 25-34 year-olds in Vietnam are Internet users (Figure 1.3). The daily Internet usage rate in 2014 shows that people aged 16-24 years account for 81%, and people between 25-34 years account for 67% (Statista, 2015).

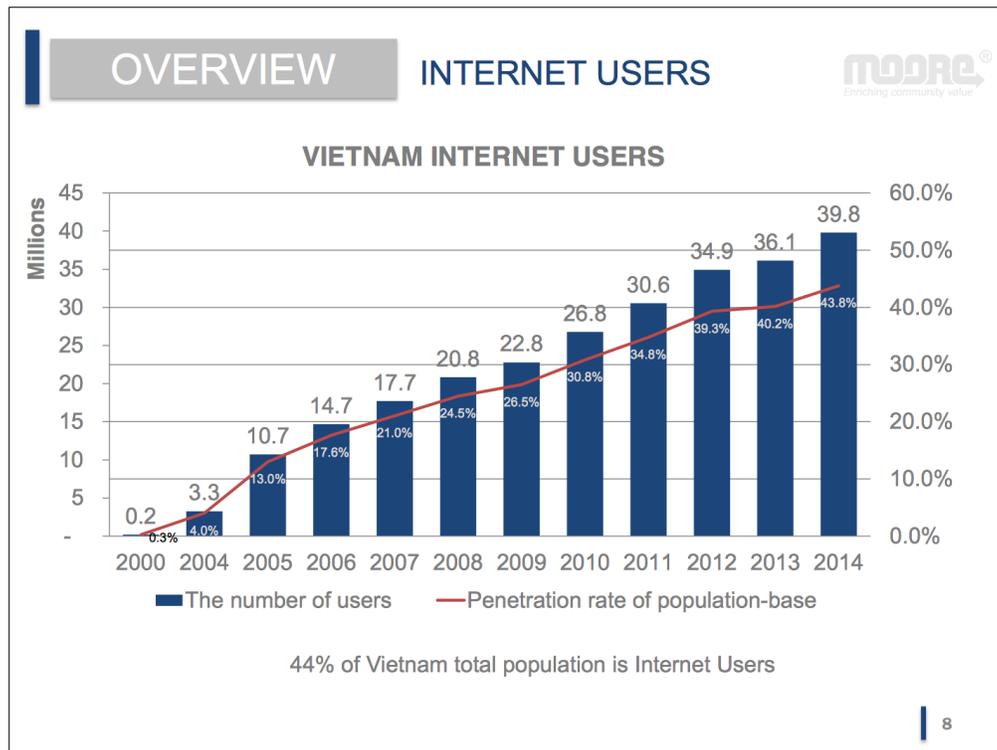


Figure 1.2. The continuously growing number of Vietnamese Internet users (Moore, 2015, p. 8)

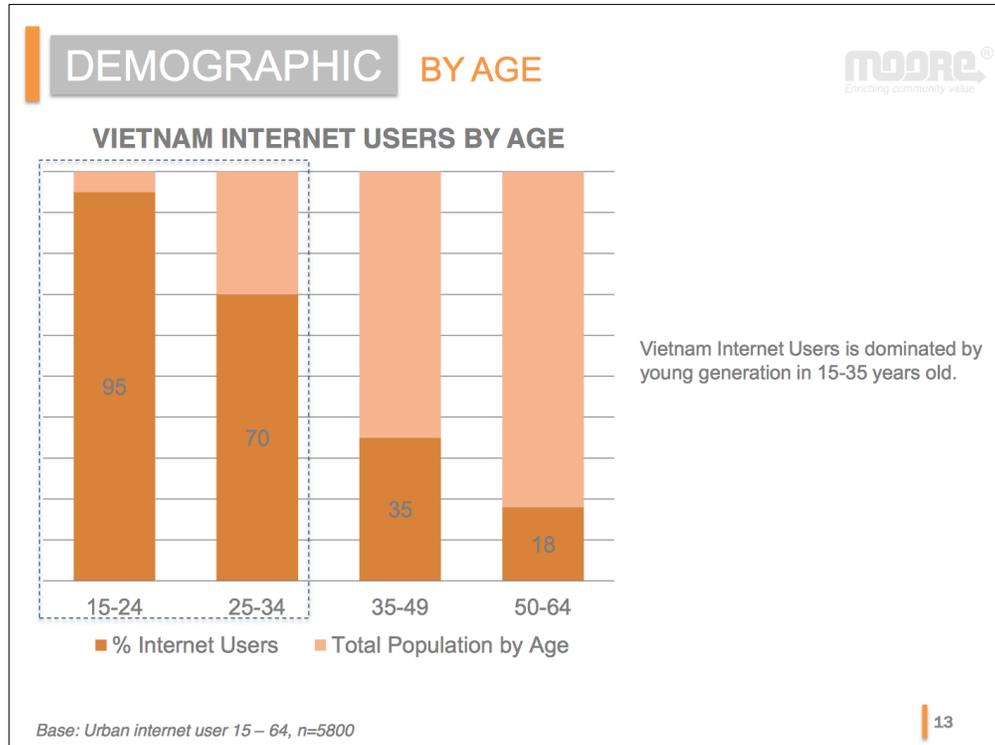


Figure 1.3. Vietnam has a young population of Internet users (Moore, 2015, p. 13)

1.2.3 Vietnamese social media users' growing concerns for the national security and development issues

In a highly restricted Internet environment as described above, social media provides an ideal public sphere for Vietnamese netizens to collectively raise their voices and express their concerns about various controversial issues, which might be considered sensitive topics for government-controlled mass media to cover.

Since 2013 Vietnamese Facebook users have been increasingly vocal about matters of national security, as well as many pressing social and environmental issues. For example, in 2013 the Institute for Studies of Society, Economics and Environment [iSEE], succeeded in galvanizing massive public participation in their 'I Do' campaign, which advocates for the legalization of same-sex marriage in Vietnam. Only a month after the campaign was launched on Facebook, 70,000 people had sent in their selfies holding the

sign ‘Tôi đồng ý’ which means ‘I do’, in demonstration of their support for the Vietnamese government to legalize same-sex marriage⁸.

In January 2014, when an uncontrollable measles outbreak caused the deaths of many Vietnamese children, a Facebook page created with the purpose of calling for the Minister of Health’s resignation, reached over one hundred thousand followers within a few days. The page is still operational now with posts about other health-related issues⁹.

Facebook users also became aggressively vocal in May 2014 with regards to China’s deployment of the Haiyang Shiyou-981 oil-rig in an area of the South China Sea which is claimed by Vietnam. Many people changed their Facebook profile pictures into patriotism posters, while some posted and shared photos of street protests against China, occurring in Hanoi and Paris during that time.

Since October 2014, a group of young Vietnamese citizens have protested against a project which proposes the construction of cable cars into Son Doong – the world’s largest cave, (located in Phong Nha - Ke Bang National Park, Quang Binh province). The movement named ‘Save Son Doong’ promotes sustainable tourism in order to conserve Son Doong’s primitive beauty, the creation and the transformation of its 5 million year old tectonics and its complex ecological system.

The Todocabi campaign was launched in January 2015 and lasted for about five months. This campaign used art to educate young people about tax money and the transparency of the state budget. It stimulated thousands of people to discuss the topic and participate in requesting that the Vietnamese government publish the budget proposals from government executives at all levels before finalising them¹⁰.

In March 2015 more than 60,000 Vietnamese protested against a government’s project to cut down 6,700 mature trees in Hanoi without consulting the citizens or giving a science-based explanation for such action¹¹.

⁸ ‘I Do’ Facebook fan page: <https://www.facebook.com/toidongy.ido/?fref=ts>

⁹ ‘Please resign, Minister of Health’ Facebook fan page:
<https://www.facebook.com/botruongytetuchuc/?fref=ts>

¹⁰ ‘Todocabi’ Facebook fan page: <https://www.facebook.com/todocabi?fref=ts>

¹¹ ‘6700 People for 6700 Trees’ Facebook fan page:
https://www.facebook.com/manfortree/photos_stream?tab=photos_stream

Together with other online environmental movements and campaigns such as, ‘6700 People for 6700 Trees’, ‘Save Dong Nai River’¹², ‘Give Us Back The Road to Bana’, ‘Switch Off Lights - Switch on Ideas’¹³, ‘I Ride A Bike Today’¹⁴, ‘Say No to Plastic Bags’¹⁵ and many other local, student-led, environmental campaigns, the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement marks the beginning of a new era, when young Vietnamese citizens have a positive attitude towards environmental protection and, more importantly, spread that environment-friendly attitude to their peers using the Internet.

1.2.4 Environmental issues and youth environmental activism in Vietnam

As a country that has gone through a rapid process of economic development within only 30 years, Vietnam has put much pressure on the environment. The consequences of unsustainable development and utilization of natural resources have placed Vietnam at almost the bottom of the world’s Environmental Performance Index [EPI] scoreboard: Vietnam is ranked 136 out of 178 countries with an overall score of 38.17/100. Among the EPI’s nine core environmental issues, Vietnam has serious problems of wastewater treatment, overfishing, and deforestation. Issues related to air quality, water and sanitation, biodiversity and habitat, climate and energy are not positively rated either (Environmental Performance Index, 2015). With a young population (nearly half of Vietnam’s 90 million people are under the age of 25), “much of the burden to respond [to environmental issues] will fall on Vietnam’s youth” (Nguyen, 2013).

Beside the efforts of international and local eNGOs in addressing environmental issues in Vietnam, youth environmental activism is becoming a trend. Many environmental clubs have been established within universities and local communities. In 2008, young environmental volunteer clubs in Da Nang city and Hanoi city connected

¹² ‘Save Dong Nai River’ Facebook fan page:

<https://www.facebook.com/chungtaybaovesongdongnai/?fref=ts>

¹³ ‘Switch off Lights – Switch on Ideas’ Facebook fan page:

<https://www.facebook.com/TatDenBatYTuong/?fref=ts>

¹⁴ ‘I Ride A Bike Today’ Facebook fan page: <https://www.facebook.com/irideabiketoday/?fref=ts>

¹⁵ ‘Say No to Plastic Bags’ Facebook fan page: <https://www.facebook.com/noikhongvoituynlon/?fref=ts>

and built the Vietnam Green Generation Network [VGGN]. VGGN has now expanded into the biggest network of young environmental activist groups in the nation.

Youth environmental activism, however, would struggle to exist without the support of international or local NGOs. For instance, VGGN declared itself to be actively encouraged by the Centre of Live and Learn for Environment and Community (also known as Live & Learn) (Vietnam Green Generation Network, 2015). Additionally, many youth-led environmental groups have received financial and technical support from a partnership between the Asia Foundation, Live & Learn, and the Centre for Education and Development [CED] called the Environmental Youth Program. This program has been developing and implementing environmental initiatives since 2011 (Nga, 2013).

The emergence of recent online environmental movements initiated by young citizen activists (especially on Facebook like the 'Save Son Doong' movement) indicates that Vietnamese youth are not ignorant to environmental issues and that they are very concerned about the unsustainable development of the country. In addition, it shows that youth environmental activism in Vietnam is catching up with the global trends of youth activism and online grassroots environmental activism.

From developed countries that embrace full democracy¹⁶ like the United Kingdom, to developing countries that embrace flawed democracy like Chile, Singapore and Malaysia, hybrid regimes like Bangladesh, or authoritarian regimes like China, young activists have taken advantage of the proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies [ICTs] and social media platforms. Doing this has enabled them to bypass the strictly-controlled mainstream media and financial barriers to raise their voices and mobilize public participation in social and environmental movements (Huang & Yip, 2012; Lim, 2013; Pickerill, 2001; Ullah, 2013; Scherman, Arriagada & Valenzuela, 2015; Theocharis, 2013; Zhang, 2013).

¹⁶ Based on a range of indicators within five categories of The Democracy Index (which are electoral process and pluralism, civil liberty, the functioning of the government, political participation, and political culture), countries are categorized into four types of regime: full democracy, flawed democracy, hybrid regime and authoritarian regime. Retrieved from <http://www.eiimedia.com/index.php/latest-press-releases/item/2127-democracy-in-an-age-of-anxiety>

In Vietnam, young Vietnamese citizens are trying to seize the opportunities provided by the Internet and ICTs to change society for the better. The group of young activists who lead the 'Save Son Doong' movement are a typical example of these Vietnamese citizens.

1.3 The 'Save Son Doong' movement

The 'Save Son Doong' movement will be used as a case study for this research project. The 'Save Son Doong' movement, initiated by young Vietnamese citizen activists, opposes the provincial government and the Sun Group's projected construction of a cable car system into Son Doong Cave, the world's largest cave, located in Quang Binh, Vietnam. In this movement, the activists utilize different approaches of communication for social change, including advocacy, social mobilization and public will campaigns to achieve their objectives. The activists have employed a variety of online media platforms including websites, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and email, to transmit information to the public, mobilize public support, keep in touch with each other and with supporters and to discuss, organize and manage public will campaign activities. They have also matched the online activities with a number of offline events. Started in October 2014, the 'Save Son Doong' movement has been in operation for over a year and not yet achieved the ultimate goal of terminating the construction of a cable car system into Son Doong Cave.

1.3.1 Son Doong – The world's largest cave

Son Doong Cave, meaning 'Mountain River Cave', is located in the UNESCO-recognized Phong Nha - Ke Bang National Park, Bo Trach district, Quang Binh province, Vietnam. Son Doong was found by a local man named Ho Khanh in 1990. The cave became internationally known only after a group of scientists from the British Cave Research Association, led by Howard Limbert, made a full discovery of its passage ("Son Doong Cave – Overview," n.d., para.1).

According to the experts, Son Doong is approximately 2-5 million years old. It is more than five kilometers long, 200 meters high and 150 meters wide (“Son Doong Cave – Overview,” n.d., para.1). The huge cave passage of 38.4×10^6 cubic meters was created as river water eroded away the limestone underneath the mountain. Where the limestone was weak, the cave ceiling collapsed creating two large dolines. These dolines allow sunlight to enter some sections of the cave, which resulted in the growth of trees as well as other vegetation (*Figure 1.4*). Unlike other well-known caves of the world, Son Doong contains abnormally tall stalagmites that reach up to 70 meters high (*Figure 1.5*) and extraordinary large cave pearls that are about the size of base balls (*Figure 1.6*) (“Hang Sơn Đoòng,” 2016).



Figure 1.4. The second doline in Son Doong Cave (Deboodt, 2013)



Figure 1.5. Massive stalagmites in Son Doong Cave (Deboodt, 2013)



Figure 1.6. Cave pearls in Son Doong Cave (Deboodt, 2013)

At the present, Oxalis Adventure is the only company allowed to operate commercial tours into Son Doong Cave. Each tour costs about US\$3000-\$4000 and takes up to five days of trekking and camping (“Son Doong cave,” n.d.). Given the fact that Son Doong is primitive and an expedition into the cave includes different challenging activities such as jungle and mountain trekking, surface and underground river crossing, rope climbing, and scrambling, tourists are required “to be very fit, and have previous trekking experience” (“Son Doong cave expedition,” n.d., para. 6). By having Howard Limbert lead the tours, Oxalis Adventures make an effort to ensuring their clients respect and take responsibility for the primitiveness of Son Dong Cave (TB, personal communication, April 14, 2016).

1.3.2 Projected cable car construction into Son Doong Cave

In early 2014, there were rumors that cable cars would be constructed into Son Doong Cave (WT, personal communication, April 13, 2016). Tuoi Tre News confirmed on October 23nd 2014 that Quang Binh province had “permitted Sun Group ... to conduct surveys for the construction of a cable car system” to the cave (Tuoi Tre News, 2014, para. 2).

The operation of a cable car system to Son Doong means that the cave will be opened for mass tourism, reaching up to 1000 visitors per hour (Dien, 2015). This raises many concerns regarding the conservation of Son Doong’s pristine charm.

Researchers and cave experts believe that the construction of a cable car system threatens Son Doong’s inside and surrounding ecosystem (Dien, 2015; Dong, 2015; Rosen, 2014; “British explorer against cable car construction in Vietnam’s Son Doong cave,” 2014). According to Vu Le Phuong, a geomorphologist from Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology, Hanoi, who has been studying the cave since 2009, “construction on top of Son Doong would put pressure on the already weak ceiling, potentially triggering collapse” (Rosen, 2014, para. 7). In addition, “cave-dwelling plants and animals are highly sensitive to even small changes in light or moisture” (Ives, 2014,

para. 7), therefore the practices of clearing nearby forest to construct cable cars, building steps and setting up a lighting system to make it accessible for diverse groups of tourists will have significant impact on the cave's fragile creatures (Ives, 2014; TB, personal communication, April 14, 2016).

Some argue that massive tourism will spoil Son Doong's landscape if it is unsustainably exploited (Dong, 2015; TB, personal communication, April 14, 2016). They fear that tourists will trample upon plants, litter or even steal stalagmites for souvenirs as many have done in other places (Le, 2015; TB, personal communication, April 14, 2016). These concerns are reinforced by examples¹⁷ of environmental degradation which has occurred due to lack of planning and the loose management of local authorities and investors in other massive tourism sites throughout Vietnam (TB, personal communication, April 14, 2016).

1.3.3 The 'Save Son Doong' movement

Right after Tuoi Tre News reported on the cable car project, three unrelated individuals living in different places simultaneously began to voice their concerns on online media. A Vietnamese American who was based in the US, made a petition on thepetitionsite.com, named 'Stop the construction: Save the Son Doong cave,' to be sent to the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and to the UNESCO World Heritage Center. A young man from Hanoi created a Facebook fan page called 'Save Son Doong' – No Cable Cars in Son Doong', and a young woman from Ho Chi Minh City wrote a long article on her personal blog analyzing the five reasons she believed putting a cable car into Son Doong would result in disaster. Only when a well-known activist from Hanoi connected the three pioneers of the protest and coordinated discussions on a

¹⁷ Phong Nha Cave: Mosses grow on stalagmites and the colors of the stalagmites fade out because of the lighting system.

Ha Long Bay: Seawater is polluted by garbage and oil discharged from tourism activities.

Ba Den Mountain: The area is full of garbage during the festival season, wild animals are used for food in restaurants, and forest wild birds are trapped to be 'released' (as an act of the festival's culture) by tourists.

private Facebook group, were their actions integrated and developed into a consistent action plan (L4AF, personal communication, April 10, 2016).

As mentioned above, the 'Save Son Doong' group initially employed online media as a tool to protest, then later managed to integrate some offline events in the movement. Started in October 2014, the 'Save Son Doong' movement has been in operation for over a year and has obtained certain results. However, although their ultimate goal, which is to officially terminate the construction plans for a cable car system into the cave, has not been achieved, the 'Save Son Doong' group has somewhat demonstrated that social changes originating from the Internet can happen in Vietnam. This presumption formed the focus of the research.

1.4 Summary

As a developing country aiming toward the international standards of globalization and Millennium Development Goals [MDGs], Vietnam has undergone hard choices between economic growth and environmental conservation. Possessing a diverse collection of beautiful landscapes and natural heritage throughout the country, Vietnam has huge potential to boost long-term economic growth in the service sector with sustainable tourism activities. However, previous examples of unsustainable massive tourism developments that have led to the degradation of the environment, especially in places that are recognized as world heritage sites like Phong Nha Caves and Ha Long Bay, have become an obsession for the pioneers of the 'Save Son Doong' movement.

Thanks to the development of the Internet and the young population of Internet users in Vietnam, the 'Save Son Doong' movement has made some impact on the investor and provincial government's postponement of the Son Doong cable cars project as well as on the promotion of youth participation in the environmental management of Vietnam. Despite the facts that freedom of expression, opinion, and information is limited, and freedom of press, assembly, association, and movement is highly controlled in Vietnam, online media has enabled and facilitated the 'Save Son Doong' movement pioneers to connect, to network with the essential supporters, to transmit information

to the public audience, to encourage public discourses of the issue, and to mobilize public participation in the movement.

Using the 'Save Son Doong' movement as the case study, this research aims to evaluate the effort of those pioneers in using online media to run the movement, as well as to explore the opportunities and challenges for grassroots groups to run environmental movements in the Vietnamese context.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

This chapter presents a review of literature relevant to this research project. The project is contextualized within the literature of grassroots online activism and communication for social change (advocacy, social mobilization, and public communication campaign).

The literature review provides an understanding of how the development of the internet, together with the proliferation of online media platforms in general, and social media platforms in particular, have enabled grassroots activism to emerge and facilitated the activists' organization of social movements in the past decade. Critiques of online activism are also covered in the chapter.

In addition, the chapter introduces the concepts of 'communication for development and social change' [CDSC]. It outlines the evolution of the CDSC scholarship from the first paradigm that was dominated by behavioral change communication to the second paradigm that promotes communication for social change. It also highlights three approaches of communication for social change, which are advocacy, social mobilization, and public will campaigning. As the activists have applied these approaches in the 'Save Son Doong' movement, this section helps to better understand the terms used in the chapter which covers my findings.

The reason why grassroots online activism and communication for social change have been chosen to be the foci of this chapter as well as the backbone of the study is that both fields look at actions that bring about "inclusion, equity, fairness and justice" ("What is social change," n.d.) – in other words positive changes – in society, politics, economics and environment. The 'Save Son Doong' movement is a typical example of a series of actions that not only aim to bring about environmental justice, but also has resulted in a positive change in society and politics, which is presented in the eagerness of the young Vietnamese citizens to exercise their perceived rights to be vocal and involved in the government's decision-making process and environmental governance.

2.2 The Internet and grassroots activism

It is undeniable that the Internet has played an important role in the mobilization of global social changes during the last decade. Research shows that the Internet and online media technologies have provided the opportunities for grassroots activism to emerge, allowing the voices of marginalized individuals to be heard (Carty, 2015; Cox, 2006; Kaur, 2015; Ke, 2014; Lee, 2015; Sima, 2011; Yang & Calhoun, 2007). According to Ke (2014), the development of the Internet has empowered people at grassroots level to “demonstrate dynamic power and adopt sophisticated strategies to change society” (p. 31). In other words, the Internet and the availability of different online media platforms have enabled grassroots and citizen activism to occur in cyberspace.

2.2.1 Green public sphere

Discussing environmental activism, Ke (2014) claims that “the availability of information about environmental conditions, regulations and behaviors, and a space in which to discuss these issues” (p. 31) are democratic preconditions for an environmental movement to occur. Other scholars also emphasize the importance of a space for the grassroots of environmental democracy to emerge, which they call the “green public sphere” or “environmental public sphere” (Cox, 2006; Sima, 2011; Yang & Calhoun, 2007).

The idea of a public sphere was introduced by the famous German scholar Jürgen Habermas (1989), who defined it as “an area of open debate” for public opinion to be formed (Webster, 1995, p. 105). Cox (2006) strengthens the term’s meaning into “the realm of influence that is created when individuals engage others in communication—through conversation, argument, debate, or questioning—about subjects of shared concern or topics that affect a wider community” (p. 18). In the public sphere, opinion is shaped through interactivity and personal concerns transform into public matters when people engage each other through debating or questioning important issues.

Relating this term to environmental communication, Cox (2006) states that the environmental public sphere takes shape in many forums and practices, such as “a talk at a local ecology club ... scientists’ testimony before a congressional committee ...

public hearings, newspaper editorials, web alerts, speeches at rallies, street festivals” (p.18) as long as it provides “a discursive space for communication about the environment” (p. 14).

According to Sima (2011), both Torgeson (2000) and Cox (2006) agree, “the green public sphere can effectively foster the circulation of ‘insurgent discourses’ ([Cox,] 2006, p. 59) that challenge prevailing assumptions and worldviews about the environment” (Sima, 2011, p. 478). Likewise, Yang and Calhoun (2007) argue, “a green public sphere fosters political debates and pluralistic views about environmental issues” (p. 212), allowing people to advocate for changes to environmental policies or changes to governments’ and corporations’ negative environmental practices.

Yang and Calhoun (2007) identify three elements of a green public sphere: an environmental discourse or a greenspeak, a public that produces and consumes greenspeak, and the media used for producing and consuming greenspeak. A greenspeak is a “gamut of linguistic and symbolic means used for raising awareness of [specific] environmental issues” (p. 213). ‘The public’ includes environmental NGOs and ordinary citizens who directly participate in producing and consuming greenspeak. The Internet, alternative media and mass/traditional media influence greenspeak differently as they differ in terms of social organization, access and technological features. Yang and Calhoun (2007) believe the Internet plays a significant role in the emergence of green public spheres in recent years because it has advantages in speed, reach and interactivity compared to other media formats.

As mentioned above, the green public sphere is only a precondition for an environmental movement to occur and movements only emerge when greenspeaks are transformed into actions. Many researchers have agreed that the Internet does not only contribute to the formation of green public spheres (Sima, 2011), but also facilitates the organization of environmental movements and other social activities (Carty, 2015; Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015; Kaur, 2015; Ke, 2014; Laer & Aelst, 2010; Lee, 2015; Sima, 2011; Theocharis, 2013).

2.2.2 Web 2.0 and the new paradigm of social movement

Web 2.0 technologies, which include a variety of web sites and applications for users to create and share online information (Thomson, n.d.), have changed the structure and repertoires of social movements (Carty, 2015). In terms of structure, contemporary social movements don't have to rely on the initiation of NGOs. Instead, anyone with access to the Internet can raise their voice and galvanize public support. In terms of repertoires, the advancement of the Internet has provided pioneers and supporters of contemporary social movements with more options to overcome financial or geographical barriers in the organization and participation of movement activities.

New structure

With the development of ICTs, contemporary social movements are not necessarily initiated by NGOs with structured leadership, plentiful resources, clear missions or strategies (Carty, 2015). According to Carty (2015), anyone can take advantage of the free and easy-to-use online media platforms like blogs, Facebook or Twitter, to amplify their own voices and galvanize their online acquaintances into debates over a particular social issue. These acquaintances also have their own networks of online acquaintances, which in turn, scales up the discourse of the issue to a level that can eventually lead to the formation of a social movement. Carty explains:

[T]raditional movements tended to rely more on a hierarchical model of formal, well-established organizations with charismatic leaders and professional experts, which provided a clear set of grievances and demands as the cornerstone of the collective behavior. More recently, however, collective behavior manifests itself through a more horizontal infrastructure of connectivity. This broadens the public sphere, as citizens can now share grievances and express their opinions through peer-to-peer networks (Carty, 2015, p. 11-12).

Likewise, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) introduce a new form of collective action called 'connective action', which highlights that contemporary social movements are built upon the massive amount of "personalized [political] content sharing across media

networks” rather than the “high levels of organizational resources and the formation of collective identities” (p. 739). The two scholars stress that participants of social movements organized by connective action networks are not bound to certain ideologies, group identities or memberships, which is usually required in traditional social movements brokered by professional advocacy organizations. Instead, the participants simultaneously engage in sharing a common protesting theme for various personal reasons, using their own languages and available communication technologies. Bennet and Segerberg go on to say:

[T]he two elements of ‘personalized communication’ that we identify as particularly important in large-scale connective action formations are:

(1) Political content in the form of easily personalized ideas such as PPF [Put People First] in the London 2009 protests, or ‘we are the 99 per cent’ in the later occupy protests. These frames require little in the way of persuasion, reason, or reframing to bridge differences with how others may feel about a common problem. These personal action frames are inclusive of different personal reasons for contesting a situation that needs to be changed.

(2) Various personal communication technologies that enable sharing these themes. Whether through texts, tweets, social network sharing, or posting YouTube mashups, the communication process itself often involves further personalization through the spreading of digital connections among friends or trusted others (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 744).

Although contemporary social movements tend to be more individualized and digitally enabled some of them still contain hierarchical structures. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) point out that in contemporary contentious politics three possible models of large-scale social movement networks exist. These models vary in the role of ICTs, grassroots activists and NGOs in the formation of social movements (*Figure 2.1*). The collective action of ‘organizationally brokered networks’ (right side of the typology) represents the traditional model of social movements led by “formal, well-established organizations with charismatic leaders and professional experts, which provided a clear

set of grievances and demands as the cornerstone of the collective behavior” (Carty, 2015, p. 11-12). These organizations may use digital communication technologies to enhance their mobilizing efforts, yet not to invite “personalized interpretations of problems and self-organization of action” (Bennett & Segerberg, p. 755).

The connective action of ‘self-organizing networks’ (left side of the typology) presents an ideal model of grassroots activism, in which conventional organizations stay at the margin of the organizing process of the movements. In this model, technologies play a huge role in the formation of the network as well as the organization of movement activities. Accordingly it is also referred to as a ‘technology organized’ connective action.

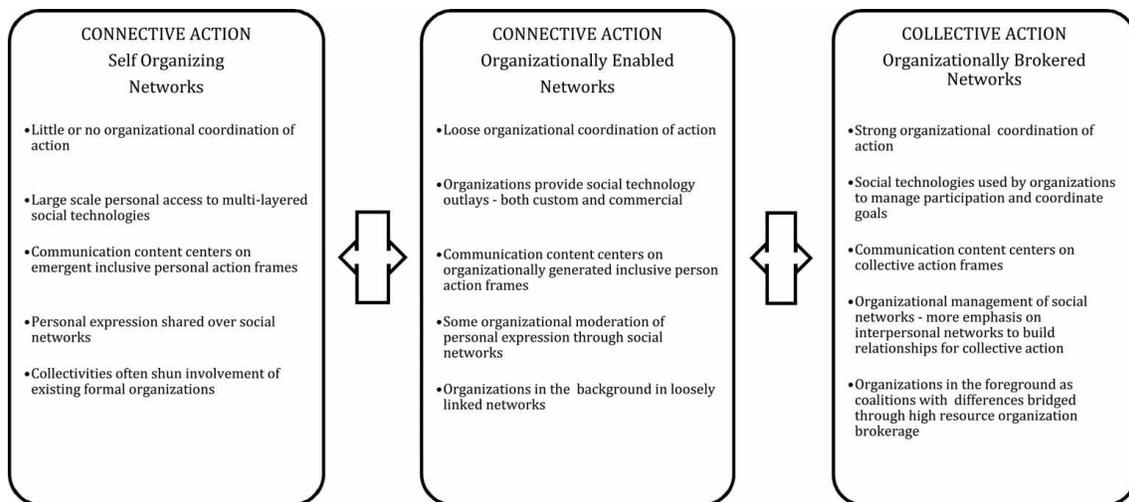


Figure 2.1. Bennett and Segerberg’s three-part typology of contemporary collective and connective action networks (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 756).

The connective action of ‘organizationally enabled networks’ (middle of the typology) is a hybrid model of the other two. In social movements using this hybrid form, NGOs deploy ICTs to invite the public audience to generate personalized political content and share individualized calls for action. They only support the public’s self-organizing process “in terms of resource mobilization and coalition building without imposing strong brands and collective identities” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 757).

In short, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) outline how ICTs have created changes in the organizational structure of contemporary activism networks. With the development of the Internet and various online media platforms, contemporary social movements can

now be organized in both new (self-organizing, organizationally enabled) and conventional (organizationally brokered) forms. In either form, ICTs manifest as effective tools for movement organizers to enrich their mobilizing tactics, which is discussed in the following chapter.

New tactics

Many researchers agree that Internet affordances bring forth changes in ‘repertoire’ or tactics of social movements. Not only has the distribution of information been improved, but the recruitment of participants and supporters, the organization of movement activities and other empowering and mobilizing efforts have also been enhanced (Carty, 2015; Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015; Kaur, 2015; Laer & Aelst, 2010; Sima, 2011; Theocharis, 2011).

Carty (2015) explains that web 2.0 allows the sharing of information to happen immediately; any updating of messages can be done within a minute. In addition, the peer-to-peer network on social media allows the information to go viral¹⁸ (Carty, 2015). And as Terracina-Hartman, Bienkowski, Myers and Kanthawala (2013) argue, “one way to reach audiences is to recruit their influential peers to pass on information” (p. 144) because “peers ... rather than mass media were most influential in opinion formation” (p. 145). Carty (2015) adds that any Internet user can be both the receiver and the sender of messages. This means information sent out is not filtered like that from traditional media controlled by the elites. Plus, original images and raw footage of videos aiding the messages can easily be shared online if they are available in camera-ready smartphones, which ensure the authenticity and transparency of the disseminated information (Carty, 2015). The ICTs allow users to participate in the generation, distribution and circulation of information.

As it accelerates the distribution of information, web 2.0 also speeds up the activists’ process of galvanizing public support and recruiting participants on a large scale (Carty,

¹⁸ go viral: being sent rapidly over the Internet from one person to another (“Viral,” 2017)

2015; Chadha & Harlow, 2015; Wang, Madnick, Li, Alstott & Velu, 2015). Kaur (2015) presents that available online platforms have enhanced NGOs and Civil Society Organisations' ability to build coalitions with communities and mobilize public opinions in their favour toward a united cause. Moreover, with web 2.0 technologies, grassroots groups have been able to strengthen connections with domestic activists and those abroad (Sima, 2011).

Online repertoires of mobilization

In order to have a more conceptualized understanding of the tactical changes in social movements that have been enabled by the Internet, a closer look at the degrees of Internet involvement in the organization of movement activities is required. Earl and Kimport (2011) categorize online repertoires of mobilization into three groups, which are e-mobilizations, e-tactics and e-movements. They define e-mobilizations as “the use of online tools to [only] facilitate offline protest”, e-tactics as “discrete protest actions where participation occurs at least partially online”, and e-movements as “social movements that emerge and thrive [totally] online” (p. 233).

Similarly, Laer and Aelst (2010) also distinguish different online social movement repertoires into sets of internet-supported and internet-based actions (*Figure 2.2*). They explain, “Internet-supported actions refer to the traditional tools of social movements that have become easier to organise and coordinate thanks to the Internet. This ‘facilitating function’ [of the Internet], lowering tactic-related thresholds and making traditional protest action more transnational” (2010, p. 1148). Most of these tactics center around the Internet’s affordance to quickly and economically disseminate information to people from dispersed areas. Examples of this include calling for monetary donations on click-and-gives websites or by clicking on sponsors’ ads, asking the public to boycott products of companies who are lacking in social responsibility by disseminating online information about alternative products (consumer behaviour), or using the Internet to distribute instructive information to participants of street protests. In short, Internet-supported actions do not replace, but only support or facilitate the

organization of offline social movement activities.

On the other hand, Internet-based actions are the social movement repertoires that are “solely performed online” (Laer & Aelst, 2010, p. 1155). Examples include online petitions, email bombs, virtual sit-ins, culture jamming and a variety of hacktivism¹⁹ activities such as “email floods, website defacements” or the use of malicious software containing a virus (p. 1159). Carty (2015) also adds memes and whistle blowing to the list as other social movement repertoires that have been enabled by the Internet.

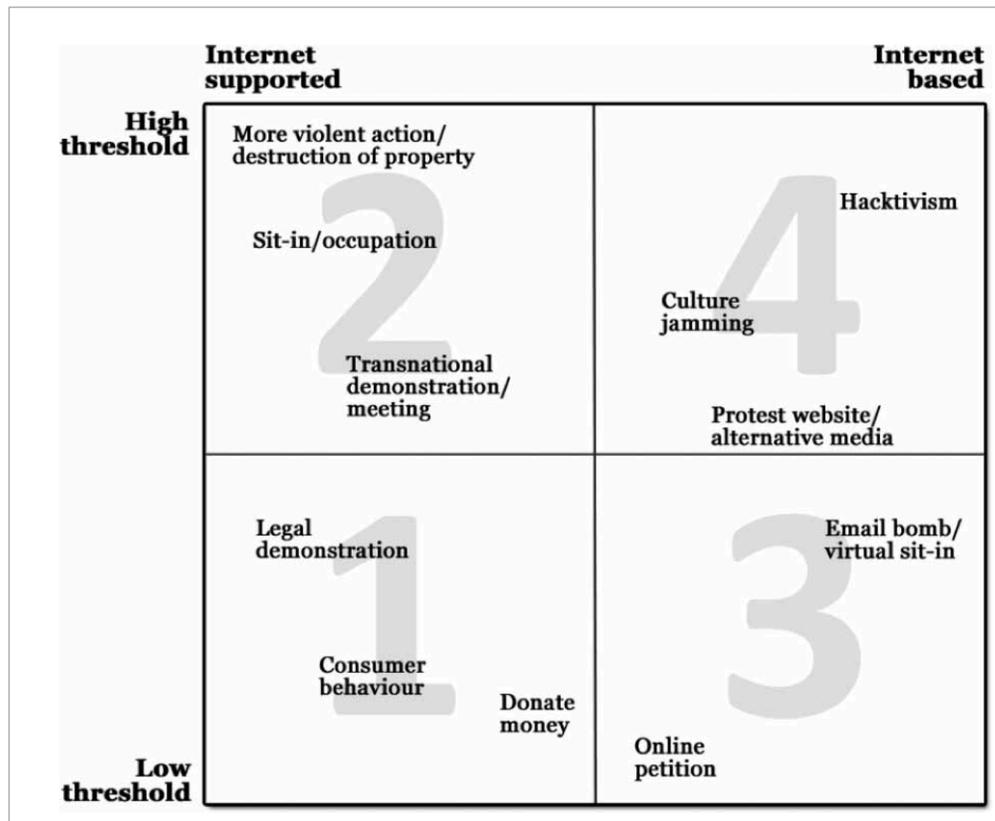


Figure 2.2. A typology of a new digitalized action repertoire (Laer & Aelst, 2010, p. 1149)

A crude comparison shows that Earl and Kim’s definition of e-mobilizations is equivalent to the set of Internet-supported actions listed in quadrant 1 and 2 of Laer and Aelst’ typology diagram (Figure 2.2), while e-tactics such as “online petition,

¹⁹ hacktivism: the practice of gaining unauthorized access to a computer system and carrying out various disruptive actions as a means of achieving political or social goals (“Hacktivism,” 2017)

boycotts, and letter and email campaigns” (Earl & Kimport, 2011, p. 233) are exactly the repertoires listed in quadrant 3. Likewise, e-movements are almost identical to the Internet-based repertoires listed in quadrant 4 that “exist only because of the Internet” (Laer & Aelst, 2010, p. 1148).

Some scholars use terms like “online mobilization tactics” (Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015) or “repertoires of online mobilization” (Theocharis, 2013) interchangeably with ‘e-tactics.’ Obviously, e-tactics do not work independently just to share information, yet perform mobilizing and empowering functions for social movement activities; they offer online spaces for the public to contribute their opinions and allow them to interact and respond to the activists’ calls for action.

More contemporary research on online activism has shown that e-tactics must not be limited to Internet-supported traditional mobilizing actions like online petitions, letter-writing campaigns, email bombing and boycotting as being listed in Earl (2006), Laer and Aelst (2010), or Earl and Kimport’s (2011) works. E-tactics can involve the use of social media, websites or blogs as long as they serve as a means for active movement organization and participation. For example, in a case study of Greenpeace using Facebook to campaign on climate change issues, Katz-Kimchi and Manosevitch (2015) argue that “Greenpeace’s choice to employ Facebook for the campaign is *in itself* an e-tactic” (p. 248). Theocharis’ (2013) paper examines the 2010 United Kingdom government funding cuts to education. Protestors against the cuts extensively used websites and blogs by loosely organized student groups to mobilize participants in more than 35 occupy events in opposition to the government’s plans.

Katz-Kimchi and Manosevitch’s (2015) analysis of e-tactics however, goes beyond Greenpeace’s employment of a social media platform for its campaign, to the content posted on its social media. In other words, the content of the statuses posted on the Greenpeace Facebook page during the campaign period is also considered an e-tactic. According to Katz-Kimchi and Manosevitch, “this content served as a call for action *as well as* a means of empowerment” (p. 259). In short, the definitions of e-tactics vary

across scholars' works. Most of the time they are referred to as 'actions,' at other times as 'functions.'

2.3 Impacts of online activism

2.3.1 Influence of social media on contemporary youth political engagement

It is suggested that social media have influenced the way young citizens lead their political and civic life (Xenos, Vromen & Loader, 2014). To be specific, youth are increasingly turning away from dutiful norms to more personalized and self-actualizing norms of political participation and civic engagement through their daily use of social media. Instead of joining political parties, voting or reading newspapers, young people in many parts of the world have adopted alternative ways to express and construct their political attitudes and identities. These include participating in social movements and engaging in everyday conversations about politics and social issues while in cyberspace.

Social media is a rich source of information for young netizens to stay updated with current affairs through daily interactions with their online networks. It is suggested that because of youth's everyday use of social media (which enhances their sense of belonging to those networks), they are unavoidably affected by peer-driven points of view and more likely to become involved in everyday political discourse (Xenos, Vromen & Loader, 2014). Social media has the ability to shift young people's attitudes regarding political and social issues from ignorance and apathy to acknowledgement and interest, not only to learn but also to take action.

Unlike involvement in traditional forms of mainstream political practices, young people can now be much more selective about which issues they want to follow and support. Amid the wide range of information generated by different political and civic groups on social media, young people have the option to support various movements that are most related to their personal lives. Scholars describe them as being "project oriented", or as those who "reflexively engage in lifestyle politics" (Loader, Vromen & Xenos, 2014, p. 145).

Subsequently scholars believe it is unfair to accuse young people of being politically

apathetic just because they abandon mainstream political practices. In this era of ICTs young people are more likely attracted to the idea of organizing and participating in politics and civic duties online.

2.3.2. Influence of blogs and social media on the media agenda setting process

Mainstream media is considered a valuable stakeholder which can immensely contribute to the success of movement advocacy activities, boosting the activists' efforts in disseminating information and fostering public discourses (Yang & Calhoun, 2007; Micó & Casero-Ripollés, 2014; Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015). Because mainstream media have long held the power to set the agenda for the public activists "turn to media to build support for their issue and to gain legitimacy for themselves" (Sommerfeldt, 2013, p. 362). However, several scholars have pointed out that traditional mass media are no longer the mono-players to set the public news agenda. The development of web 2.0 technologies allow users to generate, distribute and circulate information without barriers, so that blogs and social networking sites have become new components of the media agenda-building process (Ceron, Curini & Iacus, 2014; Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Jacobson, 2013; Luo, 2014; Meraz, 2009).

Scholars agree that mainstream media now have to pay close attention to what is happening in cyberspace to develop their stories. As suggested by Farrell and Drezner (2008), when a critical number of social media users and bloggers together raise their voice about a particular issue, "it can pique the interest of mainstream media outlets" (p. 25). Similarly, Bui (2016) and Luo (2014) suggest journalists refer to the issues debated online and public opinions as a source of information and insight for their articles. Sometimes the expertise of online opinion leaders also appeals to journalists (Farrell & Drezner, 2008). Theoretically speaking, the influence of online media on mainstream media coverage is referred to as 'bottom-up agenda setting':

A communication process through which grassroots, nonmainstream, or citizen media, usually enabled by online media such as blogging, discussion forums, or social networking sites, serve as significant agenda setters to transfer issue salience from non-

mainstream to mainstream media and as a result build the public agenda (Fu & Chau, 2014, p. 311).

2.4 Critiques of online activism

2.4.1 Slacktivism

Some critics argue that online activism is better referred to as 'slacktivism' because it does not require much commitment from participants and/or produce any tangible effect (Gladwell, 2010). The term is said to be a portmanteau of 'slacker' - "a person who is lazy and avoids work" ("Slacker," 2016) - and 'activism' ("Slacktivism," 2016). It is defined by Morozov as "the ideal type of activism for a lazy generation: why bother with sit-ins and the risk of arrest, police brutality, or torture if one can be as loud campaigning in the virtual space?" (Morozov, 2009, para. 2).

The meaning of slacktivism also manifests in the word 'slack', which is defined as "not putting enough care, attention or energy into something and so not doing it well enough" ("Slack," 2016). It implies that this new form of activism lacks "personal sacrifice" and does not appear to be "result-oriented" (Budish, 2012, p. 750). The term 'slacktivism' therefore, refers to the easy endorsing activities performed online that do not cost participants much in terms of time, effort and safety, and that do not lead to actual results on the ground. A vivid example of such easy endorsing activities is "an online letter-writing campaign in which supporters are encouraged to simply copy and paste from a template form of the letter. Participants aren't asked to come up with their own words. It is not even clear if they read the entire content of the letters they send" (McCafferty, 2011, p. 18).

Other examples include signing an online petition, sharing a YouTube video, liking/commenting/sharing a Facebook status, reposting a Tweet or embedding a hash tag (#) in social media posts that are related to certain social campaigns (Knibbs, 2013; Lo, 2013; Budish, 2012).

It is said that there is a disconnect between what people learn about social issues and what they actually do to address those issues when participating in this kind of 'click-and-like' activism (Glenn, 2015). Slacktivists are condemned for not "taking any corollary

action outside the digital world like donating money or volunteering,” (Knibbs, 2013, para. 5) or “participating in street rallies, handing out flyers to passers-by or engaging people in profound discussions about human rights” (Lo, 2013, para. 1). Furthermore, they are criticized for not carrying the genuine “emotional fire” that supporters of a social movement are supposed to possess (Dennis, 2011, p. 18).

Slacktivism, however, still appears to be very attractive and increasingly popular because slacktivists can enjoy the “satisfying and rewarding” feelings of supporting some social causes without “scarifying anything except for a single click” (Knibbs, 2013, para. 1). That is why it is also tagged as “arm-chair activism” – a relaxing form of activism (as cited in Budish, 2012, p. 750). In addition, it gives the slacktivists either peace of mind by convincing them that they are not ignorant about social injustice or “an illusion of having a meaningful impact on the world” (Morozov, 2009, para. 1). It is also popular because when sharing a social campaign they support on Facebook or Twitter, their actions are driven by the belief that their friends or followers will perceive them as an “informed [and] magnanimous person” (Knibbs, 2013, para. 3). These outcomes suggest that, in the end, slacktivism is whimsically all about self-satisfaction.

Morozov (2009) fears that the rise of slacktivism threatens the existence of traditional activism because, since slacktivism has become so convenient, people may turn away from the conventional movement activities like demonstrations, rallies, sit-ins or street protests, which are thought effective but time-consuming, costly, challenging and even dangerous, as they will most likely have confrontation with police.

2.4.2 Weak-ties

Online activism is also criticized for being unsustainable as it can only create networks of weak-ties among activists and participants of social campaigns/movements (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2009).

According to Gladwell (2010), strong-ties and hierarchical organizations are prerequisite conditions for “high-risk activism” (para. 12) or “activism that challenges the status quo - that attacks deeply rooted problems” (para. 11). He points out typical

examples of high-risk activism (such as Black Americans' civil rights movement in the 1960s or East Germans' protests that led to the Peaceful Revolution in the late 1980s), in which strong-ties were one of the core factors enabling those events to happen and achieve positive end results. Such strong-ties were built upon the personal connections, mostly friendships, which each participant already had with other members of the movement groups.

Moreover, members of high-risk activism are required to adhere to certain common goals, strategies, procedures, rules and disciplines of their organizations that are structured by hierarchical leadership (Gladwell, 2010). This means everyone involved has a responsibility and the organization's authority is in charge of ensuring unity and coordination between their members, which generates a higher likelihood of the organization achieving their ultimate goal.

On the contrary, participants of online activism are not organized into a hierarchy. Instead, they build networks of equal voices in which "decisions are made through consensus" (Gladwell, 2010, para. 22). Gladwell believes that reaching agreements on "difficult choices about tactics or strategy or philosophical direction" (para. 24) through online discussions is a big challenge for groups without hierarchical leadership.

In addition, the connections between participants of online activism are not strong-ties. According to Gladwell (2010), online social movements are built around weak-tie networks of activists and participants, and such loose networks are only "resilient and adaptable in low-risk situations" (para. 23). One might disagree and bring up the Arab Spring movement as an example of high-risk activism that was organized online, (specifically through social media). But in such a case, Gladwell's argument can still be defended, given that social media only played particular facilitating roles such as disseminating information or scheduling protests, whereas the offline personal relationships nourished by the activists throughout many years of workshops and conferences were the core of the movement (Budish, 2012; MacKinnon, 2012).

2.4.3 Dangers and obstacles to the activists

Though the Internet empowers grassroots activism, it does not mean that online activists are not exposed to any risk for speaking up and mobilizing in the digital world. While Zandt (2010) declares that social media has become a new safe public sphere for people to freely express their opinions on social and political issues without fear of being abused or harassed, other scholars point out that those who proactively initiate and organize movement activities are the ones who face the underlying dangers and obstacles of digital activism (Benlevi, 2012; Budish, 2012).

First of all, it is most likely that online activists will encounter Internet surveillance that may not only threaten their personal safety but also affect their supporters' personal and professional lives. There have been many reports of governments keeping digital activists under surveillance, either by having the police closely watch their performances on social media or by forcing the Internet intermediaries and companies that operate email and search engines to turn over the activists' data (Benlevi, 2012; MacKinnon, 2012; Szoka, 2012).

In countries where authoritarian regimes hold power like China, Iran or Vietnam, digital activists who appear to be very vocal in their criticisms of the governments' human right policies, not to mention those aiming at systemic political change, will most likely face numerous types of suppression such as arrest, jail, torture, and even a death sentence (Benlevi, 2012; Mackinnon, 2012; Reporters Without Borders, 2014). MacKinnon (2012) adds that in some cases, the activists' friends and supporters are subjected to harassment as well as expulsion from schools and work places for no apparent reason.

Secondly, apart from coping with heavy workloads of organizing and mobilizing activities, online activists carry another burden of protecting their campaigns from the opposition party's counter-attacks. There are many ways for governments and organizations to disrupt the activist's causes, using the same strategy that the activists have adopted to protest against them, which is taking advantage of the Internet for revenge. The "revenge" acts range from using key-logger spy software to capture the

personal data of the participants, to releasing malicious links that spread viruses into the participants' computers (Budish, 2012).

Thirdly, online activists have to surrender some of their independence and control during the process of distributing sensitive information and graphics when using third-party services (Budish, 2015; Cammaerts, 2015). Budish (2012) takes YouTube as an example to illustrate this point:

YouTube videos, for example, can be critical for raising awareness about issues and events. But relying on YouTube entails relying on Google and its policies. For Egyptian activists, such reliance proved problematic when Google initially decided to take down their video of police abuse for being too graphic. Google eventually restored the video, but as William Youmans and Jillian York note, by that point the damage was done: “[W]hen videos are restored, however, the impact on behalf of activists may be diminished by the loss of viewers and because the video may be overtaken by more recent events” (Budish, 2012, p. 754).

Budish (2012) thinks it is a nuisance when activists must rely on third parties who refuse to provide their services when they are needed the most.

2.4.4 Defenders of online activism

Contrary to the criticism of online activism, Shirky (2011) and Knibbs (2013) are the two who firmly defend it. In response to opinions, mostly by Gladwell (2010), that social media only promotes slacktivism that doesn't lead to effective political actions on the ground, Shirky concedes that “this critique is correct but not central to the question of social media's power” (2010, para. 34). Shirky (2010) emphasizes the power of social media to enhance the coordinating process of real-world actions, rather than replacing it. He argues that although social media does not allow uncommitted groups or slacktivists to come close to creating changes with their clicks of a mouse, it does allow the committed groups to perform more effectively (in terms of distributing information,

coordinating activities and documenting real-world actions) than their predecessors could have done before the emergence of the Internet and social media (Gladwell & Shirky, 2011; Shirky, 2010).

Knibbs (2013) approaches Gladwell's criticism from another angle. She believes it is not fair that every online campaign should be judged only on its consequential actions on the ground. Instead, critics should make each campaign evaluation unique to its goal. She quotes Mary Joyce, the co-founder and public manager of the Digital Activism Research Project, to explain, "different kinds of causes ... require different kinds of action" (as cited in Knibbs, 2013, para. 13). In other words, a campaign shouldn't have to produce street protests to be considered effective. If the goal of a campaign is only to raise public awareness, to start a conversation on the issue, to call upon online micro-donations for the cause, or to elicit oral responses from the targeted governmental officials and corporations, then the fact that the campaign does not lead to any or many offline demonstrations can be tolerated. In such cases, evaluations should focus on the reactions of the public audience and the targets of the campaign, in which an assessment of the benefits of online media for eliciting those reactions would be very helpful.

Even when an online campaign that aims for tangible results such as a policy change (instead of raising public awareness, stimulating conversations, or eliciting oral responses from the target) cannot achieve its goal, critics may still be misguided in criticizing online activism for being ineffective soon after the campaign has just ended. Evgeny Morozov reminds his readers that:

Digital activism should not be evaluated solely on the efficacy with which it achieves the goals it sets for itself. Rather, since it clearly has an ecological effect on the broader political culture that produces it, we need to assess its usefulness based on the overall

goals and directions of that culture (Morozov, 2012, p. 327).

With this statement, Morozov (2012) indicates that the success of a particular online campaign in a country does not guarantee political progress for that country in the long run. He explains, the decentralized and leaderless structures of online activism groups are not capable of handling extreme competitiveness in the political arena. According to Morozov, social and political changes demand the leadership of centralized and hierarchical groups. However, his statement could also be understood in the opposite way: the failure of a particular online campaign in a country does not mean hope for change has been dashed. From this aspect, Morozov's statement has unexpectedly supported Shirky's praise for the digital tools, which Shirky believes "strengthen civil society and the public sphere," (Shirky, 2011, para. 17) and enhance democracy in the long term. Therefore, even if an online campaign fails to reach its goal, it has at least made an impact on the society's process of obtaining freedom of speech and freedom of association, which can serve as stepping stones to future political revolution. This argument is supported by Harlow (2011), who believes "the pro-justice movement continues" even when a social movement emerging on Facebook has diminished, so it is reckless to "dismiss entirely the potential of using social media sites like Facebook for social change" (p. 240).

In response to critics' concerns about state control of the Internet and social media to suppress dissent, Shirky (2011) acknowledges that many governments, from authoritarian to democratic ones, are increasingly adopting this strategy to weaken social movements. But he thinks that this strategy, however, is problematic in many ways. For example, shutting down the Internet to prevent activists from coordinating and communicating with their supporters in the short term will alert a larger population to the on-going political conflict, and in the long term will harm the economy (Shirky,

2011).

In addition, the fact that states prevail against online activism implies that online activism works. Shirky argues, if online activism did not make any impact, governments and attacked organizations would have not been so worried that they had to apply counter strategies, such as surveillance and censorship, to interrupt the activists' organizing and mobilizing efforts:

[T]he increased sophistication and force of state reaction ... underline the basic point: these tools alter the dynamics of the public sphere. Where the state prevails, it is only by reacting to citizens' ability to be more publicly vocal and to coordinate more rapidly and on a larger scale than before these tools existed (Gladwell & Shirky, 2011, para. 8).

In conclusion, the Internet together with online media, is obviously of benefit to contemporary social movement organizers. However, critics still disagree on whether activist's adoption of digital technologies overall advances or challenges their causes, and whether digital activism in the end strengthens civil societies and weakens authoritarian regimes or vice versa. Critics also disagree about whether the growing popularity of online campaigns activates virtual public spheres (thus contributing to the "net improvement of democracy" (Gladwell & Shirky, 2011, para. 7)) or whether it simply embodies slacktivism (which is convenient but ineffective), consigning the conventional form of activism (which is challenging but effective), to oblivion. According to Fuchs (2014), only "empirical inquiries that cover aspects of both political communication and political economy" (p. 189) can provide answers to these questions.

2.5 Approaches of communication for social change

2.5.1 Communication for social change and development

According to Parks, Gray-Felder, Hunt and Byrne (2005), the use of communication for development and social change [CDSC] was formalized shortly after World War II and manifested in two distinguished paradigms. The first paradigm of CDSC, (which is closely

associated with Western efforts to address post-war underdeveloped countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa) originates from “modernization theories and information-persuasion strategies” (Parks, Gray-Felder, Hunt & Byrne, 2005, p.3). These strategies promote top-down communication approaches like diffusion of innovations, social marketing, edutainment-education, and behavior change communication.

The second paradigm, based on “critical theory, collective learning, information-sharing and dialogic processes,” promotes a horizontal, more participatory communication approach called ‘communication for social change’ (Parks, Gray-Felder, Hunt & Byrne, 2005, p. 5). It challenges the first paradigm’s belief that social changes happen when individuals are exposed to innovations, fed with information and convinced to accept and change their behaviors according to Western development ideas and practices (Waisbord, n.d.). Moreover, instead of addressing the immediate social problems that are affecting individuals, communication for social change tackles the underlying causes of the problems such as oppression or injustice. Therefore, communication for social change approaches such as advocacy, social mobilization or public will campaigning tend to focus on empowering communities to own the process of communicating for social change through dialogue, debates and negotiations (rather than persuading or forcing them to simply accept new ways of doing things), encouraging community members to become their own change agents (rather than having social changes driven by external agencies), and generating supporting social, cultural, economic and political environments in which changes can occur (rather than aiming toward changing individual behaviors) (Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani, & Lewis, 2002; Waisbord, n.d.). In the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement, all of the three approaches listed above have been utilized.

2.5.2 Advocacy

‘Advocacy’ is a set of communication activities that aim to gain political support as well as social acceptance of certain issues. Advocacy activities target not only people of influence, like legislators and influential organizations, but also ordinary citizens, to

support changes in public policy or reallocation of resources within their political, economic and social systems. Advocacy seeks to empower communities to become their own advocates, who in turn stimulate responses from policymakers and authorized institutions regarding their concerns (Moseley, Melton & Francisco, 2008; Servaes & Malikhao, 2010; Waisbord, n.d.).

According to Servaes and Malikhao (2010), mainstream media play two pivotal roles in advocacy. On the one hand, by disseminating information, media assist advocates in raising public awareness about certain issues, stimulating public debates, mobilizing public support for possible solutions and galvanizing the public into taking actions needed to address the issues. On the other hand, media serve as gatekeepers that give decision-makers access to “necessary information and feedback needed to reach a decision” (Servaes, 2007, p. 499). Therefore, obtaining coverage by the mass media such as television, radio, newspapers and magazines, is one of the most popular advocacy activities. This is also known as media advocacy.

However, advocacy is not solely associated with media actions. For example, advocacy promotes the idea that communities “gain control and power to transform their environments” (Waisbord, n.d., p. 22) by putting pressure on organizations and governments to modify policies, so advocacy also includes other activities that can enhance public pressure such as organizing rallies or news-worthy events, petitioning or obtaining endorsements from well-known people (Waisbord, n.d.).

Petitions can be described as letters of denunciation with a large number of signatures from supporting communities which present rising issues and request resolutions. They are sent to decision-makers that have either political or economic powers to alter the situation (by preventing the predicted problems from happening or fixing the problems that have already happened) (Briassoulis, 2010).

Celebrity endorsement is another popular technique used by many non-profit organizations, including big ones like the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund [UNICEF] or Oxfam, to enhance advocacy efforts (Brockington, 2014). As celebrities tend to attract media attention, celebrity advocacy helps a great deal in

raising public awareness about social causes (Park & Cho, 2015). Celebrity advocacy also increases the possibility for social movements to raise funds, recruit volunteers, mobilize potential supporters, and gain access to political decision makers (Meyer & Gamson, 1995).

2.5.3 Social mobilization

Social mobilization is a “comprehensive planning approach [closely associated with UNICEF’s communication for development strategy] that emphasizes political coalition building and community action” (in Waisbord, n.d., p. 26). Central to social mobilization interventions is empowering the community to identify, assess and analyze their own problems and solutions. Allies at all levels will then be involved in supporting the community to take action by providing available services, human and material resources (Papoutsaki, 2015; Waisbord, n.d.).

2.5.4 Public communication campaign – public will campaign

Public communication campaigns are defined as a series of organized communication activities that aim to inform or influence the behaviors of a large number of audiences toward a positive social cause within a specific period of time. Public communication campaigns use different media channels to deliver selective messages to the target audiences (Coffman, 2002; Atkin & Rice, 2013).

There are two main types of public communication campaigns. One is an ‘individual behavior change’ campaign and the other is ‘public will’, also known as a ‘policy change’, campaign (Coffman, 2003). Individual behavior change campaigns, as their name implies, aim at changing the current behaviors of individuals that will directly lead to an improvement for the “individual or social well-being” (Coffman, 2002, p. 7). Public will (or policy change) campaigns, on the other hand, aim at creating a public will that, in turn, motivates public officials to make alternative policy actions that eventually bring desirable positive outcomes. Public will campaigns focus “less on the individual who is performing the behavior ... and more on the public’s responsibility to do something that

will create the environment needed to support that behavior change” (Coffman, 2002, p. 7).

The advancement of ICTs has made tremendous impact on all of these approaches of communication for social change. With the availability of online petition platforms like change.org, thepetitionsite.com or ipetitions.com, online petitioning has become increasingly popular. With the rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, celebrity advocacy has become much more convenient, fast, cheap and proactive (Jost, 2012). It has also proved that the utilization of online media, especially social media, results in higher social mobilization speeds (Wang, Madnick, Alstott & Velu, 2015). The ‘Save Son Doong’ movement is a typical example of the growing grassroots online activism in Vietnam, in which different approaches of communication for social change have been utilized and facilitated by the growth of the Internet, as well as the proliferation of online media platforms.

2.6 Summary

It is undeniable that the development of the Internet and online media technologies has greatly influenced the mobilization of social changes worldwide. Not only have they altered the structure of social movement, providing opportunities for grassroots activism to emerge, but they have also enriched the pool of social movement repertoires. This has been achieved through a variety of e-tactics that improve the networking of social activists and allies, the dissemination of information, the mobilization of public engagement, the organization of movement activities and other empowering and social mobilizing efforts.

Regardless of the many benefits that online media have provided to contemporary social movements, some critics are not convinced that successful social movements are significantly contributed to by digital platforms. They indicate that participating in online movements is an act of slacktivism that does not lead to actual results on the ground. In addition, they criticize online movements for being unsustainable because the networks of activists that organize online movements tend to consist of weak-ties and lack

detailed strategies and solid leadership. Last but not least, critics express deep concern for the safety of online activists who might be kept under state cyber surveillance or have their lives disrupted through the counter-strategies of the opponent.

The scholarship of communication for development and social change [CDSC] plays an important part in the studies of social movements. The second paradigm of CDSC, also known as 'communication for social change', promotes the idea that in order to bring forth changes in society, social movements need to tackle the underlying cause of the problem, aiming at empowering communities to become their own advocates for change in the policy and management system. Example approaches of communication for social change include advocacy, social mobilization and public will campaigns. With the development of the ICTs, it has become much easier for anyone, especially activists with limited resources, to adopt these approaches and generate change. The 'Save Son Doong' movement is a typical example of activists with limited resources employing online media to organize advocacy, social mobilization and public will campaign activities to create enough public pressure on the decision makers that they are forced to address the issue.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Overview

For this research project, I analyze the case of 'Save Son Doong' - an online environmental movement in Vietnam started by a group of young citizen activists in October 2014. I adopted a mixed methodology including in-depth individual interviewing and a focus group as the main data collection methods, complemented by content mapping and content analysis to conduct a comprehensive study of the 'Save Son Doong' case.

This chapter explains why I chose 'Save Son Doong' as the case study and adopted the mixed methodology for this research. It also explains how I carried out the data collection process. The evaluation and theoretical frameworks adopted to assess how the activists have used online media to run the 'Save Son Doong' movement are also covered in this chapter. Finally, I spend the last section of this chapter reflecting upon the limitations of this research.

2. Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis for this research project is the 'Save Son Doong' movement with particular focus on its organizers. The reasons why the 'Save Son Doong' movement is chosen as the case study for this research project are presented in the following paragraph.

First, the movement is organized and led by young Vietnamese citizen activists, who had limited financial resources, or affiliations with NGOs which work toward protecting the environment, when they initiated this movement. This excludes environmental campaigns initiated or sponsored by an NGO from the beginning. Secondly, the 'Save Son Doong' movement represents a small number of movements that adopt online mobilizing actions to protect the environment in Vietnam. This is to set them apart from entirely offline movements. These criteria are important in generating findings which explain how much the Internet has enabled citizens in organizing an influential

movement despite their shortage of funding and/or lack of formal leadership or organizational structure and support.

3. Data sources and collection

Using 'Save Son Doong' as the case study for the research, I adopted a mixed methodology which included individual interviews and focus group as the main data collection methods, to be complemented by content mapping and content analysis approaches.

Of the three methods being used, the individual interviews and focus group are categorized into direct data collection, as such methods "put the researcher in charge" (O'Leary, 2010, p. 180). Individual interviews and focus group did allow me to ask what I wanted in my own wording, order, prompts and probes. However, the interview and focus group respondents might have obscured facts in order to impress me. Therefore, I also deployed the collection of indirect data using online content mapping and analysis to avoid (or minimize) the potential drawback of the two other approaches. The online content "exists regardless of ... [my] questioning, prompting, and probing" (O'Leary, 2010, p. 208) and I just needed to locate, gather and analyze it.

Indeed, the combination of direct and indirect data collection has given me a comprehensive source of findings to answer the research questions.

3.1 In-depth semi-structured individual interview (direct)

I conducted three in-depth interviews with the movement's leaders and initiators. As the administrators of the 'Save Son Doong' Facebook fan page, two of the interviewees (whose names are coded as TB and WT) responded to my inbox messages in which I invited them to participate in the interviews. WT introduced me to the third interviewee (LA4F), whom I got in touch with via text message. The process between first approaching the activists online and I actually meeting and interviewed them took three months.

As mentioned above, individual interviews aimed to find out information I would not be able to collect from the online content of the movement. Through in-depth interviews, I was able to explore what had motivated each of the activists to initiate and/or participate in the movement, what roles they played or are playing in the movement, what conditions challenged and/or facilitated them to run the movement, what lessons they have learned from the movement and what visions they have for the future of the movement. In the interviews, I also questioned what goals, strategies and tactics they set for the movement. Additionally, I asked them to evaluate the benefits, as well as drawbacks, of the online media tools they use(d) for the movement.

The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed unexpected and interesting data to emerge (O'Leary, 2010). I also used the information provided by former interviewees to develop related questions for the later ones (*see Appendix 2A for the interview questionnaire*).

As the interviewees' ages are close to mine, the interviews were conducted in an informal manner, in friendly and relaxed settings, and in venues of their choice. The first one was conducted at the interviewee's home, the second one was at a coffee shop close to the interviewee's workplace, and the last one was through Skype. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. All of them were audio recorded, transcribed in Vietnamese and summarized in English.

3.2 Focus group interview (direct)

A focus group interview was conducted with four core members of the group (their names are coded as TOG, GYT, DCS and JG), who are based in Ho Chi Minh city (SSD-HCM) and organize most of the 'Save Son Doong' offline events. While the leader of the group - WT, whom I interviewed individually through Skype, was away for study in the United States, I met four of the team members in Ho Chi Minh City.

The focus group interviews provided me with rich, in-depth data which provided insight into the organization of the 'Save Son Doong' movement activities. Besides asking similar questions to the in-depth interviews (which were related to motivations,

roles, challenges, and lessons-learned), I focused on examining how the team worked together in brainstorming for the offline events, how effectively the use of online media facilitates their offline events and how they overcame obstacles when organizing offline movement events. In addition, the dynamic discussions among the respondents prompted them to share things that were not been asked.

The focus group with the ‘Save Son Doong’ offline event team saved time and money. It reinforced the team members’ supporting opinions of each other, while it helped me to avoid overlapping information. Moreover, I was able to observe the interaction between the team members when they discussed interview topics together, which I consider an important element of analysis for this case study.

3.3 Online content mapping and analysis (indirect)

Apart from in-depth individual interviews and the focus group, indirect data collection helped me to discover useful information that I did not intend to find out, generating a more diverse and lively set of findings for the project (O’Leary, 2010).

Firstly, I mapped and delved into available and accessible web-based documents related to the movement, including the content posted on its website, petition sites and social media channels. Mapping allowed me to find out which platform the ‘Save Son Doong’ activists utilize the most in the sharing of information about the movement, circulation of public dialogue about the issue, raising of funds, recruitment of volunteers or creation of identity for the movement. Such findings supported the process of evaluating the activists’ effort in using online media to distribute movement materials.

After mapping, I applied ‘the interview’ content analysis technique introduced by O’Leary (2010) to ascertain more detailed findings about how strategically they use chosen online media platforms to run the movement. O’Leary’s ‘interview technique’ entails the researcher seeking information relevant to their enquiry by “highlight[ing] the passages in the document that provide the answers” (O’Leary, 2010, p. 224). Using this technique, I found out what movement activities they had organized and what content and kind of content (text only, images, video, link) were communicated to the

public audience. I could also evaluate how the public audience supported the movement activities and if the messages delivered by the 'Save Son Doong' group were consistent, understandable, credible and influential.

4. Ethical considerations

The research project was conducted according to the ethical standards required by the Unitec Research & Ethics Committee [UREC].

After the UREC approved my ethics application in late March 2016, I returned to Vietnam and spent three weeks there collecting direct data from the interviews and focus group. The time between the interviews and the focus group was spent collecting indirect data from the online content of the movement.

Prior to the interviews and focus group, all of the respondents were informed that the information they provided would only be used for the purpose of my research project. Although the activists had already publicly revealed their identities, thereby potentially exposing themselves to emotional or physical harm such as surveillance or attacks by members of the opposition, I affirmed that their identities would be kept anonymous in my research.

All participants were briefed about their right to withdraw at any time prior to the completion of the research project and to see the finished research document as well as consent. They were also informed that their discussions would be audio recorded and transcribed when participating in this project. All participants signed the consent forms as they agreed to participate (*see Appendix 4A*).

5. Evaluation framework and theoretical frameworks

This research project is a process of evaluation that measures the effort of the citizen activists in using online media for the 'Save Son Doong' movement, rather than the effect (outcome) or the community-level change (impact) resulting from the movement (*Figure 3.1*).

Initially I chose this type of evaluation because the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement is still going on. Secondly, a process evaluation will provide findings that can analyze what worked and what did not work, so that the activists can make decisions about improving or modifying their movement. A process evaluation is meant to measure not only the direct outputs of the movement, but the effort of the activists, as well. It is used to examine what materials are disseminated and what and activities are organized for the movement, and how well they are being implemented (Coffman, 2002; O’Leary, 2010). It helps determine if the movement is “delivered as it was intended” (Valente & Kwan, 2013, p. 85) so that the activists can reflect on their performance and adjust accordingly to defined challenges, as well as new opportunities emerging from the evaluation process (Coffman, 2002; Atkin and Rice, 2013).

Evaluation Type	Definition/Purpose	Example Questions
1. Formative	Assesses the strengths and weaknesses of campaign materials and strategies before or during the campaign’s implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How does the campaign’s target audience think about the issue? ▪ What messages work with what audiences? ▪ Who are the best messengers?
2. Process	<i>Measures effort</i> and the direct outputs of campaigns — what and how much was accomplished. Examines the campaign’s implementation and how the activities involved are working.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How many materials have been put out? ▪ What has been the campaign’s reach? ▪ How many people have been reached?
3. Outcome	<i>Measures effect</i> and changes that result from the campaign. Assesses outcomes in the target populations or communities that come about as a result of grantee strategies and activities. Also measures policy changes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has there been any affective change (beliefs, attitudes, social norms)? ▪ Has there been any behavior change? ▪ Have any policies changed?
4. Impact	<i>Measures community-level change</i> or longer-term results that are achieved as a result of the campaign’s aggregate effects on individuals’ behavior and the behavior’s sustainability. Attempts to determine whether the campaign caused the effects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has the behavior resulted in its intended outcomes (e.g., lower cancer rates, less violence in schools)? ▪ Has there been any systems-level change?

Figure 3.1. Four Evaluation Types (Coffman, 2002, p. 13)

Though this research is a process evaluation, I still conducted a brief assessment of the immediate outcomes and impact resulting from the movement activities because it is useful to answer RQ3 “*What outcomes have they achieved?*”

In order to evaluate the immediate outcomes and impact of the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement, I used the ‘General Theory of Change for Policy Change Campaigns’ model introduced by Coffman (2003) (Figure 3.2). Applying this particular model to the research is relevant since it was developed to evaluate the effectiveness of public will/policy change campaigns and the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement is a series of communication for social change activities including two public will campaigns. This means I will look at both the short-term outcomes and intermediate outcomes of the movement. These include the media coverage of the Son Doong cable car issue, the community awareness of the issue, the community support for the movement and support from policymakers that help the ‘Save Son Doong’ group come closer to achieving the ultimate goal of the movement.

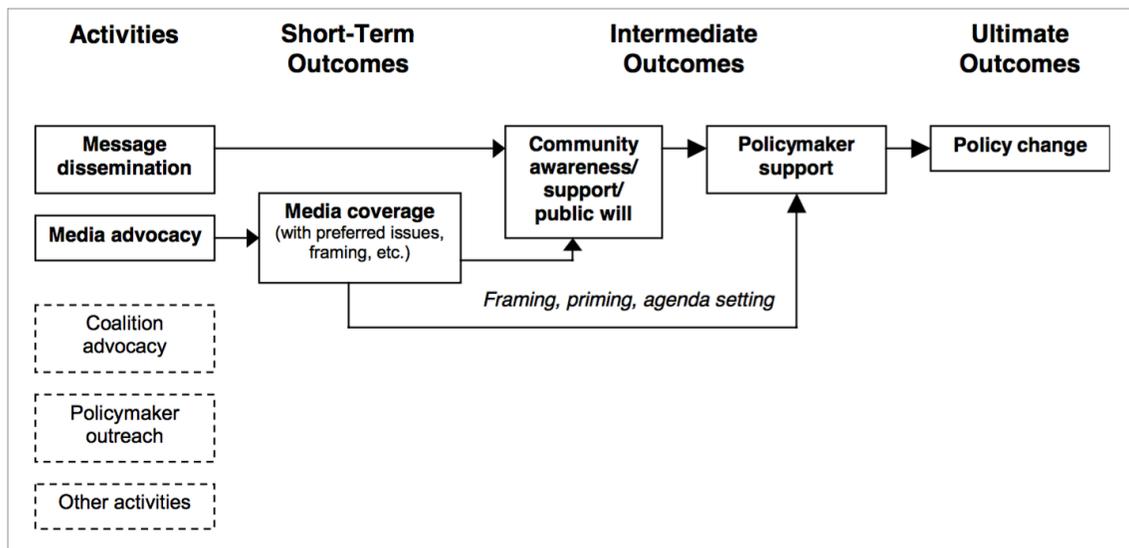


Figure 3.2. General Theory of Change for Policy Change Campaigns (Coffman, 2003, p. 6)

6. Limitations of the research

The methodology was well designed. The interview and focus group respondents are young people, who are active and open, thus easy to work with. In addition, the fact that I am a cultural insider, who has close social proximity with the respondents, helped me to easily follow and absorb the information they provided.

However, I could still have improved the study if I had had more time for the project. By saying that, I mean if I had blended myself into the 'Save Son Doong' group, joined them in organizing movement activities, observed and learned how they had gone through the process or overcome the challenges, I would have been able to better understand their working efforts. As a result, I might have been able to provide more practical recommendations.

Furthermore, no interview was conducted with VAA and no focus group was conducted with the A4F team. If these individuals had also participated in this research, they would have offered more opinions regarding the benefits and challenges of using online media for activism purposes, potentially offering additional insight into the discussion.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The 'Save Son Doong' movement, initiated by young Vietnamese citizen activists, opposes the provincial government and the Sun Group's projected construction of a cable car system into Son Doong Cave, the world's largest cave located in Quang Binh, Vietnam. In this movement, the activists have applied different communication for social change approaches including advocacy, social mobilization and public will campaigning. These involved several online and offline activities aiming to raise public awareness, stimulate media coverage and information transparency, encourage public discourse, and galvanize support from different stakeholders surrounding the issue. In order to facilitate the execution of these activities, they have employed various online media platforms such as emails, online petition sites (thepetitionsite.com and tutela.vn), blogs (wordpress), social networking sites (Facebook and Twitter), content sharing sites (YouTube and Instagram), event management sites (ticketbox.vn) and applications (Google form).

Started in October 2014, the 'Save Son Doong' movement has been in operation for almost two years, yet has not achieved the ultimate goal of terminating the construction of a cable car system into Son Doong Cave. Since the movement's inception however, the activists have produced a diverse set of online and offline activities, which have resulted in some positive outcomes for the movement, especially the postponement of the Son Doong cable car project.

What is worthy of attention is the fact that the movement is lead by a group of young citizens who had no former connection to each other, little affiliation with environmental NGOs and limited financial resources. Yet they managed to not only bypass the Vietnamese state-controlled media system to raise their voices and public awareness, but also overcame geographical barriers to network, communicate and coordinate actions on the Internet. This phenomenon made me wonder who they are and how the use of online media helps them with their activist work. Answers to these enquiries will not only provide an understanding of the 'Save Son Doong' movement

from the perspective of online grassroots youth environmental activism, but also help to sketch out an overall picture of Internet-facilitated communication for social change in Vietnam.

Guided by the research question **“How do young Vietnamese citizens use online media for environmental activism?”** this thesis focuses on exploring the profile of the ‘Save Son Doong’ activists and their utilization of online media in the movement. This chapter, therefore, presents a comprehensive set of raw data to be analyzed and discussed in the following chapter. Discussing the sub-questions (below) in relation to this data, will help in answering the (above) central research question to conclude the thesis.

- ***RQ1: What is the profile of the young Vietnamese citizen activists that initiated the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement?***
- ***RQ2: What movement activities have they performed since its inception to date?***
- ***RQ3: What outcomes have they achieved?***
- ***RQ4: How does the use of online media impact their performances of those activities and their achievements of the outcomes?***
- ***RQ5: What are their perceptions of using online media for activism purposes?***
- ***RQ6: What can we learn from their operation about online citizen activism in Vietnam?***

To begin with, this chapter outlines the structure of the movement in terms of timeline, objectives, leadership and activity so that readers can have an overview of the movement before reading details about it. The chapter then describes the activists’ backgrounds, the reasons for initiate the movement and the formation of the movement alliance. A descriptive mapping of the movement’s activities (together with the mix of online media used for this movement) is included as well. The chapter also covers some outcomes that the movement has achieved, as this is useful data in analyzing how the activists’ use of online media impacts on their performance in

organizing the movement activities, (which is discussed in the next chapter). Last but not least, the chapter shares the activists' opinions on the benefits, challenges and drawbacks of using online media for activism.

4.2 The structure of the 'Save Son Doong' movement

For ease of presentation, the findings for the 'Save Son Doong' movement is divided into three phases - phase 1 (October 2014 – February 2015), gap phase (March 2015 – July 2015) and phase 2 (August 2015 – now). Although when initiating the movement all of the activists aimed towards a common goal, (which is to terminate the construction of a cable car into Son Doong Cave), they also set their own objectives. Thus, the amount of time they have committed to the movement varies depending on the achievement of their objectives and the progress of the movement (*Figure 4.1*). Moreover, because of the activists' different objectives and time involved, the density of online and offline activities (and the usage frequency of online media) differs across the three phases of the movement (*Figure 4.2*).

4.2.1 Movement timeline and corresponding objectives

Phase 1 began when Tuoi Tre News announced a “\$212B[illion] cable car system to be built into Son Doong cave” on Oct 22nd 2014. Phase 1 ended on February 8th 2015, when Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai signed Decision 209 on the Overall Construction Master Plan for Phong Nha – Ke Bang National Park, in which no cable car project was mentioned. Phase 2 was marked with the announcement of Quang Binh's Chief Truong An Ninh on August 11th 2015 that “Quang Binh and the investor are determined to build cable car system into Son Doong cave despite the mixed opinions” and lasts until now (Anh, 2015). The period between phase 1 and phase 2 is the gap phase (*Figure 4.1 & 4.2*).

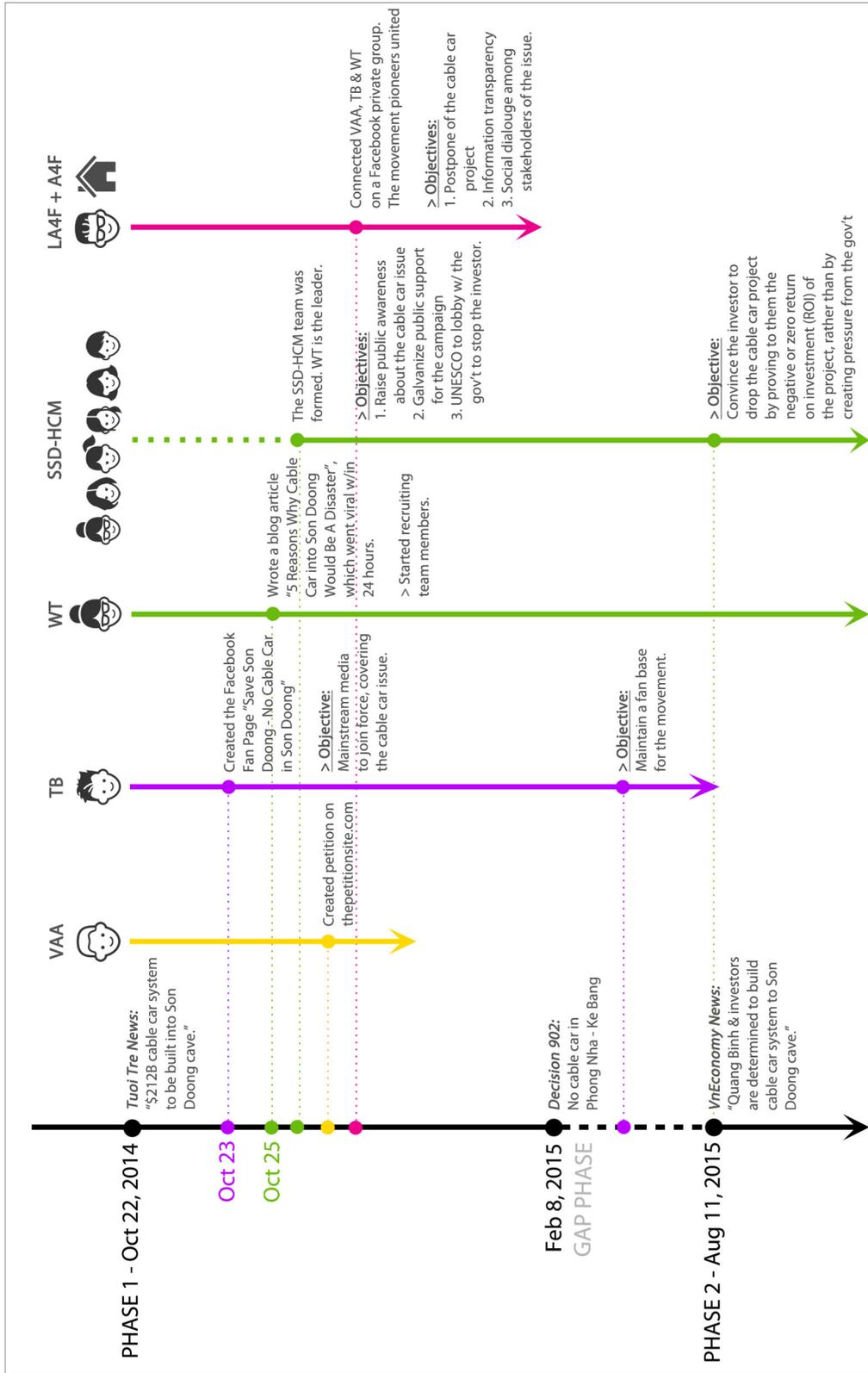


Figure 4.1. Activists' commitment and objectives in the 'Save Son Doong' movement

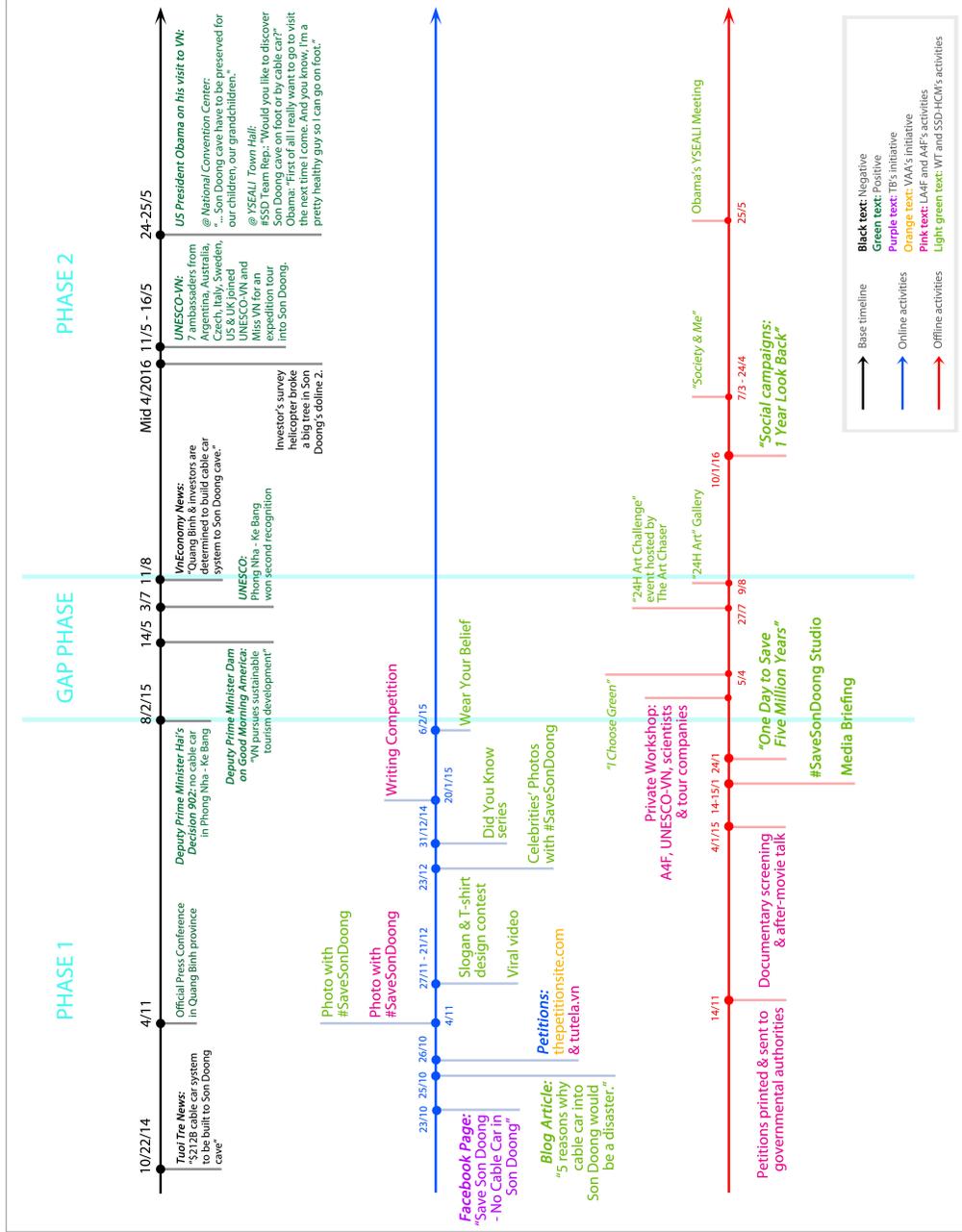


Figure 4.2. Overview of the 'Save Son Doong' movement online and offline communication activities

For the first six months of the movement (phase 1), the activists' objectives were to: 1) Postpone the implementation of the Sun Group's proposed cable car construction project; 2) Raise public awareness about the value of Son Doong Cave and the risks that may result from the construction of a cable car system into it; 3) Mobilize public support for the movement; 4) Attract mass media to cover the story and encourage journalists to join the force, raising their voices to call upon the preservation of Son Doong Cave; 5) Require the Sun Group to publish official documents of their proposed project submitted to Quang Binh; 6) Encourage social dialogue among different stakeholders of the issue, including the national and provincial government, investors, scientists, environmental organizations, tour companies and the public.

Although the activists did not achieved objective five and partly attained objective six, they managed to fulfill their first four objectives. This means they were able to attract mass media to cover the story, to raise public awareness about the issue, to mobilize public support for the movement, and to stimulate powerful environmental organizations and credible scientists to get involved in pressuring the provincial government and the investors to be transparent about the cable car project. The combination of the elements has resulted in the project's postponement.

The movement's success in phase 1, as mentioned above, was marked by the event on February 8th 2015, when Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai signed the Decision 209 on the Overall Construction Master Plan for Phong Nha – Ke Bang National Park, in which no cable car project was mentioned (*Figure 4.2*). WT stated, (in personal communication, April 13th 2016), "For us, that moment marked our success. We celebrated it hard. We won. It's done."

The fact that no cable car project was mentioned in the Overall Construction Master Plan for Phong Nha – Ke Bang Park does not mean that investors can not submit a supplementary section for the cable car project in the overall plan (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016). In other words, although the implementation of the Sun Group's cable car project had been postponed, there is no guarantee Son Doong

Cave would not be threatened again if the Sun Group insisted in pursuing their plan or if another investor took over it. Therefore, maintaining a fan base was the objective for the gap phase so that “in case the issue booms again, we will still have a large number of supporters (TB, personal communication, April 14th 2016).

Such caution is justified. The announcement from Quang Binh’s Chief Truong An Ninh on August 11th 2015 that “Quang Binh and the investor are determined to build cable car system into Son Doong cave despite the mixed opinions” (Bao Anh, 2015) was an alarm for the activists not to rest too long on their laurels. For phase 2 of the movement, preventing the construction of cable cars into Son Doong Cave is once again the objective that the activists have aimed toward.

4.2.2 Committed leadership

The amount of time the activists have committed to the movement varies according to the achievement of their own objectives and to the progress of the movement. VAA was involved in leading the movement within a short period during the beginning of phase 1, and then withdrew after his online petition became popular. The success of phase 1, which was marked by the February 8th 2015 event as mentioned above, coincided chronologically with the withdrawals of LA4F, the A4F team and TB. WT and the SSD-HCM team are those who stayed and have continued fighting to ‘Save Son Doong’ between phase 2 and now (*Figure 4.1*).

4.2.3 Density of movement activities across time

Because of the activists’ differing objectives and duration of leadership, the density of online and offline activities, and the usage frequency of online media, differ across the three phases of the movement.

Since the movement’s inception, online media has been continuously used to communicate with the audience. However, special online activities and offline events have sporadically occurred throughout the three phases. Figure 4.1 shows that phase 1 manifests a higher number of online and offline activities than gap phase and phase 2. It

also demonstrates that all of the activists and teams were very active both online and offline during phase 1, yet WT and the SSD-HCM team have been the only ones to sustain the movement (with some offline activities) throughout gap phase and phase 2.

4.3 The formation of the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement network

4.3.1 The pioneers of the movement and their initiatives to protect Son Doong Cave

Three pioneers of the movement - TB²⁰, WT and VAA – started their initiatives to protect Son Doong Cave at the very beginning of phase 1 of the movement.

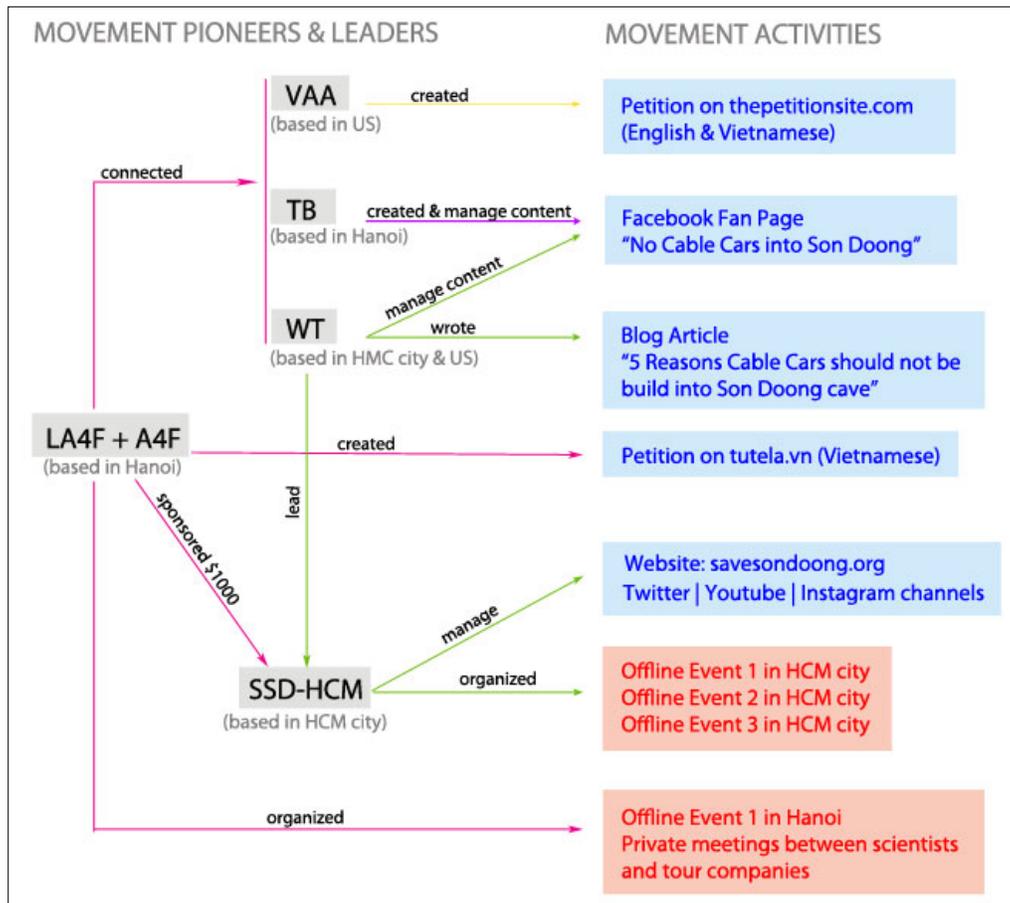


Figure 4.3. Structure of the ‘Save Son Doong’ group and their responsibilities

²⁰ Due to ethical considerations, the names of the activists have been coded into capitalized letters such as TB, WT, LA4F, etc.

The first person is TB, the creator of the ‘Save Son Doong’ – Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng Facebook fan page. TB is a 32 year old man who works for the United Nations International School of Hanoi [UNIS Hanoi] as a service learning coordinator. His job is to organize social activities and community services for students of UNIS Hanoi. TB has been volunteering for some NGOs like Habitat for Humanity Vietnam and Operation Smile for many years, and sometimes works for them as a mission coordinator.

The day after October 22nd 2014 when Tuổi Trẻ News published an article announcing a “US\$212 B[illion] cable car system to be built into Son Doong Cave,” TB created the Facebook fan page with the objective that mass media would join forces in covering the story, making it popular so that everyone would pay attention to the Son Doong cable car project and be aware that somebody was against it. He states:

Vietnamese journalism is highly controlled and information against this or that will not be covered. People don’t even read newspapers, but many own a Facebook account, therefore using social media to attract public attention and provoke discourses instead of directly asking journalists to cover the story would bring higher possibility of success [to] the movement (TB, personal communication, April 14th 2016).

What motivated TB to do that was “a little personal” (TB, personal communication, April 14th 2016). TB has never been to Son Doong, but he hopes that in the future he can visit the cave on foot with Oxalis (*Refer to Chapter 1, Section 3.1, for the introduction of Oxalis*). As TB travels pretty often and used to work in the tourism industry, he has a rich understanding about sustainable tourism and highly values it. TB believes that Vietnam has enormous potential for tourism development, but so far the country has not taken advantage of its uniqueness and beauty and developed tourism in a sustainable way. In such context, Oxalis Adventure Tours has blown a new wind into the unsustainable tourism industry of Vietnam. After only one year of operation, Oxalis’ expedition tour into Son Doong has been rated as one of the world’s best adventure tours. The construction of cable cars, along with the development of mass tourism into the cave,

means there will no longer be space for adventure tours (like the Oxalis one) into Son Doong to exist. That is the very first reason why he opposed the cable car project.

The second person is VAA, the man to create the bilingual (English and Vietnamese) petition named 'Stop the Construction: Save Son Doong Cave!' on thepetitionsite.com. VAA is a Vietnamese American journalist, living in Florence, Kentucky. Since no interview was conducted with VAA, extra information about VAA's background remains unknown in this research.

The third person is WT, who wrote a blog article analyzing '5 reasons why cable car into Son Doong would be a disaster' three days after Tuoi Tre News announced the Son Doong cable car project. WT is a 29 year old woman who was working for the Consulate General of the United States in Ho Chi Minh City as an Education Consultant when she started this initiative. For the moment, WT is doing a dual MBA in Nonprofit Management and an MA in Sustainable International Development at Brandeis University in the USA.

Since March 2014, WT had heard a rumor of the Son Doong cable car project and got confirmation that the rumor was real when she travelled to Son Doong Cave in July 2014. Having a great passion for the cave and desire to protect it, WT wrote a letter of denunciation and sent it to some environmental organizations and government institutes to inform them of the issue and to call for help after she had returned from her Son Doong expedition tour. Unfortunately, WT never received a response. In October 2014, when her blog went viral, WT recognized the power of the public. WT realized that she could no longer protest by herself, and that she needed to mobilize community support through a public communication campaign. Thus, WT started recruiting members to form a team (that is later referred to as the SSD-HCM team) that would run the public communication campaign with her.

4.3.2 The formation of the SSD-HCM team

The SSD-HCM team was founded by WT right after her blog and TB's Facebook fan page went viral (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016). WT spread messages on TB's

Facebook fan page, calling for the Facebook's followers to attend an offline meeting in Ho Chi Minh City. The SSD-HCM team is comprised of six core members, including WT, and approximately 10 volunteers (however, the focus group was conducted with only four core members: TOG, GYT, DCS and JG).

While other members of the SSD-HCM team were new to WT, TOG and GYT had been friends with WT prior to the initiation of the movement. TOG (a commerce officer at the Israel Embassy in Ho Chi Minh City), and GYT (a teacher who is taking a gap year) are also 29 years old. They both joined the SSD-HCM team because their long-time friend WT motivated them to.

DCS is a 25 year old digital communication specialist. When DCS found out about the cable car issue, there had not been any organized public communication campaigning in opposition to it at that point. DCS wanted to take advantage of the digital technology to do something about the issue, so she immediately came up with a communication plan and started looking for supporters to carry out her proposal.

JG is 23 years old. JG read WT's blog article, followed by TB's Facebook fan page, and came across WT's recruitment post on TB's Facebook fan page. At that time, JG had some free time as she had almost graduated from university. In addition, she used to be a member of the communication club at her university and thought that she could offer some help. Therefore, JG went to the first two offline-meetings that WT organized.

About the same time, DCS approached one of her friends (who is also friends with JG), to seek a connection to JG's communication club who DCS thought could help to carry out her communication plan. DCS and JG met and then they both went to WT's third offline meeting, where DCS got to meet WT and other members of the team. That is how the SSD-HCM team was formed.

4.3.3 The alliance of the three pioneers, the SSD-HCM team and other activists involved in the movement

LA4F, a 26 year old social activist based in Hanoi, was the one who connected all of the individuals who were being actively vocal about the cable car issue online, including WT,

TB and VAA. He invited them into a Facebook private group and coordinated discussions for the group to come up with an action plan and to assign tasks among each other.

LA4F has a long history of leading youth and communication projects that address environmental and social problems. He is also the director of Action for the Future [A4F], a local NGO that was transformed from a program called ‘Raising awareness about environmental issues and climate change’ that he initiated in 2008. The first reason why LA4F got involved in the movement was that there were already other pioneers. In this case, those people were VAA, who created the English-Vietnamese petition on thepetitionsite.com; TB, who created the ‘Save Son Doong’ – Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng Facebook fan page, and WT, who wrote a long blog article explaining why cable cars into Son Doong should not be built. The second reason that LA4F got involved was because he believed in the potential success of the movement, as the cable car project had just been proposed and not yet executed.

Though LA4F was not the initiator of the movement, he was the catalyst for the alliance of the involved individual activists (VAA, TB, WT) and teams (SSD-HCM and A4F). VAA, TB and WT were unacquainted individuals when they first started their own initiatives. Although they did try to get connected to one another, the alliance was formed only when LA4F stepped in and united them.

4.3.4 The roles of the activists in the movement

Apart from tasks they performed together, such as approaching scientists or putting pressure on environmental organizations and government authorities, each team and individual activist had their own key roles in the movement.

As the initiator of the ‘Save Son Doong’ – Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng Facebook fan page, TB’s main role was to manage the page’s content and to answer the page’s inbox. Originally he was the sole editor of the page but later on TB granted WT permission to be a second editor, to help keep the page updated and responsive when he was busy.

Apart from being the second editor of the ‘Save Son Doong’ – Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng Facebook fan page, WT is leader of the SSD-HCM team, who organized a public will campaign consisting of many online activities (hosted mainly on the ‘Save Son Doong’ - Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng Facebook fan page created by TB and the savesondoong.org website designed by one of the team’s volunteers) and offline events (held in Ho Chi Minh City) to support the movement. As the leader of the SSD-HCM team, WT is responsible for recruiting members, assigning tasks, supervising team members, maintaining positive relations between team members, assisting other members in completing tasks if they are busy, and representing the team in the media.

In the SSD-HCM team, TOG and GYT are mostly responsible for researching information related to Son Doong Cave and the Son Doong cable car project. DCS takes care of the campaign’s communication. JG and another core member of the team are in charge of supervising volunteers as well as logistic support for SSD-HCM’s offline events. However, the SSD-HCM team claims that they all support each other and work together most of the time.

Similar to WT, LA4F also led the A4F team to run another public will campaign in support of the movement. Their campaign’s online activities were hosted on the ‘Tử Tế Là’ Facebook fan page and the tutela.vn site, and their offline events were held in Hanoi. Under the name of A4F, LA4F raised approximately US\$5000 from the Center for Community Empowerment [CECEM] to fund the movement. US\$1000 was allocated to SSD-HCM so that the team could finance their offline events in Ho Chi Minh City, the rest was managed by A4F to budget for events and promotional items in Hanoi. Furthermore, LA4F also acted in an advisory capacity for the movement as he had a significant amount of experience in social work.

VAA is the one who withdrew from the movement the soonest. Other than creating the online bilingual petition, no activity of his was reported.

4.3.5 The commitment of the activists to the movement

As mentioned earlier, at the beginning of phase 1, everyone was actively involved in the movement. However, VAA withdrew not long after the alliance was formed. The success of phase 1 coincided with the withdrawals of LA4F, the A4F team and TB. WT and the SSD-HCM team are those who have stayed and continue to fight to 'Save Son Doong' since phase 2.

4.4 Approaches of communication for social change used in the movement

The activists and their teams have deployed advocacy, social mobilization and public will campaign approaches to obtain their objectives in this movement.

4.4.1 Advocacy: Petition

There were two petitions created for the 'Save Son Doong' movement. The first one is in both English and Vietnamese, created by VAA on thepetitionsite.com. VAA's petition titled 'Stop the Construction: Save Son Doong Cave!' was targeted at the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the UNESCO World Heritage Center. VAA had the petition open for one year and aimed to reach 75,000 signatures. As VAA is based outside Vietnam and his petition is bilingual, almost 75,000 people from Vietnam, the United States and some European countries signed the petition.

The second petition was written in Vietnamese by LA4F. It was first hosted on the tutela.vn site owned by A4F, and then printed and sent to the UNESCO, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Construction, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. According to LA4F, there were around 15,000 Vietnamese people who signed his petition on tutela.vn.

Both of the petition links were shared on the 'Save Son Doong' - Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng Facebook fan page (under TB and WT's administration) and on the Tử Tế Là Facebook fan page (under LA4F and A4F's administration) and the two pages' followers also helped share the petition links.

4.4.2 Advocacy: Media advocacy

As mentioned above, one of the foremost objectives of the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement was to attract mass media to join forces in covering the cable car project. With an unusual social cause, raising public awareness was the first step among many other mobilizing activities, and mass media played a vital role in facilitating that process. Coverage in the newspapers featuring cave experts, scientists, provincial government officers and activists’ points of view not only gained public attention but also stimulated public debate on the issue.

In addition, media advocacy assisted the petitioning process of the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement. According to LA4F, the UNESCO declared that the more newspapers which covered the issue and the more people who shared the news, the stronger foundation the UNESCO would have to participate in the movement.

The ‘Save Son Doong’ movement rapidly became significantly strong thanks to the support of mass media. Right after TB’s Facebook fan page started going viral, “newspapers continuously covered the cable car issue,” said WT (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016). TB felt “extremely successful” during that period because many popular newspapers and people working in the communication industry quickly joined forces with the movement:

Even Ms. KL from Forbes wrote one article about Son Doong cave. She wholeheartedly supported the movement by sharing some useful information. Then Ms. T from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, the owner of the ‘Du Lịch Nhân Văn’ (Tourism and Scientific Services) page and Mr. LA, a master of ceremonies also supported our cause (TB, personal communication, April 14th 2016).

4.4.3 Advocacy: Endorsement from well-known people

Obtaining endorsement from well-known people is another way the ‘Save Son Doong’ has been performing.

One of the first activities in the #SaveSonDoong campaign organized by the SSD-HCM team was a video and photo series of Vietnamese celebrities endorsing the ‘Save Son

Doong' movement. The video and photos were shared on the 'Save Son Doong' - Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng Facebook fan page, and many celebrities participating in the video and photo series also changed their profile pictures into the ones taken by SSD-HCM, in which they posed with the #SaveSonDoong sign.

Recently, during his visit to Vietnam in May 2016, (former) US President Barack Obama delivered a speech at the National Convention Center in Hanoi on May 24th in which he stated:

If we're gonna ensure the health of our people and the beauty of our planet, then development has to be sustainable. Natural wonders like Ha Long Bay and Son Doong Cave have to be preserved for our children, our grandchildren (Obama, 2016a).

The next day, on May 25th, Obama held a meeting with hundreds of local members of the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative²¹ [YSEALI] in Ho Chi Minh City. WT, as the representative of the SSD-HCM team attending the meeting, planned to attract Obama's attention by waving a Vietnamese traditional weaved palm-leaf conical hat. WT gave Obama a #SaveSonDoong T-shirt as a souvenir before asking him questions. When WT asked whether Obama would like to discover Son Doong Cave on foot or by cable car, he answered:

First of all, I really want to go to visit [Son Doong], the next time I come. And you know, I'm a pretty healthy guy so I can go on foot... Umm... How long is it? 7 days??? I'm good. Alright... I can do that (Obama, 2016b).

Both of Obama's statements have been proudly shared on the 'Save Son Doong' - Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng' Facebook fan page.

²¹ Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative is a program endorsed by (former) US President Obama to strengthen leadership development and networking in Southeast Asia (About YSEALI, 2016).

4.4.4 Social mobilization: Building coalitions with environmental organizations

Alerting and putting pressure on environmental organizations ran parallel to sending petitions to governmental authorities.

Besides the petitions that VAA and LA4F sent to the UNESCO, the ‘Save Son Doong’ group have also approached and attempted to build coalitions with other global environmental organizations like the International Union for Conservation of Nature [IUCN] and the World Wide Fund for Nature [WWF], some local organizations whose visions are closely related to the ‘Save Son Doong’ cause, and various other organizations that secretly support the movement.

WT sent a letter of denunciation to the World Heritage Committee (headquarters and Vietnam branch), the IUCN (headquarters and Vietnam branch), the WWF (head quarter and Vietnam branch), and the Vietnam Business Council for Sustainable Development, before she had even joined force with the other activists.

According to LA4F, activities which provoke international pressure on the cable car project (like petitioning the UNESCO and the IUCN for their interventions) are necessary because international pressure can force the provincial government and investors to be more open to social dialogue with the scientists and the environmental organizations that will assess the environmental impact of their project. In the case of Son Doong cable car system, both the UNESCO and IUCN have the eligibility to assess the environmental impact of the project. These organizations are urged by the activists to justify that the cable car project would violate the international conventions for the protection of the environmental or natural heritage that Vietnam has signed (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016; WT, personal communication, June 10th 2016).

In addition, the UNESCO has the right to withdraw the title ‘World Natural Heritage’ that they have awarded to Phong Nha – Ke Bang National Park, in which Son Doong Cave is located. WT states, “UNESCO has clearly declared that they cannot come to any conclusion if no project proposal is submitted to them” (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016). Therefore, ensuring the UNESCO’s involvement in challenging the

investor to make the project proposal transparent is another tactic to postpone it from happening (LA4F, personal communication, April 13th 2016).

4.4.5 Social mobilization: Mobilizing resources - scientific facts, information, and photographs

In the 'Save Son Doong' movement, cave experts as well as geologists' opinions are highly valued for three reasons. First, information provided by the scientists on the risks that can result from the construction of a cable car in Son Doong is reliable because it is based on scientific research. Second, the scientists' opinions are testimony to the 'Save Son Doong' movement. Their endorsement could boost the confidence and morale of both the 'Save Son Doong' movement pioneers and the public supporters. Third, the involvement of the scientists in the 'Save Son Doong' movement could stimulate dialogue among different stakeholders of the issue. Such dialogue, if not ensuring that the investor and the provincial government consider a more sustainable plan, could at least alert involved institutions such as the UNESCO, the IUCN and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment [MNRE] to carefully examine the proposed project before it is implemented.

Geologists from Hanoi University of Natural Sciences and cave experts from the British Royal Cave Research Association were approached by the activists both online and in person. They provided the activists with scientific documents, based on which the activists could develop content which educates the public about the risks of the Son Doong cable car project. Some even raised their voices on mainstream media against any construction of cable cars into Son Doong, stressing the importance of protecting Son Doong from unsustainable economic exploitation and of preserving this natural wonder for future generations.

PanNature, a Vietnamese non-profit organization that works toward protecting the environment and improving human well-being, organized an informal talk on the 'Challenges in preservation of development projects' in November 2014. In the event, the Son Doong cable car proposal was a hot topic that gained much attention from the

guest speakers, journalists and other attendees (Think, 2014). Many scientists recommended the investor should be more transparent so that scientists could give timely advice (PanNature, 2014). Although no representative from the Sun Group or Quang Binh provincial government was present at the event, the informal talk was covered by mainstream media, allowing the public audience to somewhat follow the process of social dialogue among the stakeholders of the issue.

Beside useful information and testimonies from the scientists, the activists managed to mobilize resources from many other people. For information purposes, a lecturer in sustainable tourism development from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities has been partnering the activists from the very beginning (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016). The group also has contacts with various congress members: some provided the group with information sourced from the government and some were asked by the activists to pass on the petitions to the right person (TB, personal communication, April 14th 2016; WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016). The activists were also able to obtain information from some Sun Group staff members that opposed the cable car project (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016), as well as information sent from Quang Binh (TB, personal communication, April 14th 2016).

For images and videos the 'Save Son Doong' group received much support from three foreign photographers and a Vietnamese American living in the US. All of these people had been to Son Doong and took high quality photos and videos of the cave. WT claims that it was not difficult to contact and get permission to use their original images and video footage for the movement (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016).

4.4.6 Public will campaign

Public will campaigning (*Refer to Section 2.5.4 for definition*) plays a vital role in the 'Save Son Doong' movement. The public will campaigns were organized to enhance the activists' effort in raising public awareness, provoking public indignation, stimulating public discourse, motivating public actions, and forming public pressure for the movement.

There were two public will campaigns running parallel and using the same hashtag #SaveSonDoong. One was organized and managed by LA4F and the A4F team, based in Hanoi, the other organized by WT and the SSD-HCM team, based in Ho Chi Minh City. Both teams targeted public communities to put pressure on the government's national and local authorities, environmental organizations like the UNESCO and IUCN, and the investors, to drop the cable car project. The SSD-HCM campaign website states:

The campaign raises [public] awareness about the natural wonder's value that Vietnam has in hand and urges them to actively save the national treasure ... The public endorsement to act against the cable car project in Son Doong can be an embodiment of [the] Vietnamese populace's vital role in deciding our country's development ("Save Sơn Đoòng," 2014).

With their online activities, both of the campaigns targeted young audiences with ages ranging from 25 to 34 (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016; WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016). Regarding offline activities, LA4F and A4F's events in Hanoi attracted more people of middle age to attend (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016), whilst, in Ho Chi Minh City, WT and SSD-HCM's events gained more attention from youth (WT, personal communication, April 13th, 2016).

Although A4F and SSD-HCM's campaigns shared the same goal (terminating construction of cable cars into Son Doong) and general strategy (forming public will to create change), they did not agree on a unified message or design of outputs. LA4F explains, 'Save Son Doong' is a movement, in which different teams of activists and individual activists act parallel to each other:

I do not have the right to tell them what to do. Or I do not have the capability to decide that every team will have a unified message [to communicate with the public] because we are not an organization. Each team has their own discussion ... For example, the logo (*Figure 4.4*) and the message "1 day to save 5 million years," designed by WT and her team only represents her campaign ... It does not represent the whole movement (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016).



Figure 4.4. Logo of the #SaveSonDoong campaign designed by the SSD-HCM team (SSD-HCM, November 11, 2014)

4.5 Public will campaign outputs (materials and activities)

Apart from TB's Facebook fan page initiative, VAA's online petition on thepetitionsite.com, and WT's viral blog article, the 'Save Son Doong' movement is comprised of many other online and offline communication activities. Many are components of the public will campaign organized by WT and SSD-HCM, while some were part of LA4F and A4F's campaign (Figure 4.2).

Most of the two campaign's online and offline activities were implemented during phase 1 of the movement, (from early November 2014 - February 2015), the same time period which was spent waiting for Quang Binh to submit the investor's official proposal to the UNESCO for an environmental impact evaluation (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016). LA4F and A4F ended their campaign after they had run all of the

activities and spent all of the money in the budget (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016). However, WT and SSD-HCM continued with their campaign, winding down their activities after February 2nd 2015, the day that Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai signed the Decision 902 on the Overall Master Plan for Phong Nha – Ke Bang, in which no cable car project was mentioned (*Figure 4.2*).

Since phase 2 of the movement, the SSD-HCM team has not implemented any online activity, but they did carry out some offline actions. According to WT, for phase 2 of the campaign, the strategy of the SSD-HCM team is to directly convince investors to drop the Son Doong cable car project, as return on investment will not be positive. However, they do not have detailed tactics. WT states:

We were surprised. We thought the campaign had ended. Thus, in phase 2 of the campaign, we have been pretty reactive [rather than proactive in organizing campaign activities]. For now, we will act whenever an opportunity comes. And we will try our best to ace it. We have not been able to proactively come up with detailed tactics like how we did in phase 1 (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016).

Compared to LA4F and A4F, WT and SSD-HCM put more effort in planning their campaign, designing logos and generating other visual content. This makes SSD-HCM's online and offline activities appear more consistent and enhances the branding of the campaign.

4.5.1 WT and SSD-HCM's campaign

4.5.1a Online activities

WT and SSD-HCM ran their online campaign activities on two main channels, the 'Save Son Doong' – Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng Facebook fan page created by TB and the savesondoong.org website developed from the platform of blogspot by a SSD-HCM volunteer. They also have a Twitter account (@SaveSonDoong), which is used to distribute information to international audiences. However, most of the online

campaign activities were organized and promoted on the Facebook fan page and the website.

Photo with #SaveSonDoong (started on 4/1/2014):

Followers of the ‘Save Son Doong’ – Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đòong Facebook fan page were called upon to take photos with #SaveSonDoong signs and post them on Facebook, using #SaveSonDoong to spread the movement.

SSD-HCM also shared the supporters’ photos on the Facebook fan page and compiled all of the supporters’ photos into an album (Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5. Photo submission of #SaveSonDoong supporters (Nguyen, May 2nd 2016)

Slogan and t-shirt design contest (27/11/2014 - 21/12/2014):

This contest was divided into two rounds. Round 1 (27/11/2014 – 7/12/2014) was to receive ideas for slogans for the campaign. Round 2 (7/12/2014 – 14/12/2014) was for the participants to submit their t-shirt designs, with the slogans that had been submitted in round 1 or a new slogan of their own.

The contest was advertised both on the Facebook fan page and the savesondoong.org website (Refer to Figure 4.6 for ads poster). Participants were instructed to email their slogan ideas and t-shirt designs to the SSD-HCM team. Submitted slogans were re-designed into nice graphics and posted in an album on the fan page by the SSD-HCM team (Figure 4.7). Submitted t-shirt designs were also posted in another album on the fan page. By doing this, the participants could invite their friends and other followers of the campaign to visit the album and vote for the best slogan and t-shirt design by clicking ‘like’.



Figure 4.6. Ads poster of the Slogan and t-shirt design contest (SSD-HCM, November 27, 2014)



Figure 4.7. Examples of submitted slogan ideas re-designed into nice graphics by the SSD-HCM team (Nguyen, June 21, 2014)



Figure 4.8. #SaveSonDoong T-shirt (SSD-HCM, March 8, 2015)

For round 1 of the contest, the SSD-HCM received 46 submissions for slogan ideas and 55 t-shirt design submissions. The winning slogan - 'Go trekking, not check-in' was selected to be put in the best t-shirt design as shown in *Figure 4.8*. The winning t-shirt design was sent to print and sold to raise funds for the campaign.

Viral video (launched on 27/11/2014):

The 57-second video titled 'Save Sơn Đoòng' features over 10 well-known people in Vietnam calling on members of the public to take action to prevent the construction of cable cars into Son Doong. In the video, each person says a few words that link into meaningful sentences when edited together and this conveys the message of the campaign.

The video is posted on their YouTube channel (<https://youtu.be/qiJhtvMKObE>). In the description box SSD-HCM invites the viewers to join the campaign with the inserted links to the Facebook fan page and website. The video is also shared on the campaign Facebook fan page and website, which has resulted in almost 14,000 views on YouTube.

Celebrities' #SaveSonDoong photo series (started on 23/12/2014):

Beside the video, SSD-HCM also invited well-known people to take photos with a #SaveSonDoong sign. Those photos are Photoshopped into nice graphics under one consistent design to be periodically shared on the wall and to be set as the cover photo of the Facebook fan page (*Figure 4.9*). Some well-known people also set the edited photos of themselves as their Facebook profile pictures (*Figure 4.10*). A collage of these photos was also printed out on a hard frame to be demonstrated at the campaign's offline events (*Figure 4.11 & Figure 4.12*).



Figure 4.9. Facebook cover photo featuring four well-known people endorsing the campaign (SSD-HCM, December 23rd 2014)



Figure 4.10. Stand-up Comedian Dua Leo's profile picture endorsing #SaveSonDoong campaign (SSD-HCM, December 23rd 2014)



Figure 4.11. Photo collage of well-known people endorsing the campaign (SSD-HCM, January 9th 2015)



Figure 4.12. Photo collage of well-known people endorsing #SaveSonDoong was demonstrated at an offline event of the campaign (SSD-HCM, March 4th 2015)

'Did You Know' series (started 31/12/2015):

The SSD-HCM team also compiled and designed a series of 'Did You Know' posters, which provide facts about Son Doong Cave, raising public awareness about the precious value of this natural heritage site.

The content of 'Did You Know' posters is written in both Vietnamese and English (*Figure 4.13*). In total, 14 posters were created, which were posted on the campaign Facebook fan page and printed out into stand-up banners to be demonstrated at offline events of the campaign (*Figure 4.14*).



Figure 4.13. A 'Did You Know' poster in English (SSD-HCM, January 10th 2015)



Figure 4.14. A 'Did You Know' stand-up banner in Vietnamese was demonstrated at an offline event of the campaign (SSD-HCM, January 27th 2015)

Wear Your Belief (started on 6/2/2015):

'Wear Your Belief' is the title of an album on the campaign Facebook fan page, in which the SSD-HCM team upload photos of campaign supporters wearing #SaveSonDoong t-shirts in different places they have travelled to (Figure 4.15).

The 'Wear Your Belief' album is constantly updated when new photos are sent to the campaign. The activity of sharing 'Wear Your Belief' photos, in which people make creative poses in beautiful places, supports the campaign team's effort in selling #SaveSonDoong t-shirts to raise funds for the campaign.



Figure 4.15. A 'Wear Your Belief' photo taken in a wedding photo shoot (SSD-HCM, February 6th 2015)

4.6.1b Offline events in Ho Chi Minh City

This section focuses on describing, in detail, significantly sized events that were organized by SSD-HCM in Ho Chi Minh City. Small events are briefly covered.

#SaveSonDoong Studio (14-15/1/2015):

The #SaveSonDoong Studio was held at a flea market in Ho Cho Minh City for two days to approach more Vietnamese people and foreigners, especially tourists, who had not heard of the campaign online.

At the #SaveSonDoong booth of the flea market, the SSD-HCM team introduced the campaign to the public and offered to take photos for those who wanted to support the campaign. Supporters had their photos taken holding the #SaveSonDoong sign, which were later Photoshopped into nice graphics like the ones the SSD-HCM team had done for the well-known people (Figure 4.16).

These photos were also added to the ‘Public response to the ‘Save Son Doong’ campaign’ album²² on the Facebook fan page, so that supporters could download their photos to set up as profile pictures. The photos were also contributed to the #SaveSonDoong gallery, that would be printed out and demonstrated at the team’s following offline events (Figure 4.17).

The two-day event reached up to more than 500 people and engaged over 100 supporters from 10 countries including France, Taiwan, Japan and Australia, to take photos.



Figure 4.16. Photo collage of #SaveSonDoong supporters taken at the #SaveSonDoong Studio event (SSD-HCM, January 11, 2015)

²² Link to the ‘Public response to the ‘Save Son Doong’ campaign’ album on the Facebook fan page: https://www.facebook.com/NoCableCarInSonDoong/photos/?tab=album&album_id=15082677427610



Figure 4.17. #SaveSonDoong photo gallery showcased at the ‘One Day to Save Five Million Years’ event (SSD-HCM, January 27, 2015)

Media briefing (14/1/2015):

Although there had been many articles covering the cable car issue, there was no article specifically featuring the #SaveSonDoong campaign organized by the SSD-HCM team. The media briefing can be considered as an effort to approach the mass media by the SSD-HCM team (DCS, personal communication, April 23rd 2016). The event was organized to introduce the #SaveSonDoong campaign and their up-coming ‘One Day to Save Five Million Years’ event to the journalists (TOG, personal communication, April 23rd 2016).

SSD-HCM got the contact list of journalists and reporters from a communication officer who works for Change Vietnam²³. In response to SSD-HCM’s invitation, over 30

²³ Change Vietnam: a non-profit organization whose mission is to bring about sustainable changes regarding urgent environmental and developmental issues through innovative communication and community engagement (Who we are, 2017).

reporters and journalists from 30 newspapers, magazine and online news sources showed up at the briefing. These numbers exceeded the team's expectations because the location of the briefing was "quite far away" (JG, personal communication, April 23rd 2016). Additionally, the journalists and reporters came to the media briefing, which SSD-HCM assumed to be informal, with serious attitudes as if they were attending a press conference. Thus, the event was "such a challenge" for SSD-HCM (TOG, personal communication, April 23rd 2016).

TOG shares that the team found it "very stressful" when the journalists and reporters focused on questioning the incentives behind the team's campaigning actions. DCS admitted that the team was too naive to think that the mass media would really support them, thus did not expect to be asked questions like 'Why are you doing this? and 'Who is behind your team?' DCS stated:

They asked us questions that can be translated into sentences like "You must have much free time to involve in organizing these activities" or "Quang Binh local residents are poor, why do you protest against the cable car project? This could take away chances for them to earn extra income" (DCS, personal communication, April 23rd 2016).

After the media briefing, the #SaveSonDoong campaign and the SSD-HCM team were covered in only two articles, an English and a Vietnamese version in The Saigon Times, and on the television news on the HTV²⁴ channel. "By that time, we immediately lost our hope in the mass media," said JG (JQ, personal communication, April 23rd 2016). Therefore TOG concluded, the SSD-HCM team was not supported by the mainstream media at all.

²⁴ HTV: Ho Chi Minh television

'One Day to Save Five Million Years' (24/1/2015):

'One Day to Save Five Million Years'²⁵ was an event aimed at raising awareness and understanding in the community about environmental protection, the minimization of human impact on nature, and especially the preservation of the natural heritage Son Doong Cave (DCS, personal communication, May 23rd 2016).

'One Day to Save Five Million Years' was a whole-day event, comprised of various activities including the #SaveSonDoong photo shoot and exhibition, National Geographic's 'World Biggest Cave' documentary screening, post-movie discussion, and the slogan and t-shirt design contest award ceremony. The Facebook fan page was used to advertise the event (*Figure 4.18 for the ads poster*), and the ticketbox.vn site²⁶ was used for participants to register for it.

At this event, the SSD-HCM continued free photo shooting for whoever wanted to support the campaign. The exhibition showcased not only pictures of the campaign supporters which had been taken from the #SaveSonDoong studio (*Figure 4.17*), but also photographs of Son Doong Cave taken by three professional photographers John Spies, Ryan Deboodt and Jason Speth (*Figure 4.19*). The photographs have received many awards and have been published in popular newspapers and magazines including the Outdoor Magazine, New York Times and The Telegraph. Deboodt's photos have also been used numerous times in the Heritage magazine on Vietnam Airlines. The 45-minute documentary with Vietnamese subtitles was played in three slots during the day so that the audience could pick the slot that fitted their schedules. Last but not least, the award ceremony was to congratulate the winners of the slogan and t-shirt design contest and to express the team's gratitude for those who had taken part in the competition. The day ended with an open mic for the public to express their thoughts after watching the documentary and to debate the topic of heritage conservation versus mass tourism (DCS, personal communication, May 23rd 2014).

²⁵ Link to the photos of the 'One Day to Save Five Million Years' event:
https://www.facebook.com/NoCableCarInSonDoong/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1544667572454442

²⁶ Link to the 'One Day to Save Five Million Years' event on ticketbox.vn:
<https://ticketbox.vn/event/savesondoong-22050/2850>

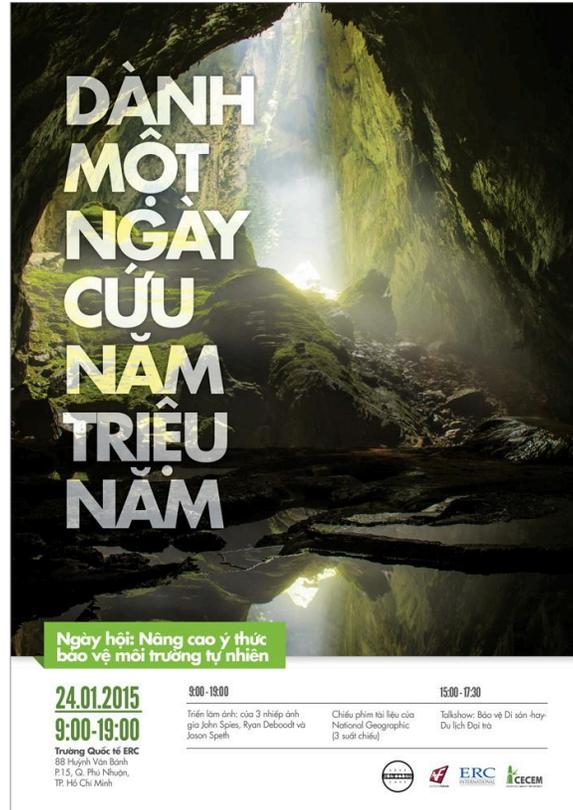


Figure 4.18. Ads poster of the 'One Day to Save Five Million Years' event (SSD-HCM, January 21, 2015)



Figure 4.19. Exhibition of professional photographs of Son Doong Cave at the 'One Day to Save Five Million Years' event (SSD-HCM, January 27, 2015)

‘Social Campaigns: 1 Year Look Back’ (10/1/2016):

‘Social Campaigns: 1 Year Look Back’²⁷ was a panel discussion event with three guest speakers working in the fields of sustainable development and communication for social change, and representatives from several other social campaigns that boomed in 2014 and 2015. The event was organized for the activists to reflect upon their successes and failures and to hear objective expert views, analysis and advice. It was also an opportunity for general audiences to understand the meaning of social activities and learn how to be a catalyst of change within their own societies (“Bức xúc không làm ta vô can,” 2016). This event was advertised on Facebook (Figure 4.20 for ad poster) and free tickets were obtained from the ticketbox.vn site²⁸. It included other campaign activities like the #SaveSonDoong photo gallery, the exhibition of professional photos taken in Son Doong and t-shirts for fund raising.

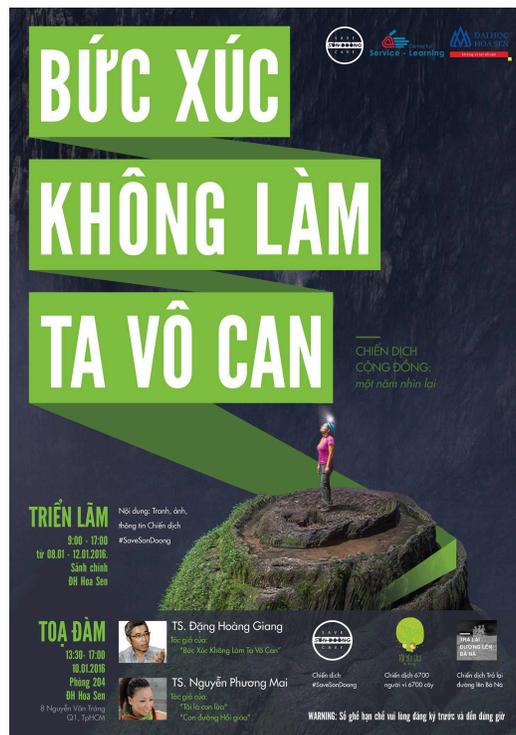


Figure 4.20. Ads post of the ‘Social Campaigns: One Year Look Back’ event (SSD-HCM, January 8, 2016)

²⁷ Link to the photos of the ‘Social Campaigns: 1 Year Look Back’ event: https://www.facebook.com/NoCableCarInSonDoong/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1660359164218615

²⁸ Link to the event on ticketbox.vn: <https://ticketbox.vn/event/buc-xuc-khong-lam-ta-vo-can-58439/30526>

Other events:

Apart from the main events listed above, the SSD-HCM team also took part in some events hosted by other institutes with different roles. For example, on April 5th 2015, SSD-HCM representatives attended the ‘I Choose Green’ event²⁹ organized by the University of Science in Ho Chi Minh City as guest speakers. The SSD-HCM team, together with other invited organizations, also set up a #SaveSonDoong booth at the event venue to introduce their campaign to the university students.

On July 27th 2015, the SSD-HCM team sponsored the ‘24H Art Challenge’ event³⁰ hosted by the Art Chaser³¹ team to raise environmental awareness for art lovers. At the ‘24H Art Challenge’ event, “artists worked together in a close space within 24 hours to produce artworks related to the relationship between human beings and Mother Nature” (SSD-HCM, August 8th 2015). The art works were then demonstrated at the ‘24H Art’ gallery on August 9th 2015.

Between March 7th and April 24th 2016, the SSD-HCM supported the Global Acknowledged Professionals Institute [G.A.P] and Hoa Sen University in Ho Chi Minh City to organize the ‘Society and Me’ competition³² for university students to debate on social issues. SSD-HCM’s main role at this event was to serve as a communication mechanism, however the team got involved in many other logistic tasks. In terms of communication, SSD-HCM was responsible for designing the ad poster (*Figure 4.21*), the introduction video³³, the graphics material for the event³⁴, and promoting the event through different channels including the campaign’s Facebook fan page and website³⁵. The team was also in charge of inviting mass media to cover the event.

²⁹ Link to the photos of the ‘I Choose Green’ event:

https://www.facebook.com/NoCableCarInSonDoong/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1573267002927832

³⁰ Link to the photos of the ‘24H Art’ exhibition day:

https://www.facebook.com/24hartchallenge/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1462445037394164

³¹ Art Chaser: a group of Sai Gon teenagers who love art and share concern about the environment (Vy, 2015)

³² Link to the photos of the ‘Society and Me’ debate competition:

https://www.facebook.com/GAPLeader/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1070396233020968

³³ Link to the introduction video of the ‘Society and Me’ competition: <https://youtu.be/y7QSAffnwaI>

³⁴ Link to the event page of the ‘Society and Me’ competition, which contains the graphics material:

https://www.facebook.com/events/463798457164157/?active_tab=posts

³⁵ Link to the web page of the ‘Society and Me’ competition <http://savesondoong.org/xahoivatoi/#awards>



Figure 4.21. Ad poster for the ‘Society & Me’ debate contest (SSD-HCM, March 7th 2016)

Most recently, WT and other SSD-HCM representatives got a chance to attend the YSEALI meeting with (former) US President Obama, at which WT gave Obama a #SaveSonDoong t-shirt as a souvenir and asked him two questions. The first question was, “How would you, an American leader of global citizens, reserve it [Son Doong]?” (Obama, 2016b). For this question, Obama did not provide a specific answer, however he stressed the importance of sustainable development. The second question was if he would like to trek into Son Doong or take a cable car. As stated in section 4.4.3, Obama’s answer to this question was a very satisfying one for SSD-HCM and the campaign supporters.

The videos of that Q&A session were shared through Facebook and Twitter channels for the campaign. This little conversation between WT and Obama, as well as the t-shirt souvenir, was also covered in some newspapers (Oanh, 2016).

4.5.2 LA4F and A4F's campaign

4.5.2a Online activities

LA4F and A4F's online campaign activities were run on two channels, the 'Tủ Tể Là' Facebook fan page and the tutela.vn site.

Petition:

The first thing that LA4F and A4F did for their campaign was to create a Vietnamese-version petition along with a campaign page on the tutela.vn site. The link to the campaign page that contained the petition was shared on their Facebook channel, which also went viral thanks to sharing by their fan page followers.

Due to the closing of tutela.vn for the development of the site into the Wake It Up platform, all of the campaigns hosted on tutela.vn were moved to hazy.pro, including #SaveSonDoong. Yet the remaining content of the #SaveSonDoong campaign on hazy.pro does not include the petition. Therefore, there is no link to the Vietnamese-version petition in this report.

Photo with #SaveSonDoong:

Similar to this activity promoted by the SSD-HCM team, A4F also called upon the followers of 'Tủ Tể Là' Facebook fan page to take photos with #SaveSonDoong signs and post them on Facebook, using #SaveSonDoong to spread the movement. A4F also shared the supporters' photos on the 'Tủ Tể Là' Facebook fan page.

Writing competition (20/1/2015):

On January 20th 2015, LA4F and A4F launched an online writing competition named 'Writing for the lost' (*Refer to Figure 4.22 for ad poster*). Although Son Doong Cave was not specifically mentioned, this competition was organized as part of the #SaveSonDoong campaign because it is listed in the A4F's #SaveSonDoong financial plan (LA4F, personal communication, April 19th 2016). This is implied in the description of the competition, as well:

There are thousands, or even an unaccountable number, of natural heritage sites in Vietnam. Some of them are recognized as world natural heritage sites ... We are pressured to preserve the beauty of that natural heritage for future generations. The reality shows that we have lost a significant amount of pristine charm, as well as local cultural customs, due to careless exploitation (Tử Tế Là, January 20th 2015).

4.5.2b Offline activities in Hanoi

With the Vietnamese-version petition, LA4F coordinated with TB to print and send hard copies to government authorities as mentioned earlier. However, they “never got a response” (TB, personal communication, April 14th 2016).

On January 4th 2015, LA4F and A4F organized the ‘World’s Biggest Cave’ documentary-screening event. This was followed by a panel discussion on the topic of natural heritage versus massive tourism, with two guest speakers who research in the field of sustainable tourism. The event was promoted on the ‘Tử Tế Là’ Facebook fan page and the campaign page on the tutela.vn site (Refer to Figure 4.23 for ad poster).



Figure 4.22. Ad poster for the ‘Write for things that have lost’ writing competition (iSee, December 26, 2014)

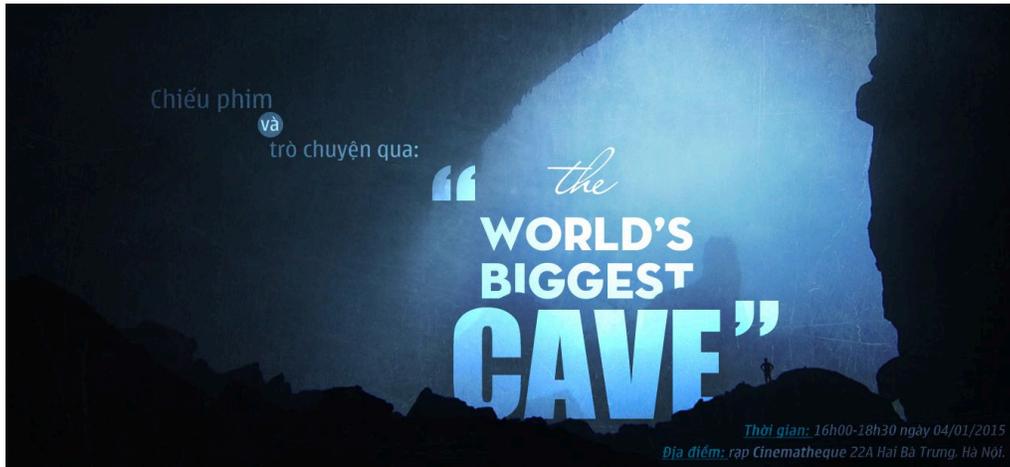


Figure 4.23. Ads poster of the ‘World’s Biggest Cave’ documentary-screening and panel-discussion event in Hanoi (Tử Tế Là, December 27, 2014)

Besides that, LA4F and A4F also held a private workshop in Hanoi in which 10 parties were invited to discuss the campaign. They were representatives from A4F, the UNESCO Vietnam, various tour companies, scientists and geologists.

4.5.3 The integration of online and offline activities

Both TB and WT believe that the integration of online and offline activities is necessary. According to WT, online activities expanded the “width” of the campaign by rapidly spreading the impact to a large online community. Alternatively, offline activities increased the “depth” of the campaign by bringing forth the “fire” within those who attended offline events (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016).

In TB’s opinion, offline activities allow the campaign to appear more genuine to the supporters. By presenting at the offline events, showing their faces to communicate with the attendees, the campaign organizers could show that they were serious about the issue and garner trust from their supporters.

However, TB also stated that offline events “could only make impact on some audiences, while online activities allowed thousands of people to follow and get access to the information. Therefore, those two should go together” (TB, personal communication, April 14th 2016).

4.6 Online platforms used in the movement

Table 4.1 presents the mapping of online media platforms used in the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement. Each online media platform plays one or many roles in the movement. Among all, Facebook is the most multi-functional platform that serves the activists’ various purposes in this movement.

Facebook possesses different specializing tools, including a Fan Page, Event feature, Group feature and Messenger tool, Facebook allows the ‘Save Son Doong’ activists to do many things. For example, they can connect to each other via Messenger, coordinate discussions in a private Group, distribute information and mobilize public support through the Fan Page, as well as advertise and update information about offline events using the Event feature on Facebook.

Table 4.2 presents which platforms each individual activists and teams have used, which channels they have created as well as how often they have used them to coordinate the movement.

Because WT and the SSD-HCM team are the only ones to continue fighting to ‘Save Son Doong’ (after the others withdrew from the movement), information related to the movement is now posted only on SSD-HCM’s channels. Among all of their channels, the ‘Save Son Doong’ – Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng’ Facebook fan page is the most active one. Although the SSD-HCM team implemented a lot of special online activities in phase 1 but not in phase 2 of the movement (*see Figure 4.2*), the Facebook fan page continues to be updated with various types of information regarding the cable car issue. According to TB and WT, it is important to keep in touch with the followers and regular posting on the Facebook fan page helps maintain a fan base for the movement during its down time.

Platforms	Channels/Tools	Purposes of using
Facebook	Fan Page 'Save Son Doong' – Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng' & 'Tử Tế Là'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmit information to the public audience • Stimulate mass media coverage • Encourage public discourse • Mobilize public participation in online and offline activities • Recruit members and volunteers for the SSD-HCM team • Call for action: signing petition, buying #savesondoong t-shirts etc. • Network with other supporters
	Event	Advertise and update offline events
	Private Groups	Coordinate discussions among the activists
	Messenger	Maintain networks among the activists, supporters and volunteers
Website	Savesondoong.org	Store information
	Tutela.vn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host the Vietnamese petition • Store information
	Thepetitionsite.com	Create the bilingual (English & Vietnamese) petition
	Ticketbox.vn	Allows the public to register for attending the offline events
Twitter	@savesondoong	Transmit information
YouTube	SaveSonDoong	Store videos of SSD-HCM's campaign
Instagram	Savesondoong	Share photos and graphics of the campaign
Blog	WT's personal blog	Share personal opinions regarding the Son Doong cable car issue (four blog articles)
Email		Exchange information and documents among the activists and supporters (scientists, photographers etc).
Google form		Allow the public audience to register for attending the offline events

Table 4.1. Online platforms used in the 'Save Son Doong' movement

Individual /Team	Platforms	Channel	Purposes of using	Frequency of using
VAA	Website	Thepetitionsite.com	Create the bilingual petition	★
TB	Facebook	Fan Page “Save Son Doong’ – Phản Đối Dự Án Cấp Treo Hang Sơn Đòong’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmit information to the public audience • Stimulate mass media coverage • Encourage public discourse • Network with supporters 	★★★
WT	Blog	WT’s personal blog	Share personal opinions regarding the Son Doong cable car issue (four blog articles)	★
LA4F and A4F	Facebook	Fan Page ‘Tử Tế Là’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmit information to the public audience • Stimulate public discourse • Mobilize public participation in online and offline activities • Call for action: signing petition • Network with supporters 	★★
		Event	Advertise and update offline events	★
	Website	Tutela.vn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host the Vietnamese petition • Store information 	★
	Google form		Allow the public audience to register for attend the offline events	n/a
WT and SSD-HCM	Facebook	Fan Page ‘Save Son Doong’ – Phản Đối Dự Án Cấp Treo Hang Sơn Đòong’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmit information to the public audience • Encourage public discourse • Mobilize public participation in online and offline activities • Recrute members and volunteers for the SSD-HCM team 	★★★★★

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call for action: signing petition, purchasing #savesondoong t-shirts etc. • Network with supporters 	
		Event	Advertise and update offline events	★
	Website	Savesondoong.org	Store information	★★
		Ticketbox.vn	Allow the public audience to register for attending the offline events	★
	YouTube	SaveSonDoong	Store videos of SSD-HCM's campaign	★
	Twitter	@savesondoong	Transmit information	★
	Instagram	Savesondoong	Share photos and graphics of the campaign	less than ★
Everyone	Email		Exchange information and documents among the activists and supporters	n/a
	Facebook	Private Groups	Coordinate discussions among the activists	n/a
		Messengers	Maintain networks among the activists, supporters and volunteers	n/a

Table 4.2. Online platforms used by the activists in the 'Save Son Doong' movement

Beside Facebook, the SSD-HCM team also used Twitter and Instagram for the movement. However, the team has poor planning for the content of these channels and does not use these platforms as regularly as they do Facebook. The activists claim that the explanation for this is because Twitter and Instagram are not popular in Vietnam and that the team is too short of human resources and content to update the two channels regularly. The Twitter channel, @SaveSonDoong, was created in November 2014, but it has had only 66 followers and 28 tweets so far. Almost all of the tweets are in English because it serves the international community. Because SSD-HCM prioritizes protesting the issue with the Vietnamese community rather than with the international community, the team puts more effort into updating the Facebook channel. When asked about their maintenance of the Twitter channel, WT admits that there has been no initiative to improve its performance due to the shortage of human resources. WT

explains, “it is a vicious circle: we need to distribute a lot of information to attract followers, but because we do not have many followers yet, we are lazy distribut[ing] information” (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016). The situation with the Instagram channel is even worse as it was created around October 2015 with only one photo and has been abandoned since then.

The savesondoong.org site, though considered as the official website of SSD-HCM’s #SaveSonDoong campaign, has not enough content and design investment either. The site was developed based on the platform of wordpress, therefore its structure looks more like a blog rather than a website. In addition, due to the lack of official information sourced from the provincial government, investors and related environmental organizations, the content on savesondoong.org is brief (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016). According to DCS and TOG, the utilization of the website is limited because it does not allow as much interaction as Facebook does. The SSD-HCM team declares that they do want to upgrade the website, making it more organized in terms of content and more interactive in terms of function. Although they have tried to recruit a website coder into the team, they have not been able to find one.

4.7 Short-term and intermediate outcomes of the movement

This research aims to explore the activist’s process of using online media to run the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement from its initial inception to date. Therefore it would be insufficient if I only reviewed the immediate output of the movement (materials and activities) without examining its outcomes. This section presents the short-term and intermediate outcomes that have resulted from the activists’ use of online media to produce those outputs.

I will now look at mass media coverage, public awareness, support and engagement, and the reactions (opinions, attitudes and behaviors) of policymakers and influential people related to the issue of ‘Save Son Doong’ after the movement was launched. This part of the research will be based on Coffman’s ‘General Theory of Change for Policy Change Campaigns’ model (2003) (*see Figure 3.2*).

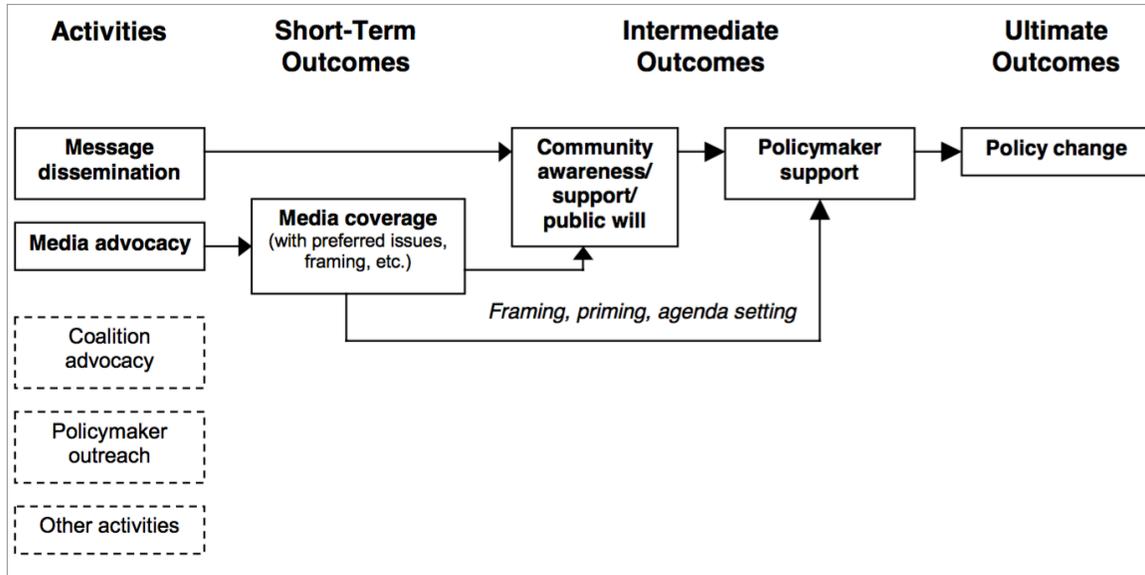


Figure 3.2 General Theory of Change for Policy Change Campaigns
(Coffman, 2003, p. 6)

4.7.1 Mass media coverage

The ‘Save Son Doong’ movement was able to attract much attention from the mainstream media. Immediately after the very first communication initiatives including the Facebook fan page, blog and petition went viral, more and more journalists from both domestic and international newspapers and magazines started covering the Son Doong cable car issue. The issue was also covered on national television news channels VTC14³⁶ and VTV³⁷, and featured in a couple of other news videos online.

According to LA4F, the massive media coverage of the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement is an interactive process of actions between the activists and the journalists. In general, if a social or environmental problem is a “hot issue” (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016), activists usually do not have to contact journalists because journalists will cover that issue on their own initiative. LA4F explains that journalists do pay attention to what is happening on social media, to the public’s opinions and experts’ comments on the issue. Their job requires them to observe how their articles are reacted to and to listen to different perspectives from the audience. Based on the

³⁶ VTC14: a channel of Vietnam Telecommunications Company that provides up to date information on weather, the environment and natural disaster prevention, response and mitigation

³⁷ VTV: Vietnam Television

audience's feedback using social media tools such as 'likes', shares, and comments, journalists can produce additional articles that capture greater audience attention, which improves the number of views for their publication.

LA4F adds, when a campaign's Facebook fan page shares the links of the articles covering the issue, those articles tend to have higher numbers of views than other ones. In turn, once the journalists have covered the issue in their publication, social activists will share the links of the articles on their Facebook channels. This makes the issue appear more significant as it has received much attention from the mainstream media (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016).

From the perspective of TB, whose main objective was to attract the mainstream media to heavily cover the Son Doong cable car issue, the fact that it became a breaking news story was already a success. However, from the perspective of the SSD-HCM team, who expected the mainstream media could help them to promote their #SaveSonDoong campaign, "the mainstream media's support is insignificant" (TOG, personal communication, April 23rd 2016). They explain, although Vietnamese mainstream media drastically wrote about the Son Doong cable car story, only a few reported specifically on the 'Save Son Doong' movement, the #SaveSonDoong campaigns or the SSD-HCM team, regardless of their effort in approaching the journalists. DCS states:

One of the challenges we face is that Vietnamese mainstream media do not cover our #SaveSonDoong campaign. Only a few do. There are plenty of articles covering Son Doong, providing information about the projected cable cars, about somebody expressing his view on cable cars into Son Doong. They only provide facts. They do not analyze the information. They do not include their judgments in their articles (SSD-HCM, personal communication, April 23rd 2016).

Likewise, JG explains:

There is even a ridiculous case like this: *Đời Cơ Đìền* newspaper published an article about the cable car project and the #SaveSonDoong campaign. *Tuổi Trẻ* newspaper translated it, but cut the whole paragraph specifically about [the] #SaveSonDoong [campaign] (SSD-HCM, personal communication, April 23rd 2016).

4.7.2 Public awareness, support and engagement

It can be said that the activists raised significant public awareness about the Son Doong cable car issue and mobilized public participation in the 'Save Son Doong' movement.

As a result of the communication activities organized online and offline, by June 20th 2016 the movement had:

- Almost 75,000 signatures on the English-Vietnamese petition hosted on thepetitionsite.com
- Approximately 15,000 signatures on the Vietnamese petition hosted on tutela.vn
- More than 41,000 followers on the 'Save Son Doong' – Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng Facebook fan page (*Figure 4.24*)
- Nearly 14,000 views on the 'Save Son Doong' Official Video on YouTube
- Over 400 photos of supporters with #SaveSonDoong signs
- About 100 submissions to the slogan and t-shirt design contest
- More than 30 celebrity endorsements
- Hundreds of likes, shares and comments on each status and hundreds of attendees at offline events

Moreover, some individuals including famous bloggers, stand-up comedians, talk-show hosts as well as campaign supporters also invested time and effort in raising public awareness by mentioning the Son Doong cable car issue in their videos and blogs.

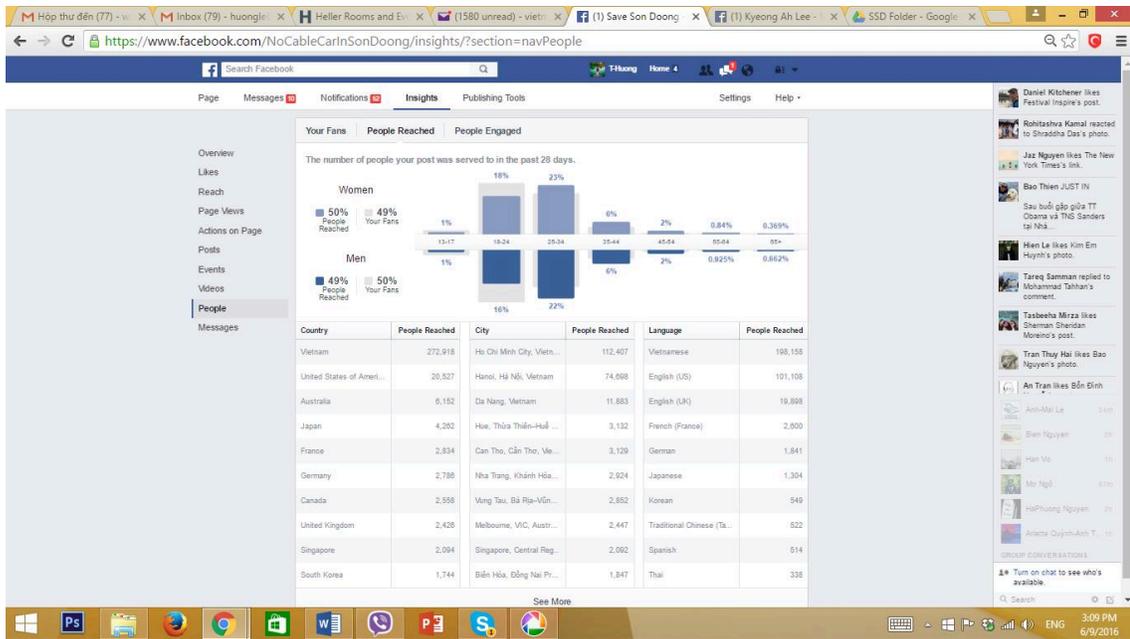


Figure 4.24. Insight on the followers of the “Save Son Doong” – Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đòong’ Facebook fan page (WT, 2016, June 10)

4.7.3 Reaction (opinions, attitudes and behaviors) of governmental authorities

Some governmental authorities have made positive reactions during phase 1 of the movement as presented below.

Immediately after the mass media joined forces with the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement at the end of October 2014, Quang Binh Provincial Government held a press conference at the beginning of November 2014 to answer questions regarding the cable car project (Figure 4.1). Although the given answers did not satisfy the audience, the press conference, at least, embodied the effectiveness of the advocacy approaches, confirming that public pressure will most likely lead to information transparency and social dialogue.

In the beginning of February 2015, after many online and offline campaign activities organized by A4F and SSD-HCM had been executed, Vietnam’s Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai approved Decision 902, an Overall Construction Master Plan for Phong Nha – Ke Bang National Park, in which no cable car project was mentioned (Figure 4.1).

In mid-May 2015, another Deputy Prime Minister, Vu Duc Dam was interviewed inside Son Doong Cave on the Good Morning America livestream show, in which he mentioned that Vietnam pledged for sustainable development of tourism (*Figure 4.1*).

4.7.4 Reaction (opinions, attitudes and behaviors) of other stakeholders

In May 2016, seven foreign ambassadors in Vietnam took a five-day expedition tour into Son Doong with the representatives of the UNESCO Vietnam. The ambassadors for Australia, Sweden, Italy, the UK, the Czech Republic and Argentina, along with US Assistant Secretary of State Tom Malinowski, joined the Vietnamese Ambassador Pham Sanh Chau, head of the Foreign Ministry's Culture and the UNESCO Department, and Vietnamese model-actress Duong Truong Thien Ly, who represented Vietnam at Miss World 2008, in this expedition.

Although it is reported that the tour was organized by “the External Culture and UNESCO Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to help Vietnam promote tourism to Quang Binh and the rest of the country” (Vuong, 2016), the following facts suggest that the tour is most likely part of the UNESCO-Vietnam's efforts in lobbying the foreign embassies to put pressure on the Vietnamese government into considering sustainable tourism development and preservation of natural heritage sites.

Firstly, after the tour, Assistant Secretary of State Tom Malinowski's opinion was shared on the Facebook fan page of the US Embassy in Hanoi, and covered by many newspapers. He stated that:

Son Doong is not only beautiful – it is also very fragile. It took nature millions of years to sculpt it, one drop of water and one grain of sand at a time. It would take human beings an instant to destroy it, if we chose to exploit it in the wrong way. I am therefore very grateful to the people of Vietnam and to the authorities of Quang Binh province for preserving Son Doong cave in its natural state.

The sustainable tourism currently allowed in Son Doong, managed by professionals who have deep respect for the environment and for the community nearby, has protected the cave and provided many jobs for local people. It is no surprise that tourism to Quang

Binh Province started increasing exactly when Son Doong cave was discovered. People around the world are impressed by Vietnam's commitment to preserving its natural beauty and come to the area to see everything that they can. I hope that my children and grandchildren will be able to see this great treasure of Vietnam just as I did (U.S. Embassy in Hanoi, May 18th 2016).

Secondly, during his three day visit to Vietnam, Obama delivered a speech at the National Convention Center in Hanoi, in which he called for the conservation of world natural heritage sites like Ha Long Bay and Son Doong Cave (Ly, 2016). There is a high possibility that Assistant Secretary of State Tom Malinowski had inspired Obama's Southeast Asia policy advisor, as well as his speechwriter, to include 'conservation of natural heritage' and 'Son Doong' in his remarks.

Thirdly, on her visit to the Vietnamese Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment office [MNRE], Italian Ambassador Cecilia Peccioni, who also participated in the Son Doong expedition tour, expressed her deep concern for the conservation of Son Doong Cave with Minister Tran Hong Ha. Peccioni also invited the Minister to attend a workshop co-organized by the Italian Ministry of Environment and the Vietnamese MNRE to support the protection and preservation of natural heritage (WT, personal communication, June 10th 2016; CTTDT, 2016).

4.8 Benefits of using online media

The activists emphasize three outstanding benefits that the utilization of online media has made in their efforts in running the movement.

4.8.1 Accelerating the process and reducing the cost of information distribution

TB and WT confirm how quickly and economically online media have facilitated their information distribution process. From their observations, information shared on social media goes viral rapidly, especially when the news is 'hot off the press'. WT explains that if news is shared on Facebook immediately after it has just been released, even at an off-peak hour, it will still be able to go more viral than if it is shared at a peak hour,

but several hours away from the moment the news was released. Apart from that, using online media to distribute information is an economic option for the activists since they cannot afford email or mobile marketing, not to mention purchasing advertising in mainstream media like newspapers, radio or television (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016).

4.8.2 Facilitating the networking and mobilization of resources between the activists and their supporters

Without online media, it would have been very inconvenient for the ‘Save Son Doong’ activists to approach and ask for help from the people who could provide them with information, expertise, supporting documents and visual content needed for the movement. Although the activists did invest time and money in physically meeting their supporters such as journalists, scientists, photographers and volunteers, the original connection and exchanging of information was initially made online, mostly via email and Facebook.

Vice versa, online media also allows the supporters to approach the activists so as to offer help. For example, some people responded to WT’s recruitment calls for the SSD-HCM team members and volunteers by leaving their contact details on her blog or replying to her comments on the ‘Save Son Doong’ – Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng Facebook fan page. In addition, many journalists took the initiative to write about the Son Doong cable car issue and Facebook messaged TB their articles so that he could share the article links on the Facebook fan page. Moreover, TB also received news alerts from general supporters:

I was very busy during that period, but I felt obligated to keep track of the news [related to the Son Doong cable car issue so that I could share it on the Facebook fan page]. [As people were aware of my duties] they sent me whatever news they came across so that I could post it. If I missed any news, people would message me. It is an advantage of using social media. That is everyone can contribute into making a successful campaign” (TB, personal communication, April 14th 2016).

4.8.3 Understanding audience

Social media in general (and Facebook in particular) enables activists to understand their audience and respond accordingly through features such as user comments and replies, and the counting of ‘likes’ and shares. Despite the fact that TB had never run a Facebook fan page or a public social campaign before he initiated the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement, he was able to generate exciting content that stimulated public discourse, ‘likes’, comments and shares by acting in accordance with the analysis of the Facebook Insights tool as well as by reading the followers’ comments. In a similar way, WT uses Facebook Insights to know who the audience are so as to create suitable content and to use appropriate language. For example, WT knows almost all of the audience of the ‘Save Son Doong’ – Phản Đối Dự Án Cấp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng fan page are Vietnamese speakers, “so 70% of the content on the page is in Vietnamese” (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016).

As the editors of the ‘Save Son Doong’ – Phản Đối Dự Án Cấp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng Facebook fan page, TB and WT have also learned that Vietnamese audiences are very emotional. According to WT, Facebook posts containing informative and scientific content are usually less popular than posts with touching content. TB adds, “posts that sound a little bit more critical or anti-government usually receive more likes, shares and comments” (TB, personal communication, April 14th 2016). Keeping this in mind, TB has a tendency to blow the whistle on sensitive information, while WT is more inclined to produce “posts that are concise, yet can stir readers’ emotion” when updating the Facebook fan page (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016).

4.8.4 Maintaining a good relationship with the audience to build a fan base

Both TB and WT acknowledge the importance of building a loyal fan base for the movement and they agree that social media allows them to do that. By replying to comments and private messages and setting rules for the followers of the fan page, the activists show that they have respect and appreciation for their audience. TB has announced clearly on the fan page that he will not delete any comment, except for ones

that insult other followers of the page. He chooses to respond to those who ask questions and those who indicate misunderstanding of his points from his status updates, both in the comment boxes and through Facebook messenger.

WT responds to the audience in a similar manner, yet invests more time in acknowledging audience members who encourage the movement and the activists by liking their comments, or replying with a smiley emoticon (☺) or a “thank you.” WT adds, she prioritizes her responses to foreign followers’ comments because “70% of the information we distribute on the page is in Vietnamese, 30% is in English. They [the foreign followers] are normally lack[ing] information. If I do not answer their questions, they cannot find the necessary source of information” (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016).

Furthermore, during off-peak periods of the movement, social media allows the activists to keep in touch with their followers. When there is no information specifically about Son Doong cable car project or about the movement activities, they post about related topics such as how the construction of Fanxipang cable cars in Lai Chau province, North Vietnam or Ba Na Hills cable cars in Da Nang city, Central Vietnam have resulted in the degradation of the surrounding environments (TB, personal communication, April 14th 2016). WT also shares that:

In general, a campaign or a topic trends in only a short period of time. Suddenly, tremendous amounts of people mention a topic, but the next day they forget it though the problem has not been solved yet. So the value of online media is that it helps us to keep the topic continuous so people don’t forget about it. When we need to heat it up, we can heat it up (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016).

4.9 Unexpected incidents the activists have encountered when using online media for activism purposes

There is no doubt that online media has provided many benefits for the ‘Save Son Doong’ activists. However, they have also encountered some challenges when using the tools.

First, Internet anonymity prevents the activists from thoroughly learning about their conversation partners. Both TB and WT share that they hesitated to be open and trust people with whom they were communicating online for the first time:

When I was recruiting [members for the SSD-HCM] team, I went through every single one's profile, examining how long he/she had been using Facebook, if he/she had any affiliation with the Sun Group or Quang Binh provincial government. Some people act as if they were #SaveSonDoong supporters, but it turns out that they were not (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016).

Second, discouraging comments on Facebook posts might have affected the psychology of the activists to some extent. TB admits that impolite comments at times cause him much stress. WT also received comments that criticized her use of English in some posts on the Facebook page (accusing her of not being patriotic) and comments that oppose the 'Save Son Doong' t-shirt fundraising activity (suggesting the SSD-HCM team is using the 'Save Son Doong' – Phản Đối Dự Án Cấp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng page to generate commercial benefits). In such cases, both TB and WT chose to disregard the negative comments and strengthened their belief in the cause by continuing their plans and aiming toward the defined objectives. According to WT, understanding and listening to the audience is necessary, but “do not let them sway you too much” with their negative attitudes (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016).

Third, someone tried to interrupt the activists by turning off and damaging their communication channels. TB reported that someone continuously tried to reset the password of the 'Save Son Doong' – Phản Đối Dự Án Cấp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng Facebook fan page (TB, personal communication, April 14th 2016). The Vietnamese-version petition for the movement hosted on the tutela.vn site was also attacked with waves of fake signatures, which devalued the real signatures of their supporters (Tử Tế Là, 2014).

Fourth, WT fears that online activism acts are quite new in Vietnam so decision-makers do not recognize the movement outputs, especially the online petitions. The

decision-makers will most likely deny the petitions by suggesting that either, online petitions do not contain real signatures, ID numbers or addresses of the people who sign, or that online petitions can simply be hacked to have as many signatures as the activists wish (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016).

Fifth, although TB and WT share responsibly editing the ‘Save Son Doong’ – Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng Facebook fan page, they do not speak with a single voice. This has resulted in some unexpected obstacles for WT when seeking help from potential supporters who might not be comfortable with the way TB has addressed the Son Doong cable car issue. To be specific, when using the word “Phản đối,” which means “to oppose,” to name the Facebook fan page, TB has declared that he opposes the Son Doong cable car project. However, WT emphasizes that the message that she and SSD-HCM want to convey to their audience is more indirect:

We do not call upon people to oppose cable cars into Son Doong. We want them to have as much information as possible to make their own decisions. Roughly speaking, many young audiences think that if the cable cars only stop in front of the entrance of Son Doong, there is no impact on the cave, and that will not cause the cave to collapse. They are not aware of the impacts of tourists’ footsteps or carbon dioxide (CO₂) exhaled by tourists inside the cave. The cave ecosystem is very sensitive to sound, light and CO₂ gas. We transmit those messages to the audience, from which they make their own decisions, rather than calling upon everyone to boycott cable cars. We do not convey such [a] message (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016).

Some institutions were hesitant about supporting the SSD-HCM’s campaign when WT approached them for help. WT believes it was partly due to TB’s utilization of sensitive words like “oppose” on the Facebook page, that were adopted by WT herself and branded as the official Facebook channel of the SSD-HCM’s #SaveSonDoong campaign.

4.10 The activists' perceptions of the drawbacks of existing online media platforms when being used for organizing social movements

Speaking from the perspective of the founder of the Wake It Up platform as well as a full-time activist, LA4F believes that “there has not been any online platform that meets all the needs of a social campaign” (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016). In other words, there is no platform designed particularly for social activists. Existing online platforms, even the multi-functional Facebook, does not provide a comprehensive set of tools for activists to organize and manage all of the possible campaign activities in one place, and allow for the campaign supporters to get involved in the activities with convenience. LA4F expands on this by giving three specific examples below.

To begin with, it was not really practical for the #SaveSonDoong slogan and t-shirt design contest to be run on Facebook. Facebook does not allow competition participants to upload their designs directly onto the campaign fan page. The participants had to submit their designs via email and the competition organizers had to post the designs on Facebook, which was time-consuming. In terms of voting:

Facebook is not a reliable platform for voting or for watching the voting process. What if a submission has a sudden increase in the number of votes? Will you be able to supervise it? Obviously, Facebook is not a platform designed for competitions, and there is not any platform as such. If you want one, you have to design a website, which is costly. A platform as such can totally be created by a website designer, about VND 30 million. But it takes very long [to be finished] ... at least a couple of weeks (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016).

Next, Facebook is a great tool to advertise events, but only using Facebook is insufficient in managing the events. Activists can easily invite as many people as possible to an offline event by using the ‘create event’ tool on Facebook, but Facebook users who are invited cannot register to attend the event simply by clicking ‘Going’. They have to reserve their spots by filling out forms on Google form, Eventbrite or Ticketbox. For

event organizers, the extra steps of creating separate Google forms for each event and then repeatedly posting information about one event on different sites is time-consuming (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016).

Finally, petition sites like thepetitionsite.com or change.org are not really friendly to people who are willing to sign petitions but do not know English. Furthermore, these platforms do not allow the petition creators, to contact their supporters for free:

In fact, petition sites do not provide email addresses of those who have signed [petitions], so you can't email to thank them or invite them to participate in other activities. You don't know, out of 70,000 people [signing the #SaveSonDoong petition], who are in Hanoi so that you can invite them to attend the workshop [you organize in Hanoi] ... Thepetitionsite.com will suggest similar petitions for you to sign. They will send their own newsletters, but they don't allow campaign organizers who use the third platform to send newsletters to supporters without paying [to upgrade the accounts]. That is the business model of the petition platforms (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016).

In short, the #SaveSonDoong supporters who participated in any activity of the movement had to switch to another platform such as email, online petition, or Ticketbox as part of the participating procedure. Neither Facebook nor any other online platform allows all possible social movement activities to be organized and managed in one place. The Internet has much potential and the capability for such a thing to be developed (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016).

With particular regards to Facebook, LA4F affirms that Facebook is a good channel for transmitting information, but not a good platform to host proper debates, in which opinions from different sides are equally valued. WT adds, the interactions happening on Facebook are not a two-way dialogue. Facebook users tend to comment or express emotion in short posts, thus when a status is updated on a Facebook fan page, the information mainly derives from the content of the status rather than from the comments (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016). Some followers do give informative comments, but "good comments are easily floated away by clicks" (WT,

personal communication, April 13th 2016). In addition, discussions on a Facebook fan page cannot be categorized into topics like on a forum. The Facebook fan page editor is the one who decides the content of the posts, which means he/she is the one to orient the followers to discuss particular topics. When a new status is updated, previous ones are pushed down along with the followers' comments. Whereas, in a forum platform, anyone can create his/her own topic discussion, and other contributors' comments are not drifted away, but stay in that topic box (LA4F, personal communication, April 10th 2016).

4.11 Alternative online platforms to be used for the movement

The 'Save Son Doong' activists are tech-savvy leaders with a vision. Their technology skills are demonstrable in their proactive search for solutions to the shortcomings of the existing online platforms.

Recognizing the drawbacks of Facebook (as mentioned above), WT and the SSD-HCM team strived to create a dedicated forum, named greenorgrey.org, to host public discourse and debates related to the movement. It is their ambition "to advance the debates and arguments in the comments on the Facebook fan page to another level, [placing them in] a more decent format" (TOG, personal communication, April 23rd 2016). The SSD-HCM team expects their supporters and those who are concerned about the issue, especially young people, to develop their critical thinking instead of accepting the activists and others' opinions without making their own judgments. The site has been coded, but the process of testing and putting it into operation has been delayed, and most likely cancelled, due to the voluntary coder's tight schedule and partly because of LA4F's introduction of the 'Wake It Up' platform.

While waiting for our voluntary coder to work on the greenorgrey.org site, I talked to LA4F. I am very supportive of LA4F's Wake It Up project because it will be not only a forum for debates, but also integrated with many different tools... When the Wake It Up platform is ready, we will cling to it. I am very afraid of wasting resources. Non-profit organizations with limited human and finance resources should coordinate and share

whatever resource [is] available to share. We should not multiply the platforms because it will be difficult for the audience to follow, too. I think, in the coming future, we will concentrate [on] using LA4F's Wake It Up site (WT, personal communication, April 13th 2016).

LA4F launched the Wake It Up platform in late 2015 – early 2016. Although the platform, in its present condition, does not look like what WT expected (a social multi-functional platform that contains a forum-like section), it provides users or activists with useful tools to design their campaigns, addressing the shortcomings of other existing online platforms that LA4F has referred to above.

First, the 'petition' tool allows activists to create online petitions, mobilize communities' signatures, watch the petitions' performance, generate statistical reports, and contact the people signing the petitions. With this function, Wake It Up is the first and only online petition platform in Vietnamese.

Second, activists can flexibly use the 'competition' tool to host online competitions, recruit volunteers and promote events. With a handy design format, and convenient monitor and communication system, this tool facilitates the activists' organization of, as well as public participation in, such activities. Submission of work by contestants, audience voting, registration of personal information by event attendees or volunteers, the activists' supervision of these activities, and their communication with contestants, event attendees, volunteers and other platform users are supposed to be much easier and centralized on the Wake It Up platform.

Third, the 'sharefund' tool, which is claimed to be a new method of fund raising not only in Vietnam but globally, enables activists to raise funds from potential sponsors based on the level of public support they can galvanize for their campaign. Above all, Wake It Up is free so this new platform seems to be a very promising tool for Vietnamese NGOs, NPOs, CSOs and grassroots activists to help organize campaign activities, galvanize public support, and mobilize financial and human resources at the same time.

4.12 Summary

Initiating the movement were three unacquainted individuals: TB, who created a Facebook fan page called ‘Save Son Doong’ – Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đòong; WT, who wrote a blog article analyzing “5 reasons why cable cars into Son Doong would be a disaster”, and VAA, who created an online bilingual petition named “Stop the Construction: Save Son Doong Cave!” on thepetitionsite.com. When these three initiatives started going viral and the Son Doong cable car project became increasingly popular among the Vietnamese netizen community, LA4F decided to gather WT, TB and VAA into a working group. LA4F invited them into a Facebook private group and coordinated discussions for the group to come up with an action plan and to assign tasks among each other. WT also recruited members to form a team (the SSD-HCM team) that later assisted her in organizing a public will campaign, contributing to the movement. As the leader of a local NGO called A4F, LA4F also got the A4F team involved in organizing another public will campaign to support the movement.

It is important to acknowledge that ‘Save Son Doong’ is not a single campaign. It is a movement in which different teams of activist (the SSD-HCM team led by WT and the A4F team led by LA4F) and individual activists (TB and VAA) act parallel to each other to achieve one common goal, which is to terminate the construction of cable cars into Son Doong Cave. Although aiming toward the same ultimate goal, these individual activists and teams set different objectives. Therefore, they did not agree on a detailed strategy, which would have clearly defined a target audience, core messages or tactics that everyone had to follow.

Despite the lack of a detailed strategy, individual activists and teams acted consistently with each other. Their consistency is shown through the fact that all of their activities aim to create public pressure that would stimulate a reaction from the provincial government, the investor and other stakeholders such as environmental organizations and scientists. The activities, both online and offline, are designed based on three approaches of communication for social change: advocacy (petitioning, media

advocacy, obtaining well-known people's endorsement), social mobilization (building coalition, mobilizing resources), and public will campaigning.

It did not take long for the movement to achieve certain outcomes, such as massive media coverage of the Son Doong cable car project, increasing public awareness and support for the 'Save Son Doong' movement and positive responses from the decision-makers as well as other stakeholders of the issue. Four months after the movement's inception, the Son Doong cable car project was finally postponed. However, there have been signals that it is being continued. Some of the activists decided to keep fighting, but so far they have not achieved the ultimate goal.

In this movement, the activists have employed many online platforms for their activism purposes, including email, online petition sites, blogs, social networking sites, content sharing sites, and event management sites and applications. The adoption of online media has enabled the activists to initiate the movement despite the fact that they had no former connection to each other, little affiliation with environmental NGOs as well as limited financial resources. Furthermore, using online media has benefited them in other ways: 1) It accelerates the process and reduces the cost of information distribution; 2) It facilitates the networking and mobilization of resources between the activists and their supporters; 3) It helps the activists understand their audience; and 4) It makes the activists' process of maintaining a good and long lasting relationship with the audience convenient.

However, the activists also experienced some challenges when using online media for this movement: 1) They found it insecure when communicating with strangers on the Internet; 2) They sometimes came across discouraging comments on the Facebook posts that might have affected their psychology; 3) They had to deal with the opponents' attempts to hack the movement's communication channels; 4) They had concerns about whether decision-makers recognize the credibility of online petitions; and 5) They have failed to speak with a single voice though they shared responsibility in editing the same Facebook channel.

The activists also point out that there has not been any online platform that meets all the needs of a social campaign. Neither Facebook nor any other online platform allows all possible social movement activities to be organized, managed and engaged in one place. This makes the mobilizing process inconvenient and time-consuming for both the activists and the participants. In addition, the characteristic of Facebook that allows users to comment or express emotion in short posts, makes it less attractive to the activists as a proper platform to host debates. Perceiving these drawbacks, the activists have attempted to build alternative platforms (a forum named 'Green or Grey' and an online social platform specifically for activists named 'Wake It Up') in the hope of overcoming the deficiencies of the currently available platforms.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Profiling the 'Save Son Doong' activists

The 'Save Son Doong' movement would have not occurred without the initiation of TB, WT and VAA, as well as the active involvement of LA4F, the A4F and SSD-HCM teams as leaders and core members of the movement. They are young Vietnamese people with ages ranging between 24 and 35, living in urban areas including Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and Kentucky, US. All of them are highly educated (with undergraduate and graduate qualifications), who have worked and studied in an English-speaking environment.

These people, especially the movement pioneers and leaders share other common traits as well. For example, they love experiences related to adventure travel or nature exploration. TB usually shares photos of himself trekking or hiking on his private Facebook account, WT claims she loves adventure experiences similar to her trip to South Africa and LA4F states he likes hiking and horse riding.

In addition, they are active and enthusiastic people whose jobs are directly or indirectly related to social activities and university extracurricular activities. For instance, TB works for the United Nations International School of Hanoi [UNIS Hanoi] as a service learning coordinator. His duties include organizing social activities and community services for students of the UNIS Hanoi. He has also been volunteering for NGOs like Habitat for Humanity Vietnam and Operation Smile for many years, and sometimes works for them as a mission coordinator.

LA4F is a fulltime social activist. Since he was 12, he has been involved in many youth and communication projects that address environmental and social problems. He is the director of Action for the Future [A4F], which was transformed from a program named 'Raising awareness about environmental issues and climate change' that he initiated when he was 18 years old. Some executive members of the SSD-HCM team also declare they participated in social and environmental extracurricular activities while at university.

Moreover, these people are active users of online media. Both TB and WT had already been travel bloggers before they started the movement. LA4F and A4F was already the owner of the tutela.vn site and managed to make the 'Tủ Tể Là' Facebook fan page become very popular among young Vietnamese netizens before joining the 'Save Son Doong' movement and becoming the founder of the 'Wake It Up' platform. VAA has been an active Facebook user whose status is updated every day with the latest news he gathers from several sources. Finally, DCS of the SSD-HCM team is herself a digital communication specialist.

It is no surprise that in developing countries where the digital divide remains obvious, grassroots movements that emerge from social media tend to be initiated by young, urban and/or highly educated individuals (Chadha & Harlow, 2015; Fu & Chau, 2014; Harlow, 2011; Ullah, 2013). The profiles of the 'Save Son Doong' movement activists support this trend as they are young urban people who have access to advanced education and technologies, and opportunities to experience exotic adventures and engage in social activities.

Their backgrounds have built up an elite group of activists who commit "an elite form of activism" (Chadha & Harlow, 2015, p. 686). This manifests through their utilization of online media as a tool to communicate with an elite population of audience (other educated Internet users) about unpopular concepts among Vietnamese people, such as nature preservation and sustainable tourism. The elite form of activism is also embodied in their adoption of professional NGOs' advocacy and social mobilization approaches including online petitioning, gaining celebrities' endorsement, and allying with international organizations like the UNESCO and IUCN.

Sommerfeldt (2013) mentions that grassroots activism groups are most likely to perform civil disobedience activities like sit-ins, blocking traffic and trespassing, or symbolic strategies like boycotts and protests because they are spontaneous and unprofessional. But his argument does not include the 'Save Son Doong' activists' form of activism. The fact that the 'Save Son Doong' activists have taken on forms of highly professionalized movement strategies could be reasoned out with two factors. First, the

Vietnamese political context is not a favorable condition for groups, regardless of their organizational structure, to execute civil disobedience or symbolic activities. Second, the activists' experiences of working and studying in English-speaking environments has exposed them to more open sources of information about global movements, from which they have been inspired and learned to employ various possible approaches.

5.2 The structure of the 'Save Son Doong' network

5.2.1 Digital enabled network

The findings obviously show that the 'Save Son Doong' working group is a digitally enabled network, in which the members were globally located and had no prior connection to each other. It is also safe to say that the 'Save Son Doong' movement is an embodiment of a connective action that manifests in both the 'self-organizing' and 'organizationally enabled' models introduced by Bennett and Segerberg (2012) (*Figure 2.1*). On the one hand, the self-organizing aspect of the 'Save Son Doong' connective action is shown through the fact that online media play a huge role in the activists' formation of the network as well as their organization of the movement activities (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). The communicated information was generated within personal action frames that are "inclusive of different personal reasons for contesting a situation that needs to be changed" (p. 744) and shared through various communication technologies of personal choices.

The findings show, all of the 'Save Son Doong' activists pursue one common goal, which is to terminate the Son Doong cable car project, but each of them had their own reasons when initiating the movement and adopted different online media platforms to start their initiatives. For examples, TB's reason to 'Save Son Doong' is that he wanted to trek into Son Doong in the future and he created Facebook fan page to raise his voice, while WT wanted to 'Save Son Doong' purely because of her love for it and she started by expressing her concerns on her personal blog. In addition, the activists welcome the public's personal expressions toward the issue all over the network, instead of imposing

a collective action frame, which underlines common interpretations of the issue (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

On the other hand, the organizationally enabled aspect of the 'Save Son Doong' connective action is demonstrated by the involvement of the A4F, a pre-existing NGO, in the coordination of the movement activities. As described in the findings, the A4F ran their own #SaveSonDoong public will campaign on their Facebook fan page and tutela.vn site. This implies that the A4F has acted as an organization that not only performs "loose organizational coordination of action," but also "provide[s] social technology outlays – both custom and commercial" for the public audience to generate personalized content, and share individualized calls for action to support the overall movement (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 756). Moreover, the A4F team, on behalf of the 'Save Son Doong' alliance, has pitched to CECM for a funding of US\$5000 to cover both A4F's and SSD-HCM's activities. They also reached out to the UNESCO by inviting the organization to a private meeting attended by other stakeholders of the issue. These actions suggest that they have supported the other activists' self-organizing process "in terms of resource mobilization and coalition building without imposing strong brands and collective identities" on the overall movement (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 757).

The unique structure of the 'Save Son Doong' network reflects the conclusion that Bennett and Segerberg (2012) drew from their logic of connective action and Granovetter's (1973) past study on the advantages of weak-ties in social networks. They concluded that the deployment of digital technologies by grassroots activists in contemporary social movements brings about opportunities for ordinary citizens to simultaneously raise voices against a common issue in their own way, and also creates loose (yet beneficial) networks of individuals and organizations from which activists can seek "support ... in form of experience, information and resources" (Cammaerts 2015, p. 1033).

5.2.2 Weak-ties network

The findings also show that the 'Save Son Doong' working group is a weak-tie network. Drawing on past literature on the Gerlach and Hines' SPIN-model, this research provides evidence that digital networked movements are characterized as Segmentation (fluid and diverse in demands and aims), Polycentric (leaderless and containing a multiplicity of identities), Integration (horizontal structures and the building chains of equivalence), and Networks (non-hierarchical, complex interconnections and flows of information) (Cammaerts, 2015). The activists' formation and operation of the 'Save Son Doong' movement clearly embody all of these characteristics.

To begin with, the 'Save Son Doong' working group consists of different teams of activists - the SSD-HCM led by WT, the A4F led by LA4F, and the individual activists who are TB and VAA. These individuals and groups are acting parallel to each other to achieve one common goal, but aiming toward different objectives for different phases of the movement (segmentation). Next, members of the 'Save Son Doong' group did not stress the importance of a detailed strategy, which would have clearly defined a target audience group, core messages or tactics that everyone had to follow. As LA4F has stated, no one can force the others to convey certain messages and one team's slogan for their campaign does not represent the whole movement (polycentric). Although the activists did not agree on a detailed strategy or particular set of rules, they acted consistently with each other based on a general plan, which is to create public pressure to stimulate reactions from the decision makers and influential stakeholders of the issue. Their decisions on such a consistent plan of action were made through consensus rather one individual's order (integration).

Last but not least, the formation of the 'Save Son Doong' working group is a result of a complex interconnection among the activists and their intermediaries, as well as a complex matrix of free flowing information distributed online by the activists that attracted them to make contact with each other (networks). Coupled with the fact that the 'Save Son Doong' network is "dynamic in terms of the changing population" as the activists "opt in and out of play" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 759), these

characteristics imply the unsustainability of such weak-tie, decentralized or deinstitutionalized forms of activism (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2009). As mentioned in the findings, most of the activists who initiated and engaged in leading the 'Save Son Doong' movement are no longer involved. The withdrawal of VAA, TB, LA4F and the A4F team from the movement's working group has posed a challenge for WT and SSD-HCM to sustain the movement when there is a shortage of human resources that can mobilize financial resources and/or provide expertise needed to execute additional activities.

Moreover, many scholars argue that a weak-tie social network' performance is usually spontaneous and disperse (cited in White, 2014) because they lack 1) a common detailed strategy that would clearly define the target groups of audience and core messages to avoid conflicting distributed information; 2) certain procedures for consistently designing communication materials and organizing offline events which strengthen the branding of the movement and; 3) rules and discipline to ensure the activists' unity and equal time commitment to achieving the ultimate goal. Such fluid structure of the network has given the activists the flexibility to act in a timely and independent manner. But in the long run, when the issue advances, it will be unsustainable unless the network transforms into a formal institution with "more structure and division of labor" and "strategies of efficacious issue advocacy change" (Sommerfeldt, 2013, p. 363).

Findings show that the activists do acknowledge the unsustainability of their status quo as well as the importance of formalizing the organizational structure of their working group as a prerequisite for the movement to progress. They believe if an NPO is established with a clear mission of a general related theme (such as nature preservation or environmental protection to carry on the 'Save Son Doong' movement and future relevant programs), they will be able to carry out more systemized fundraising projects to sustain the 'Save Son Doong' movement. In addition to this, the establishment of an NPO would also generate more professionalized activities aimed at making changes to the Vietnamese environmental and economic policies, which would be beneficial in the

preservation of Vietnam's natural environment in general and the protection of Son Doong Cave in particular.

5.3 Tactical use of online media

5.3.1 The employment of online media for different activism purposes

The benefits of online media in activism have been well documented in the literature. This research provides further empirical evidence of the multifunctional role that online media can play in the organization of a grassroots social movement. The findings show that the 'Save Son Doong' activists have used online media for many different activism purposes that can be synthesized into four dimensions – awareness uses, mobilizing uses, communication and networking uses, and administrative uses (Harp, Bachmann & Guo, 2012) – as presented in *Table 5.1*. The findings demonstrate that among the many benefits that online media provides to the 'Save Son Doong' activists, its advantages in raising public awareness, mobilizing resources and establishing a sustainable relationship with the audience are worthy of more thorough discussions.

First of all, the employment of online media was an effective way for the activists to share their opinions and to raise public awareness of the Son Doong cable car project. The availability of the web 2.0 platforms including an online petition site, Facebook fan page and blog, made it possible for VAA, TB and WT to start their protesting initiatives. Using those online platforms, these ordinary citizens could bypass the state-controlled media to amplify their voices, sharing their knowledge of Son Doong Cave and the necessity of protecting it, with the online public. This result concurs with the argument that in countries where the media systems are politically and commercially controlled, (preventing contentious political information from being covered by traditional mass media), online media (in general) and social media (in particular) is a viable solution (Fu & Chau, 2014; Fuchs, 2014; Huang & Yip, 2012; Lim, 2013; Pickerill, 2001; Scherman & Valenzuela, 2015; Theocharis, 2013; Ullah, 2013; Zhang, 2013).

Activism dimensions	Activists' purposes of using online media
Awareness uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share personal opinions regarding the Son Doong cable car issue • Transmit information to the public audience • Stimulate mass media coverage
Mobilizing uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage public discourses • Call for action: signing petition, taking photos with #SaveSonDoong signs, participating in online competitions and offline events, buying #savesondoong t-shirts etc. • Promote online activities and offline events • Recruit executive members and volunteers for the SSD-HCM team • Exchange information and documents with supporters (scientists, photographers etc.)
Communication & networking uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network among the activists • Coordinate discussions among the activists • Network with supporters and volunteers • Establish and maintain relationships with public audience
Administrative uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Store information, photos, videos • Create and host the petitions • Generate forms for the attendees to register for offline events

Table 5.1 Purposes of using online media for activism

Under authoritarian regimes like China and Vietnam, activists usually have special appreciation for online media which enables them to circumvent the powerful information gatekeepers, allowing the promotion of awareness about salient issues (Bui, 2016; Harp, Bachman & Guo, 2012).

In addition to awareness uses, the activists' employment of online media was especially beneficial to their mobilizing effort. Taking advantage of what Sommerfeldt refers to as "the relationship building potential of the Internet technology" (2013, p. 352), the activists managed to mobilize necessary resources from the connections that they made online. In general, required resources for a social movement come in many forms. For example, tangible resources include "money, space and a means to publicize the existence of the group and its idea", whereas intangible resources are "people, their support for an organization, and the activities they perform to further the goals of the organization." Coalition-building resources refer to the advocacy power and legitimacy that the alliance lend to the group (Sommerfeldt, 2013, p. 353). Taking the 'Save Son Doong' activists' low finances and unofficial partnership with a formal sponsor into consideration, the amount of resources they managed to solicit from the network established online is impressive. These include (but are not limited to) the online petition signatures, the likes, comments and shares on Facebook, the audience's participation in the movement activities and competitions, the knowledge provided by the cave expert, the volunteers and their services, the high-resolution photographs provided by the foreigner photographers, the \$5000 sponsored by CECM, and the funds raised from the selling of t-shirts which were advertised online. To put it succinctly, the activists' utilization of online media has allowed them to mobilize support from different stakeholders, strengthening their effort to organize the movement.

Furthermore, by using online media, the activists were enabled to not only form a network of public audience and supporters for the movement but also maintain the relationship with these people. The activists agree that maintaining ongoing communication with the supporters is a must for a sustainable movement (Katz-Kimchi

& Manosevitch, 2015). Among many online platforms, social media are the best tools that allow activists to obtain such goals. As shown in the findings, Facebook features allow the activists to keep their audience updated with breaking news related to the issue as well as real time updates of the movement (Obar, Zube & Lampe, 2012). It also enables the activists to interact with their audience, communicating not just to exchange information but to understand the audience in a way that benefits the maintenance of the 'Save Son Doong' cause. The activists also know how to make use of the platform to gain insight into their audience so that they can then generate content that wins further audience support.

5.3.2 Integration of the online and offline activities

Social movements become more genuine to the supporters when online mobilization activities are complemented by offline demonstrations. In the 'Save Son Doong' movement, the activists recognized the importance of integrating the online and offline tactics so as to reinforce their overall mobilization effort. Theoretically speaking, the activists' use of online media can be considered as a set of e-mobilizations and e-tactics that not only enrich the movement's overall mobilization repertoires (Earl & Kimport, 2011), but also enhance the coordinating process of the real-world actions (Shirky, 2015). The activists admit that using online media was an effective (inexpensive and quick) way to gather a big crowd of supporters for the movement. They are aware of the tools' ability to help them circumvent financial and geographical barriers to mobilize on a large scale (Carty, 2015; Chadha & Harlow, 2015; Wang, Madnick, Li, Alstott & Velu, 2015).

However, although they believe integrating online and offline mobilizing activities ensures the movement approaches its audience in terms of scale and depth, they also accept that using online media can help them to attract the crowd but it cannot make a profound impact because it does not bring forth the "emotional fire" (Dennis, 2011, p. 18) within each participant. The fact that participants of the movie screening, panel discussion and debate events were required to commit more time, effort and money

than those who only signed the online petitions or interacted on the Facebook fan pages, suggests participants in the offline events made closer connections to the movement cause and developed stronger feelings about supporting it in the long run. In order to ensure high turnout, different platforms such as websites, Facebook and ticketbox.vn were employed for promotion and management purposes.

The activists' use of online media has been advantageous in the process of mobilizing necessary resources for offline activities as well. For example, the petitions sent to the authorized offices were printed out from the online petitions with a great number of signatures from the online audience, the SSD-HCM core members who execute the offline events in Ho Chi Minh City were recruited online, the high-resolution photographs of Son Doong Cave demonstrated at the SSD-HCM's offline events were acquired from the international photographers via the Internet, and the #SaveSonDoong t-shirts sold at the offline events to raise funds for the movement were designed by the participants of the online slogan and t-shirt design contest. The activists believed, without online media, it would be very difficult for the offline events to succeed.

The finding also supports the notion that online activism does not replace, but complements offline activism practices (Chadha & Harlow, 2015). In addition to the offline events aimed at impacting the public audience, the activists also executed some offline activities to target other stakeholders of the issue. For example, they organized a private workshop with the UNESCO, scientists and tour companies to encourage these parties to actively get involved in finding a solution to the problem. They also sent letters of denunciation to authorized environmental organizations and petitioned the environmental offices of the central government to urge these institutions to respond and address the issue. These actions imply that the activists might have not been confident about the efficacy of their online activism, worrying that their online activities might have failed to capture the attention of the decision makers or to influence their actions (Harp, Bachman & Guo, 2012).

Undoubtedly, the Internet has made activism become "too easy" so that decision-makers sometimes do not find online activism appealing (Laer & Aelst, 2010, p. 1162).

This argument applies particularly to online petitioning, which can be easily created, shared and signed by a massive number of people in a short period of time. Resultantly, decision-makers tend to be “unimpressed by a haphazard list of names that arrives piecemeal, with repeated signatures or pseudonyms from people well outside their jurisdiction” (Meikle 2002, p. 25). Sometimes, decision makers also question the credibility of the online petition signatures like in the case of the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement. Thus, all of these points suggest that the transfer of activism from cyberspace to an offline setting offers a higher likelihood of the social movement creating an impact.

5.3.3 Combination of nonmainstream media and mainstream media

The activists’ adoption of online media to spread news and share opinions about the Son Doong cable car project was able to attract public attention and foster debate among the online netizens, which in turn made a significant impact on the mainstream media’s coverage of the issue. This provides evidence to support the concept of ‘bottom-up’ agenda setting, which refers to:

... a communication process through which grassroots, nonmainstream, or citizen media, usually enabled by online media such as blogging, discussion forums, or social net-working sites, serve as significant agenda setters to transfer issue salience from non-mainstream to mainstream media and as a result build the public agenda (Fu & Chau, 2014, p. 311).

It reinforces the notion that where mainstream media are under authoritarian ownership and control, the grassroots media becomes an even more competitive and useful tool for the marginalized to amplify their voices of dissent.

The massive mainstream media coverage of the issue also manifests the “bidirectional agenda-setting influence” between the nonmainstream and mainstream media (Luo, 2014, p. 1301). From the beginning, the mainstream media, *Tuoi Tre News* to be specific, publicized the news and the activists amplified it by using online media to

share their opinions and start the various ‘Save Son Doong’ initiatives. The activists’ immediate reactions drew public attention and provoked public discourse about the issue as well as public support for the initiatives. This, in turn, resulted in many other newspapers covering it.

In simpler terms, massive mainstream media coverage of the Son Doong cable car issue was the result of an interactive process between the activists and the journalists that happened organically when both sides simply tried to perform well in their daily jobs. Usually “activists ... turn to media to build support for their issue and to gain legitimacy for themselves” and their causes because mainstream media conventionally hold the power to set a public agenda (Sommerfeldt, 2013, p. 362). However, due to the fact that arranged media coverage is costly, the ‘Save Son Doong’ activists employed online media to raise public awareness, galvanizing them into discussing the issue and promoting the ‘Save Son Doong’ initiatives. When the topic started trending on social media, many mainstream journalists picked up the story. The audience’s discussions on Facebook became a valuable source for the journalists to exploit for ideas for their articles (Luo, 2014). Once the issue had been massively covered in newspapers, the activists then promoted the articles on the movement’s Facebook fan pages, firstly to illustrate the worthiness of the movement’s cause, secondly to keep their audience updated. The articles that were shared on the fan pages consequently drove more traffic to the corresponding newspapers’s websites. Overall, it is a win-win co-operation in which the activists helped the journalists to attract a wider readership by orienting the public attention toward an issue that was newsworthy, while the journalists helped promote the topic to which the activists wanted the public audience to pay attention to.

In this “trajectory of inter-media interplay” (Lin, Change & Zhang, 2015, p. 235) that heightened public awareness of the Son Doong cable car issue and the ‘Save Son Doong’ initiatives, both the mainstream media and the activists, as the opinion leaders, held the first-level agenda-setting power, the ability to drive audience attention towards a certain issue and to foster online discourses and debates on that issue. The activists, together with their online followers, also exerted second-level agenda-setting power,

which influenced how the issue was framed as well as how positively, negatively or neutrally it was referred to in the mainstream media (Ceron, Curini & Iacus, 2014). The first article about the Son Doong cable car project on *Tuoi Tre News* was purely a fact-based article announcing that the Sun Group and Quang Binh province were planning on the construction of a cable car system into Son Doong Cave. In this article, the Son Doong cable car project was not framed as an issue, but simply a fact. Only after the activists and their online followers had raised concerns about the potential risks of the project did the mainstream media started framing it as a controversial issue or as an issue relating to environmental degradation or sustainable tourism development. The findings bolster the understanding that mainstream media is a valuable stakeholder who can immensely contribute to the success of movement advocacy activities by boosting activists' effort in disseminating information and fostering public discourses (Yang & Calhoun, 2007; Micó & Casero-Ripollés, 2014; Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015).

However, the findings also show that the Vietnamese mainstream media still suffer from strict censorship, which has prevented them from overtly supporting the movement. They lack the freedom of press that is necessary to provide audiences with the most objective, accurate and complete information. As some researchers argue, mainstream media tend to “marginalize and discredit social movement” activists and that instead of analyzing the “underlying causes or significance” of social movements, mainstream media only “focus on the violence, numbers, and spectacles of protests” (as cited in Chadha & Harlow, 2015, p. 673). Likewise, the SSD-HCM team indicates that the mainstream media's support for the SSD-HCM's #SaveSonDoong campaign is not significant. Although the Vietnamese mainstream media wrote about the Son Doong cable cars story when the movement emerged, only a few reported specifically on the 'Save Son Doong' movement, the #SaveSonDoong campaigns or the SSD-HCM team, despite their efforts approaching the mainstream journalists.

Essentially the activists' use of online media was an effective mechanism for advancing their advocacy effort by having the mainstream media join forces with them. Doing this increased public awareness but also oriented the audience toward a more

critical view of the Son Doong cable car project. Though the mainstream media did not directly advocate for the cause of the 'Save Son Doong' movement, the 'Save Son Doong' working group or the SSD-HCM team, it was able to boost public debates and generate pressure for the decision makers to respond.

5.4 Remaining obstacles

5.4.1 Digital divide

Despite the fact that it was an affordable option to raise public awareness, the use of online media by the 'Save Son Doong' activists was a limitation on their communication with a much wider range of potential audiences. In answer to the question of how the movement could have been done better, TB's says that "collaboration with mainstream media, newspapers and television who can transmit information to more groups of audience is needed the most". This indicates that the digital divide remains an obstacle to online activism making a wide impact on society (Chadha & Harlow, 2015; Obar, Zube & Lampe, 2012; Harp, Bachmann & Guo, 2012).

Digital divide refers to the disparity in access to information and communication technologies between people of different socioeconomic class, demographic segmentation and region. A recent study on media use in Vietnam by the Broadcasting Board of Governors [BBG] and Gallup reports that although the total number of Vietnamese people with access to the Internet and online news sources has rapidly increased over the past few years, the proportion varies by age, education and urban versus rural areas (BBG & Gallup, 2015). Most of the growing online community in Vietnam is comprised of young adults, urban residents and college-educated people. It is also reported that this group is more open to non-official information sources like personal blogs than to official information produced by state media (BBG & Gallup, 2015). Hence, they are more likely to be convinced of contentious information spreading online and to become supportive of grassroots movements emerging within cyberspace, compared to others. Evidence for this argument manifests in the number of followers of the 'Save Son Doong' – Phản Đối Dự Án Cáp Treo Hang Sơn Đoòng

Facebook fan page, which shows the majority is from 18-34 years of age and living in big cities including Ho Chi Minh city, Hanoi and Da Nang (*Figure 4.24*).

Because “television remains the most used medium and the top source for news and information” for all Vietnamese citizens regardless of gender, age, education and geographic area (BBG & Gallup, 2015, p. 36), the activists’ distribution of information on cyberspace has unavoidably excluded a majority of the Vietnamese population from the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement.

5.4.2 Alternative media platforms

It is safe to say that the ‘Save Son Doong’ activists regard their use of online media for activism purposes as unsatisfying. The dissatisfaction results from the available online media platforms (that have been used for this movement) not having ideal functionality to conveniently lead the movement in the direction the activists want it to go. That is the reason why the activists strived to develop the alternative platforms (Green Or Grey and Wake It Up) in the hope that they can improve the mobilizing process of this movement in particular, and of future social movement activities in general.

Evidence from previous research shows that there have been some alternative³⁸ social networking sites that provide tools for global activists to connect, form assemblies, disseminate information, schedule meetings, organize events and coordinate movements such as Diaspora*, Quitter, Twister, rstat.us, GNU social, the Dark Web social networks, N-1, Occupii, crabgrass/Riseup, InterOccupy and many other Occupy fora (Fuchs & Sandoval, 2015; Gehl, 2015; Micó & Casero-Ripollés, 2014; Sernalp & Sernalp, 2015). These alternative social media platforms are produced, owned, controlled and maintained by activists and, most importantly, “they are relatively independent from state and corporate power, and designed as platforms for the dissemination of critical information and for activist communication” (Fuchs & Sandoval, 2015, p. 172). Except for the fact that alternative social media platforms are “non-profit and non-commercial” and that they provide activists with “more privacy ... less

³⁸ Different from popular commercial social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Google+ etc.

“censorship and surveillance,” most activists who have experience using one or some of those platforms have not found any other advantages to using them (Fuchs & Sandoval, 2015, p. 172). In fact, the activists have come across some shortcomings when using the alternative platforms, such as the impossibility of reaching a large number of people in the public audience and the lack of financial and human resources to invest in the construction and maintenance of the platforms (Fuchs & Sandoval, 2015). This is similar to the cases of the ‘Green Or Grey’ forum developed by the SSD-HCM team and the ‘Wake It Up’ platform developed by LA4F. Due to the team’s limited financial and human resources, the SSD-HCM team could not continue the ‘Green Or Grey’ forum project. Likely, the ‘Wake It Up’ platform, although it has been put into operation, is still barely familiar to the public in comparison with Facebook.

Activists worldwide, including the ‘Save Son Doong’ activists, are very proficient at exploiting the Internet’s potential and the ever-changing development of ICTs for their exclusive activism purposes. This is shown through the fact that the various alternative online platforms vary in language and functionality. Apart from the linguistic distinction, the biggest difference between Diaspora* and N-1, or Occupii and Wake It Up is that the former two function as networking platforms that provide private spaces for users to communicate, debate and coordinate activities through discussions with minimum surveillance, while the later two function as organizing and monitoring platforms that facilitate and accelerate the activists’ organization and management of campaign activities and the public’s participation in those activities, compromising the shortcomings of the popular commercial networking sites Facebook and Twitter. Each platform surely has its own competitive advantage that benefits users in different ways.

However, one challenge to the creators of all of these alternative platforms is how they bypass the overwhelming popularity of the mainstream commercial social media like Facebook and Twitter to make sure that their platforms are made use of intensely and effectively by activists, supporters and the public audience. This supports Youmans and York’s (2012) concerns that alternative “platforms optimized for activists may be so niche that it is more difficult [for the activists] to broadcast their concerns widely and

mobilize networks of casual sympathizers” (p. 325). Indeed, the domination of mainstream social media implies that it might take years until activists and the public will switch over from using mainstream social media to alternative social media, or until they at least add the alternative platforms to their online media consumption for activism purposes.

5.4.3 Surveillance

The findings suggest that the ‘Save Son Doong’ activists are reasonably bold since cyber surveillance or state surveillance is not a matter of concern to them. There are a few hints of their boldness. First, though performing activism under an authoritarian regime where activists are at high risk of being in danger, the ‘Save Son Doong’ activists seem to be careless about revealing their own identities. Most Chinese activists, who perform activism work in quite a similar political and media climate, do express fears about government surveillance (Harp, Bachmann & Guo, 2012). Second, despite previous hacking attacks, the activists have not paid as much attention as needed to prevent the movement from being interrupted again, if it is to continue for a significant time in the future. Activists worldwide have developed alternative online media platforms with the purposes of avoiding surveillance, and providing themselves and their movement communities with a safer and more private place to communicate and coordinate activities, however the ‘Save Son Doon’ activists are more passionate about seeking ways to improve the functionality of the platforms so that they can better organize and manage future movement activities.

An assumption is that the movement does not directly target the benefits of the central government, but only aims at challenging a provincial government and corporation’s mutual project (MacKinnon, 2012). Therefore it has not undergone any further obstacles other than the previous hacking incidents that were solved quickly. For this reason, the activists may currently be confident about their ability to control the movement activities without worrying much about possible surveillance.

The concerns of the ‘Save Son Doong’ activists about the legitimacy of the online

petitions, the functionality of the online platforms and the digital divide, implies that the activists pay much more attention to the effectiveness of the movement activities than to their own safety. This is a positive sign that there is a young generation of Vietnamese citizens who are smart, brave and enthusiastic about creating changes in Vietnam.

5.5 The legacy of the 'Save Son Doong' movement

Even though the 'Save Son Doong' movement has not achieved its ultimate goal yet, the short-term and intermediate outcomes are noteworthy. Besides achievements like massive mainstream media coverage of the issue, a good deal of public support, some responses from the provincial and central government, and a few supportive opinions of influential stakeholders and powerful politicians, the movement succeeded in immediately postponing the implementation of the Son Doong cable car construction project. It can be said that the 'Save Son Doong' movement is not an act of slacktivism because it did lead to actual results on the ground (Gladwell, 2010).

The movement has changed the dynamic of Vietnamese youth's online public sphere, which used to be flooded with entertaining and commercial content but is now being supplemented with an increasing amount of contentious environmental topics. It has increased public awareness about the importance of natural preservation as well as sustainable tourism in Vietnam. It has shifted many young Vietnamese people's attitudes toward environmental issues from ignorance and apathy, to acknowledgement and interest in learning and taking supportive actions. The movement has pioneered the development of a green public sphere, in which young Vietnamese citizens dominate the production and consumption of various greenspeaks on 'Save Son Doong' and other environmental topics (Yang & Calhoun, 2007).

Moreover, the 'Save Son Doong' movement has promoted the ideas of public participation and civic engagement in governing environmental protection and natural conservation among the Vietnamese netizens, especially youth (Xenos, Vromen & Loader, 2014). Its popularity and impact have inspired other grassroots environmental movements to emerge on Facebook such as the '6700 People for 6700 Trees' movement

or the 'Fish Need Clean Water Movement', both of which later led to street protests and eventually prompted the government to solve the issues. Besides each movement's unique goal, the common trait between them is that they all aimed towards the goal of forcing information transparency. By using social media to raise voices, the marginalized citizens have strongly expressed their desire for more opportunities to participate in the government's decision-making process and environmental governance. They have demonstrated exactly the spirit of dutiful citizens in accordance with the state party and governmental guidelines – *People know, people discuss, people do, and people monitor* (as cited in Dang, Nguyen, Le & Do, 2015, p. 1). This finding supports Fu and Chau's (2014) statement that:

[T]he sociopolitical landscape is modified by social and institutional forces that are amplified by the use of the Internet. The amplified voice per se may not alter the sociopolitical environment, but it can reinforce existing social dynamics to create social change (Fu & Chau, 2014, p. 312).

In the 'Save Son Doong' movement, online media has played a leading role in allowing the Vietnamese youth to advocate for changes in the government's and corporations' negative practices toward the environment. Although the movement did not lead to an alteration in the Vietnamese regulation of economic development or environmental conservation, it has resulted in the development of the Vietnamese online green public sphere and stimulated an increase in Vietnamese youth's engagement in environmental governance, which can be favorable conditions for policy changes to occur in the future.

5.6 Summary

RQ1: What is the profile of the young Vietnamese citizen activists that initiated the 'Save Son Doong' movement?

They are young urban people who have access to advanced education, Internet and technologies, and opportunities to experience exotic adventures and to engage in social

activities. They represent an elite group of activists who know how to take advantage of the ICTs in order to apply professional approaches of communication for social change to protesting for the conservation of Son Doong Cave.

RQ2: What movement activities have they performed since its inception to date?

Since the movement's inception to date, they have organized many online and offline activities, all of which aim toward building a public will that can influence the decision makers to address the Son Doong cable car issue. Their activities were developed based on three approaches of communication for social change, which are advocacy (petitioning, media advocacy and gaining endorsements from well-known people), social mobilization (building coalitions and mobilizing resources), and public will campaign (raising public awareness and galvanizing public support).

RQ3: What outcomes have they achieved?

By simultaneously carrying out various activities of advocacy, social mobilization and public will campaign both online and offline, the activists were able to achieve some immediate outcomes. First of all, they obtained mainstream media coverage of the issue, which significantly contributed to raising public awareness of the issue and promoting public support for the movement. Then, they succeeded in establishing a public will that could stimulate responses from the decision makers of both provincial and central government, as well as from other influential stakeholders including some environmental organizations and well-known politicians. As a result, the Son Doong cable car project was postponed three months after the movement initiatives were started. However, the ultimate goal, which is to terminate the construction of a cable car system into Son Doong Cave, has not yet been achieved.

RQ4: How does the use of online media impact their performances of the movement activities and their achievements of the outcomes?

The employment of online media is beneficial to the activists in many ways. First of all, it allowed the activists to bypass the financial and geographical barriers to raise voices and increase public awareness of the Son Doong cable car issue. Second, it enabled the activists to connect and coordinate actions among each other and then to network with the general public and special supporters to mobilize resources needed to run the movement. Third, the tactical use of different online media platforms and functionalities facilitated the activist's administration of the movement activities, and also their audience relationship management. Last but not least, by using online media to amplify their own voice and the public's collective voice of dissent, the activists managed to stimulate the agenda setting of the strictly controlled mainstream media, which eventually contributed to their advocacy effort.

RQ5: What are their perceptions of using online media for activism purposes?

To begin with, the activists believe that the use of online media should be integrated with offline activities so that the movement can make greater impact on the supporters in terms of both scale and depth. Then, they acknowledge that combining the use of online media with traditional mass media can enhance the effectiveness of their advocacy effort, as the mainstream media hold the power to influence both public and political agendas. Next, despite the fact that using online media was helpful to the activists in this movement, they are not fully satisfied with the experience because the functionalities of the platforms they have used, as well as the current available platforms, do not meet all of their needs to organize the movement most effectively and efficiently. Finally, the activists do not perceive their use of online media for activism purposes may pose a threat to their safety.

RQ6: What can we learn from their operation about online citizen activism in Vietnam?

Thanks to the development of the ICTs, the popularity of social media (especially Facebook) and the young population of Internet users, online grassroots activism is

trending upwards in Vietnam. Through the 'Save Son Doong' movement, the activists have shown that ordinary citizens with limited resources do have opportunities to emerge as opinion leaders and organizers of social movements. However, this opportunity is dependent on them knowing how to tactically use online media to amplify their voices, networking with people who have the same sense of purpose, soliciting tangible and intangible resources, galvanizing public debates and mobilizing public support toward certain issues.

However, it is important for online grassroots activists to consider the long-term strategies that are needed to sustain their movements, since this type of activism tends to decline before ultimate goals are achieved due to the activists' shortage of funds, time and human resources, as well as weak-tie networks.

Despite the opportunity provided by the ICTs, citizen activists do face several challenges when using online media for activism purposes in Vietnam. For example, they may encounter the opponents' counter-strategies like hacking or they may undergo cyber surveillance by the government or the targeted parties. The digital divide is also an obstacle that can prevent cyber activists from approaching a large number of potential Vietnamese supporters who are not exposed to the information distributed online.

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION

6.1 Restating the significance of the research

This research aimed to explore how young Vietnamese citizen activists use online media to run environmental movements. Using the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement as a case study, the research evaluates the activists’ efforts in using online media to coordinate actions and mobilize public support. This explores the opportunities and challenges for online citizen activism to emerge in the Vietnamese political sphere and media.

With data collected from three in-depth individual interviews, a focus group with the movement pioneers and core members, and findings from content mapping and content analysis, I was able to answer the following research question “***How do young Vietnamese citizens use online media for environmental activism?***”

6.2 Answering the research question

A group of young, highly educated and tech savvy Vietnamese citizens have been very active, brave and smart in taking advantage of the proliferation of online media platforms and the growth of Internet usage in Vietnam. Doing this has enabled them to circumvent unfavorable conditions like the state-controlled mainstream media system and lack of resources, to emerge as activists initiating and running the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement.

By tactically utilizing online media to raise their concerns over the risks of the Son Doong cable car project, these young activists have been able to increase public awareness of the importance of natural preservation and sustainable tourism development in Vietnam. They have also mobilized tangible and intangible resources, as well as public support for the ‘Save Son Doong’ movement, that eventually led to the postponement of the Son Doong cable car project. Within less than four months, they organized and participated in more than 20 online and offline activities of three communication for social change approaches, including advocacy (petitioning, media advocacy and well-known people endorsement), social mobilization (building coalition and mobilizing resources) and public will campaigns. All of them aimed toward building

a public will that could influence the decision makers to address the issue. The most noticeable impact is that their employment of online media to provoke public discourse about the issue stimulated the mainstream media to massively cover the story, which indirectly advocated the public's demand for responses from the decision makers.

Not only have the activists known how to tactically use currently available online media platforms, but they have also endeavored to improve on their experiences of using online media for activism purposes. The Wake It Up platform and the Green Or Grey forum developed by the 'Save Son Doong' activists in the later phases of the movement, are examples of an indication that young Vietnamese activists are not merely dependent users of mainstream commercial online media platforms. Instead, they are proactive in building alternative products (with additional functionalities) that can better serve their activism needs.

The young activists, however, have encountered some obstacles when using online media for activism purposes in Vietnam. For example, the activists had to deal with the opponent's counter-strategies, which included their hacking into the movement's online communication channels. Due to the high rate of digital divide, the activists have not been able to approach a large number of potential Vietnamese supporters who access news and information via television rather than the Internet. The activists also encountered concern about the legitimacy of their online movement activities, as this form of activism is quite new in Vietnam. Regarding security, activists worldwide consider cyber surveillance or state surveillance as another obstacle to their activism purposes. However, the 'Save Son Doong' activists have been relatively bold in revealing their identities during (and after) running the movement, with little fear of surveillance by the police or the opponent parties.

Furthermore, the activists have not invested enough in developing a solid communication strategy or a sustainable plan that is needed for the movement to progress through to achievement of the final goal, which is to terminate the construction of the cable car project. Though online media allowed the activists to network and bypass geographical barriers to coordinate actions, it only facilitated weak-

tie connections amongst these young people and between themselves and the public supporters. This has led to the withdrawal of most of the former leading activists from the 'Save Son Doong' group as the movement declines. In addition, the finance, human and information resources that they managed to solicit from the online networks were only temporary arrangements, which are insufficient for the movement to sustain in the long term.

Nevertheless, their use of online media to address the specific issue of Son Doong Cave, has provoked changes in the dynamic of the Vietnamese' online public sphere, supplementing the cyberspace with an increasing amount of contentious environmental information. It has become an inspiration for other grassroots groups to organize movements against other environmental issues in the country. It also encouraged Vietnamese youth engagement in monitoring the government's environmental administration and in discussing other public matters.

6.3 Recommendations for the 'Save Son Doong' group

Based on the discussion, it is recommended that the 'Save Son Doong' working group consider institutionalizing their organization. That also means they have to produce a solid strategy in general, and a communication strategy in accordance with the general strategy. The general strategy should contain a long-term funding plan that can cover future projects of the movement, the administration fees and a salary for staff. In addition, a clear mission statement and operating procedures should be clearly documented. The communication strategy must define the target audience and indicate the core messages for corresponding audience groups. The media mix also needs refining.

6.4 Requirements for future research

As stated before, this research evaluates the efforts of the 'Save Son Doong' activists in using online media to run the movement. Therefore its focus has been placed on discovering their methods and perceptions of online activism. It is suggested that an

evaluation of the impact of the 'Save Son Doong' movement from the perspective(s) of the public audience as well as the mainstream media, would provide a more objective view of how effectively the activists have used online media in this movement. Future research can also expand on this topic by scaling up the case study, or by adopting a quantitative method which supplies scholars and activists with a broader view of the Vietnamese context of citizen online activism in general and grassroots environmental activism in particular.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1A – FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Rapport questions

1. Can you give me a brief introduction about yourself?
 - a. What's your name?
 - b. How old are you?
 - c. What do you do? Who are you working for OR What school/university are you going to?
 - d. Beside your professional/academic life, what are the social/volunteer activities you are involved in?

Questions related to the campaigning group

2. Can you tell me about the establishment of the campaigning group?
 - a. Who initiated the campaign?
 - b. If there are more than one leaders, who contacted whom first?
 - c. How many leaders are there in your campaigns? Please describe each person's role.
 - d. How do you get connected to your co-leaders, volunteers and alliances? Does online media play any role in such connection? (Please be specific)

Questions related to the brainstorming of the campaign

3. When did you come up with the idea/plan?
4. How long did it take you to transform the idea/plan into real action?
5. Did you get any help from any individual (other than your co-leaders) or organization to start the campaign? Who are they?

Questions related to the implementation of the campaign

6. What are the goal, objectives and missions of this campaign?
7. Who are your target audiences?

8. What is your key message?
9. What other content do you share with your audience?
10. Who are your messengers?
 - Whose voices do you use to transmit the message (your own voice as a young citizen, a scientist, celebrities)?
 - How did you choose your messengers?
11. What are the online and offline activities?
12. How did you mobilize supporters to physically participate in offline activities such as the street protests?

Questions related to their communication strategy and the use of online media for the campaign

12. What online media platforms are you using for your campaign? What do you use each platform/tool for?
13. Why did you choose to use those platforms?
14. How does the use of each platform facilitates you to:
 - a. Create the group's identity? How?
 - b. Promote of the campaign? How?
 - c. Share information related to the campaign? How?
 - d. Circulate dialogues? How?
 - e. Raise fund for the campaign? How?
 - f. Connect with alliances? Who and How?
 - g. Recruit volunteers? How?
 - h. Increase the press coverage of the campaign?
15. What are the advantages or disadvantages of each online media platform?
16. Do you have a communication strategy or plan for this campaign? Is it written down?
17. If you do have one, what are the strategy and tactics?
18. If you don't have one, do you perform any of the following actions?
 - a. Setting communication goals and objectives identical to the overall campaigning goals

- b. Building clear campaign messages and adjust accordingly to different groups of audience
- c. Taking advantage of campaign supporters who have expertise in graphic design (to design the posters), or coding (to design the website), etc.?
- d. Creating posting schedule
- e. Following specific rules to respond to audience's comments
- f. Basing on followers feedback to improve your campaign
- g. Using analytical apps to keep track of the traffic to your website and social media channels
- h. Paying FB to advertise your campaign
- i. Liaising with journalists to increase the press coverage of the campaign on mass media

Conclusion

19. How do you evaluate the success of your campaign?

20. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

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This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 21/03/2016 to 21/03/2017. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

APPENDIX 1B – CÂU HỎI PHÒNG VẤN NHÓM

Câu hỏi tạo dựng mối quan hệ và không khí thân thiện giữa người phỏng vấn và người tham gia phỏng vấn

1. Anh/chị có thể giới thiệu một chút về mình không?
 - a. Tên
 - b. Tuổi
 - c. Anh/chị hiện đang học tập/công tác ở đâu?
 - d. Ngoài công việc hiện tại, anh/chị có tham gia hoạt động xã hội nào?

Câu hỏi liên quan tới nhóm tổ chức chiến dịch Save Son Doong.

2. Anh/chị có thể nói về quá trình hình thành nhóm Save Son Doong chứ?
 - a. Ai là người khởi xướng nhóm?
 - b. Nhóm có tới 3 thủ lĩnh. Vậy ai là người chủ động liên hệ với các thành viên khác trước?
 - c. Mỗi người (thủ lĩnh) nắm vai trò gì trong nhóm?
 - d. Anh/chị liên lạc và kết nối với những cá nhân, tổ chức hỗ trợ chiến dịch và các bạn tình nguyện viên như thế nào? Truyền thông trực tuyến có đóng vai trò gì trong việc kết nối với các đồng minh đó không?

Câu hỏi về việc lên ý tưởng cho chiến dịch

3. Anh/chị rầy lên ý tưởng thực hiện chiến dịch này từ khi nào?
4. Phải mất bao lâu anh/chị mới có thể biến ý tưởng thành hành động?
5. Anh/chị có nhận sự giúp đỡ từ cá nhân nào khác (ngoài 3 thủ lĩnh) hay tổ chức nào để bắt đầu chiến dịch này không? Họ là ai? Họ đã giúp gì cho anh/chị?

Câu hỏi liên quan đến quá trình thực hiện chiến dịch

6. Mục đích, mục tiêu và sứ mệnh của chiến dịch là gì?
7. Nhóm đối tượng khán giả nào là chủ yếu mà chiến dịch hướng tới?
8. Thông điệp chính của chiến dịch là gì?

9. Ngoài thông điệp chính, anh/chị đã, đang và sẽ chia sẻ thêm nội dung gì trong chiến dịch?
10. Ai là người đưa thông điệp? Anh/chị dựa vào/dùng tiếng nói của ai để đưa thông điệp? (Anh/chị dùng tiếng nói của chính mình với tư cách là công dân trẻ, hay tiếng nói của các nhà khoa học hay người của công chúng? Tại sao anh/chị lại chọn tiếng nói ấy?
11. Ngoài những hoạt động được liệt kê ra sau đây, anh/chị đã tổ chức các hoạt động online và offline nào?
12. Anh/chị đã vận động những người ủng hộ chiến dịch đến tham gia vào các hoạt động offline như thế nào?

Câu hỏi liên quan tới chiến lược truyền thông và việc sử dụng các công cụ truyền thông trực tuyến cho chiến dịch

12. Anh/chị sử dụng những công cụ truyền thông trực tuyến nào chiến dịch (ngoài Facebook, Twitter và website ra)? Mỗi công cụ được sử dụng cho mục đích gì?
13. Tại sao anh/chị lại chọn sử dụng những công cụ đó? (Cụ thể từng loại)
14. Việc sử dụng mỗi công cụ nêu trên có giúp anh/chị dễ dàng thực hiện các việc dưới đây hơn không:
 - a. Tạo dựng danh tính/thương hiệu cho nhóm Save Son Doong? (Như thế nào?)
 - b. Quảng bá chiến dịch? (Như thế nào?)
 - c. Chia sẻ thông tin liên quan tới chiến dịch? (Như thế nào?)
 - d. Lưu hành và luân chuyển những cuộc tranh luận cho những người theo dõi? (Như thế nào?)
 - e. Gây quỹ cho chiến dịch ? (Như thế nào?)
 - f. Kết nối với đồng minh? (Ai và Như thế nào?)
 - g. Tuyển tình nguyện viên? (Như thế nào?)
 - h. Làm tăng số lượng bài phóng sự về chiến dịch trên các mặt báo?
16. Ưu điểm và nhược điểm của mỗi công cụ truyền thông trực tuyến là gì?
16. Anh/chị có lên một chiến lược hay một kế hoạch cụ thể cho chiến dịch này không? Nó có viết xuống thành văn bản đảng hoàng không?
17. Nếu như có, thì chiến lược và chiến thuật của anh/chị cho chiến dịch này là gì?

18. Nếu như anh/chị không có một chiến thuật/kế hoạch cụ thể được viết xuống thành văn bản đảng hoàng, thì anh/chị có:
- Đặt mục đích truyền thông đồng nhất với mục đích chung của chiến dịch không?
 - Xây dựng thông điệp rõ ràng cho chiến dịch và điều chỉnh phù hợp cho các nhóm đối tượng theo dõi khác nhau không?
 - Tận dụng tài năng của những người ủng hộ chiến dịch để thiết kế các sản phẩm truyền thông như tạo website, thiết kế posters, v.v.?
 - Tạo lịch post trên website và Facebook?
 - Theo một nguyên tắc cụ thể khi trả lời comment của người theo dõi?
 - Cải thiện chiến dịch dựa vào những ý kiến đóng góp của người theo dõi?
 - Sử dụng những ứng dụng phân tích để theo dõi lượt người vào thăm và tham gia comment, like, share trên website, Facebook và Twitter?
 - Sử dụng quảng cáo Facebook để quảng bá chiến dịch?
 - Bắt và giữ liên lạc với cánh phóng viên để làm tăng số lượng bài phóng sự về chiến dịch trên mặt báo cũng như truyền hình?

Câu hỏi kết

19. Anh/chị đánh giá thế nào về sự thành công của chiến dịch cho tới thời điểm hiện tại?
20. Còn điều gì anh/chị muốn chia sẻ về chủ đề phỏng vấn ngày hôm nay không?

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APPENDIX 2A – QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

1. What motivated you to initiate/participate in the campaign?
 - a. Was the available/proliferation of ICTs one of the reasons why you were motivated to start the campaign?
 - b. Was there any body close to you encouraged you to initiate the campaign?
 - c. Do you have high technology skill that allows you to confidently start the campaign online?
 - d. Before starting the 'Save Son Doong' campaign, did you get involved in any other activities related to environmental protection or social development? What are they? Are those experiences the background for you to start the campaign?
2. What are your (political) believes that support your involvement in this campaign?
3. What is your vision on this campaign?
4. Have you ever hesitated to initiate or participate in this campaign? Why or why not?
5. What are challenges you face when getting involved in this campaign?
6. Are you a technology savvy person?
7. How do you access the importance of the ICTs in the planning as well as implementation of your campaign?
8. How much time do you spend each day in performing campaigning activities (including researching, editing posts, emailing with alliances and volunteers, meeting with supporters, responding to audiences online, designing posters/website, organizing offline events, other activities...)
9. How much time do you spend online each day in performing campaigning activities?
10. How do you get access to the Internet? By computer, or mobile phone?
11. Where and when do you usually get access to the Internet? At home, work, outside? Within or after business hours?

12. How do you keep in touch with your co-leaders, supporters, and volunteers?

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APPENDIX 2B – CÂU HỎI DÀNH CHO NGƯỜI THAM GIA PHÒNG VẤN CÁ NHÂN

1. Điều gì thúc đẩy anh/chị khởi xướng/tham gia vào chiến dịch này?
2. Sự có mặt dày đặc của công nghệ thông tin có phải là một trong những lí do thúc đẩy anh/chị khởi xướng chiến dịch không?
3. Có người thân nào đã cổ vũ anh/chị khởi xướng chiến dịch?
4. Việc mình có kĩ năng sử dụng công nghệ cao đã cho anh/chị tự tin để khởi xướng chiến dịch?
5. Trước khi khởi xướng chiến dịch Save Son Doong, anh/chị đã tham gia vào bất cứ hoạt động phát triển xã hội hay bảo vệ môi trường nào chưa? Các hoạt động đó là gì? Có phải những kinh nghiệm và trải nghiệm từ việc tham gia vào các hoạt động đó là nền tảng cho anh/chị khởi xướng chiến dịch Save Son Doong không?
6. Quan điểm chính trị nào truyền sức mạnh cho anh/chị điều hành chiến dịch này?
7. Tầm nhìn của anh chị về chiến dịch này là gì? Hay nói cách khác, anh/chị tưởng tượng chiến dịch này sẽ dẫn tới kết quả nào?
8. Anh/chị đã bao giờ lưỡng lự khi khởi xướng và tham gia chiến dịch này chưa? Tại sao có và tại sao không?
9. Những thách thức anh/chị đã và đang phải đối mặt khi điều hành chiến dịch này là gì?
10. Anh/chị có phải người rất thông thạo công nghệ thông tin không?
11. Anh/chị đánh giá thế nào về tầm quan trọng của CNTT trong việc lên kế hoạch và thực hiện chiến dịch này của anh/chị?
12. Trung bình mỗi ngày anh/chị dành bao nhiêu thời gian để thực hiện các hoạt động cho chiến dịch (bao gồm nghiên cứu thông tin về hang, soạn bài, email qua lại với đồng minh và tình nguyện viên, gặp gỡ với những người hỗ trợ chiến dịch, trả lời comment của người theo dõi online, thiết kế posters/website, tổ chức hoạt động offline, v.v)
13. Trung bình mỗi ngày anh/chị dành bao nhiêu thời gian trên mạng để thực hiện các hoạt động cho chiến dịch?
14. Anh/chị vào mạng bằng máy tính hay điện thoại?

15. Anh/chị vào mạng ở đâu và khi nào?

16. Anh/chị liên lạc những thủ lĩnh khác, tình nguyện viên, và người hỗ trợ chiến dịch như nào?

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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

Online Media and the Emergence of Young Vietnamese Citizens as Environmental Activists.

My name is Ly Thi-Cam Nguyen. I am currently enrolled in the Master of International Communication degree in the Department of Communication Studies at Unitec New Zealand and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course that forms a substantial part of this degree.

This research aims to examine how young Vietnamese citizen environmental activists use online media to run environmental campaigns.

I shall collect your opinions on how you have used online media for your campaign. I may also want to seek information on the incentives that have driven you to initiate the campaign and to employ online media for your campaigning purposes. Your sharing about the strategies, tactics as well as challenges when using online media are also helpful.

I request your participation in the following ways: participating in a focus group interview and an individual interview. The interviews shall be audio recorded for purpose of the research only.

You will not be identified in the thesis. The results of the research activity will not be seen by any other person or organization without the prior agreement of everyone involved. You are free to ask me not to use any of the information you have given, and you can, if you wish, ask to see the Thesis before it is submitted for examination.

I hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find your involvement interesting. If you have any queries about the research, you may contact my principal supervisor at Unitec New Zealand. My supervisor is Associate Professor Evangelia Papoutsaki, phone +64 9815 4321 ext. 8746 or email epapoutsaki@unitec.ac.nz

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PHIẾU YÊU CẦU THÔNG TIN CỦA NGƯỜI THAM GIA

Truyền thông trực tuyến và sự trỗi dậy của công dân trẻ Việt Nam với tư cách là nhà hoạt động vì môi trường.

Tôi tên là Nguyễn Thị Cẩm Ly, hiện đang theo học khoá Thạc sĩ Truyền thông Quốc tế, Khoa Truyền thông học, học viện Unitec New Zealand, và đang tìm sự trợ giúp của quý anh/chị nhằm đáp ứng yêu cầu khoá luận tốt nghiệp như một phần yêu cầu của khoá học.

Nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm hiểu: các nhà hoạt động vì môi trường xuất thân là công dân trẻ Việt Nam sử dụng công cụ truyền thông trực tuyến để phục vụ cho mục đích chiến dịch vì môi trường của họ như thế nào.

Tôi sẽ thu thập ý kiến của anh/chị về cách sử dụng truyền thông trực tuyến cho chiến dịch môi trường của mình. Tôi cũng có thể muốn tìm hiểu lí do vì sao anh/chị quyết định trở thành người tiên phong cho phong trào và sử dụng các công cụ truyền thông trực tuyến để phục vụ cho các mục đích liên quan đến việc tổ chức chiến dịch. Chia sẻ của anh/chị về chiến lược, chiến thuật cũng như thách thức khi sử dụng các công cụ truyền thông trực tuyến đó cũng sẽ rất hữu ích.

Tôi sẽ yêu cầu anh/chị tham gia vào dự án bằng cách: tham gia phỏng vấn nhóm và phỏng vấn cá nhân. Cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được ghi âm lại để phục vụ cho mục đích nghiên cứu.

Danh tính của anh/chị sẽ được giữ kín trong khoá luận này. Kết quả của hoạt động nghiên cứu sẽ không được tiết lộ cho bất kỳ tổ chức, cá nhân nào mà không có sự

đồng ý của các cá nhân có liên quan. Anh/chị có thể yêu cầu tôi không được sử dụng nội dung của thông tin mà anh/chị đã trả lời, và nếu muốn, anh/chị có thể yêu cầu được xem qua khoá luận trước khi nộp cho hội đồng đánh giá.

Tôi hy vọng anh/chị đồng ý tham gia dự án và sẽ thấy thích thú khi tham gia dự án này. Nếu anh/chị có bất kỳ thắc mắc nào về nghiên cứu này, xin vui lòng liên hệ người giám sát chính nghiên cứu của tôi tại Unitec New Zealand theo thông tin sau:

Phó giáo sư Evangelia Papoutsaki, ĐT: +64 9815 4321, số máy lẻ: 8746 hoặc qua email: epapoutsaki@unitec.ac.nz

MÃ SỐ DỰ ÁN ĐƯỢC CẤP BỞI UREC: 2016 - 1010

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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I don't have to be part of this if I don't want to, and that I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time. However, I am expected to announce my withdrawal within 2 weeks after participating in the interview or the focus group so that the researcher can accordingly and timely adjust her researching plan.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me and that the only persons who will know what I have said will be the researcher and her supervisors. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on a computer at Unitec for a period of 1 year after the publication of the research.

I understand that my discussion with the researcher will be taped and transcribed. I understand that I can see the finished research document. I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Participant Signature: Date:

Project Researcher: Date:

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PHIẾU ĐỒNG Ý

Tôi đã được nghiên cứu sinh giải thích, đã đọc và hiểu mẫu phiếu lấy thông tin đưa cho tôi.

Tôi hiểu rằng tôi không nhất thiết phải tham gia nếu tôi không muốn; và tôi có quyền rút lui khỏi dự án này bất cứ lúc nào. Tuy nhiên, nghiên cứu sinh hi vọng rằng tôi sẽ thông báo quyết định rút lui khỏi dự án muộn nhất là 2 tuần sau khi tôi tham gia vào buổi phỏng vấn cá nhân hoặc phỏng vấn nhóm để nghiên cứu sinh có thể điều chỉnh kế hoạch nghiên cứu phù hợp và kịp thời với thay đổi này.

Tôi hiểu rằng tất cả ý kiến của tôi sẽ được giữ kín và không có bất kỳ thông tin nào mà tôi đưa ra sẽ xác định nhân thân của tôi, và rằng chỉ có các nghiên cứu sinh và người giám sát đề tài của họ được biết các thông tin này. Tôi cũng hiểu rằng tất cả thông tin mà tôi cung cấp sẽ được lưu trữ an toàn trong máy tính tại Unitec trong thời hạn 1 năm kể từ khi nghiên cứu này được xuất bản.

Tôi hiểu rằng cuộc trao đổi với nghiên cứu sinh sẽ được ghi âm và chép lại bằng tay. Tôi hiểu rằng tôi có thể được xem phần chép lại này khi nghiên cứu hoàn thành. Tôi đã có thời gian để cân nhắc và tôi đồng ý là một phần của dự án này.

Người tham gia (ký tên): Ngày:

Nghiên cứu sinh (ký tên): Ngày:

MÃ SỐ DỰ ÁN ĐƯỢC CẤP BỞI UREC: 2016 - 1010

Nghiên cứu này đã được Ủy ban về các vấn đề đạo đức trong nghiên cứu khoa học của UNITEC duyệt thực hiện từ ngày 21/03/2016 đến ngày 21/03/2017. Nếu anh/chị có bất kỳ phản ánh hoặc nhận thấy hạn chế về mặt đạo đức của nghiên cứu này, anh/chị có thể liên hệ với Ủy ban qua Thư ký của UREC (số: 09 915-4321, số máy lẻ: 6162). Bất kỳ vấn đề nào được anh/chị nêu cũng sẽ được điều tra kỹ lưỡng và giữ bí mật, và anh/chị sẽ được thông báo kết quả của những điều tra này.



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