

Taming traditional gender norms and patriarchy on social media in Vietnam

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RESEARCH
REPORT

Taming traditional gender norms and patriarchy on social media in Vietnam

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Executive Summary

Social media has shown itself as a site wherein a narrow set of gender roles and norms are propagated, especially based on advertising appeal and algorithmic outcomes. These platforms are, however, also capable of expanding and diversifying society's understanding of gender roles and norms, particularly through campaigns targeting key demographics, via their scale and reach, speed and timing of engagement, creating and sharing content that is visually and emotionally engaging, allowing for informal and conversational engagement, creating both publicly assessable content and fostering closed communities, anonymity, and breaking down barriers to engagement. In a Vietnamese context, the intersection between social media and gender norms is limitedly understood, as the current academic attention is mainly given to restructuring the socio-cultural and political infrastructures hindering gender equality. Hence, this study demonstrated how gender is discussed on social media, with specific emphasis on Facebook, to evaluate the impact of Investing in Women, an initiative of the Australian government, and their campaigns to support inclusive economic growth through women's economic empowerment in Southeast Asia.

The study was conducted in the first half of 2022. Through textual analysis, interviews, and focus group discussions, the investigators found that:

- Social media (i.e., Facebook Pages) amplified traditional gender norms, in addition to patriarchal beliefs and values, already pervasive in the offline sphere. These values and beliefs were observable in online discussions pertaining to gender equality. These include but are not limited to how women and girls continued to endure social pressures embedded in society.
- Based on an analysis of 6 FBPs administered by Investing in Women's partners, discussions related to gender norms can escalate to unnecessary debates and personal attacks. Stigmas towards gender equality supporters, users who share content that can be perceived as challenging the existing gender norms and roles, were observable. Examples of such stigmas include being selfish, ungrateful, and westernized.
- In response, supporters of gender equality exercised a range of agency. At an individual level, counteracting negative comments was seen contra-productive as doing otherwise would only derail the core messages they sent. Alternatively, the supporters used content about the positive impact of equality in everyday life. At an organizational level, personal stories, pop cultures, and current events were content often used for campaigning on gender norm shifts in Vietnam.

Following the study, the research team suggests programmers and community organizers to:

- create opportunities for supporters and detractors to develop common grounds as to what gender equality means in everyday life, with specific emphasis on the economic benefits that accompany societies committed to gender equality and inclusion.
- cater messages about collective struggles to better engage adherents to traditional gender norms, which tends to comprise of straight men and privileged women.
- harness localized values and cultures for building alliances between different people of diverse gender identities.
- promote intergenerational dialogues to break the circuit of misconceptions about gender equality among different age groups.

In conclusion, this report shows the lingering resistance against gender equality and possible mitigation strategies. It has illuminated the continuation of offline traditional norms and patriarchal attitudes while identifying progressive forces advocating for equality in the online sphere. The universal benefits of living in an equal and just society needs to be communicated within the context of everyday life to gradually transform gender norms in Vietnam.

Background

Like many nations across the world, Vietnamese leadership in business and government recognize the economic benefit of promoting and implementing policies that improve gender equality. Vietnam is one of the few countries that has utilized legislation and social programs to institutionalize gender equity at the macro, meso, and micro levels.¹ Since 1930, Vietnam's Women Union (henceforth VWU) has blossomed into one of the most recognized national organizations dedicated to the advancement of women. Following the implementation of Đổi Mới (the country's broad economic liberalization reforms), VWU has focused on contributing to the country's development specifically through gender equality and women's empowerment through a variety of campaigns and movements, with the focus varying from mutual assistance for household development to good parenting for the reduction of children malnutrition and school dropouts.²

Recent policy initiatives at the governmental level include the *National Strategy on Gender Equality*. This initiative recognizes that gender equality, aside from being a fundamental human right, can play a substantial role in developing the country's socio-economic growth (see also a 2020 country brief titled "[Leading to Success: the business case for women in business and management in Vietnam](#)," which emphasizes that gender diversity correlates with higher profitability, productivity, and creativity, as well as an increased ability to retain talent). Thus, its focus, in part inspired by the country's commitment to the UN's Sustainability Goals, aims to facilitate the country's gender equality and women entrepreneurship during the years of 2021 to 2030.³ The country has received praised by the United Nations for its efforts to promote gender equality, particularly at the political level. In 2022, "the percentage of female deputies in the National Assembly has reached nearly 30.3%, higher than the world average of 25.5%, moving Vietnam from 65th to 54th in the global ranking as of August 2021."⁴

Beyond the political sphere, many Vietnamese women have been internationally recognized for their success in the country's business community. For instance, Trương Thị Lệ Khanh and Nguyễn Bạch Diệp, two executives from country's food and electronics retail sectors, were featured in the 2020 version of Forbes' Top 25 Asian Power Businesswomen.⁵ Additionally, Nguyễn Thị Phương Thảo, the current president and CEO of VietJet Air, is frequently cited and celebrated as Vietnam's first self-made female billionaire (and second billionaire overall). Historically, the country reveres many women as symbols of national pride, such as the Trung sisters (Hai Bà Trưng) and Lady Triệu (Bà Triệu), for whom many temples are dedicated in honour of their role in supporting the country's national struggle for independence against foreign domination.

¹ Sidney Ruth Schuler et al. "Constructions of gender in Vietnam: In pursuit of the Three Criteria," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 8, no. 5 (2006): 384

² "Introduction: VWU in Brief," Vietnam's Women's Union, last modified April 2018, <http://vwu.vn/vwu-in-brief>.

³ "Vietnam Implements Gender Equality Strategy but Challenges Remain," Vietnam Briefing, last modified December 6, 2021. <https://www.vietnam-briefing.com/news/vietnam-implements-gender-equality-strategy-but-challenges-remain.html/>

⁴ "UN Women hails Vietnam's efforts to promote gender equality," Voice of Vietnam, last modified March 9, 2022, <https://vovworld.vn/en-US/spotlight/un-women-hails-vietnams-efforts-to-promote-gender-equality-1080410.vov>

⁵ "Asia's Power Businesswomen 2020," Forbes, last modified September 14, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesasiateam/2020/09/14/forbes-asias-power-businesswomen-2020-list/?sh=2ae51f8c74d2>

Despite such veneration, numerous challenges remain. Economically, women are still regarded as being secondary earners in both rural and urban contexts, a reality exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶ Additionally, although the nation's strategies in the last decade have overall been successful, particularly the mainstreaming of gender issues, various goals of the previous gender-strategy under-achieved as reflected in the lower participation of women in science & technology sectors, high paying jobs, and the widespread expectation on women to play roles as primary caregivers and income generators.⁷ Transforming gender norms, hegemonic understandings embedded within the country's socio-cultural fabric, is a persistent barrier to promoting gender equality and addressing the above realities. One frequently cited gender-related discourse is the intertwined influence of five distinct value systems that permeate contemporary Vietnam: traditional Vietnamese, Confucian and Taoist (particularly in the north), Mahāyāna Buddhist, Western and Christian (particularly in the south), and Socialist.⁸ Collectively, these value systems form the bedrock of what are considered the *traditional gender norms and values* in Vietnam.

While these value systems are respectively supportive of patriarchy to varying degrees, none are more explicit about this support than Confucianism and Mahayana Buddhism, as each provides a doctrine and template for which women are expected to adhere. Through the former, women are recommended to follow three tenets of obedience (she must obey her father as a daughter, she must obey her husband as a wife, she must obey her son as a widow) and four virtues. The first of these is to develop good homemaking skills, which confines them to the domestic sphere. The second is to obtain and maintain a beautiful and gentle appearance, which is in service of the pride of their husbands. Third, women must practice appropriate speech; their volume should always remain at a reasonable level. Fourth, women are expected to exhibit exemplary conduct by way of modesty and mild-mannered behaviours to nurture harmony within the family and never draw attention to herself. The last virtue is illustrative of the expectation that women should prioritize their families rather than other pursuits, like education or personal passions.

The Mahāyāna Buddhist notion of Karma encourages people to consider that their next life will be decided by what transpires in the current one. This cultural understanding resonates in numerous Vietnamese folk tales. One in particular, “The Story of Tam and Cam” (*Truyện Tấm Cám*), conveys how one will be rewarded if they display forgiveness and tolerance towards those who demonstrate ill-will. In the story, Tam epitomizes both the virtues of Confucianism, as she is depicted as beautiful, hard-working, gentle, and honest, as well as the tolerance and forgiveness of Buddhism.⁹ Despite a barrage of abuse from her stepmother and sister, Tam never complains and continues with her chores. In the story, the stepmother and sister meet a horrific fate, while Tam marries a prince and embarks on an idyllic life. The story illustrates how, for women, being tolerant and willing to forgive, even if enduring a difficult situation, is required to ultimately succeed.

⁶ “Catalyzing Women’s Entrepreneurship: Creating a Gender-Responsive Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, United Nations ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), last modified 2020, https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/2020-09/ESCAP_VietNam_MSMEs_and_COVID-19.pdf

⁷ “On the Implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality: 2011—2020,” UN Women, last modified August 2021. <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2021/08/vn-bc-ra-soat-17x25cm-eng.pdf?la=en&vs=3215>

⁸ Quynh Thi Nhu Nguyen, “The Vietnamese Values System: A Blend of Oriental, Western and Socialist Values,” *International Education Studies* 9, no. 12 (2016).

⁹ Nguyen, “The Vietnamese Values System.”

The importation of western values, both in the sense of Enlightenment-inspired personal awareness/individual development and Marxist-inspired socialism, has also resulted in major ramifications for the female experience. The former, particularly in urban areas, enabled new opportunities for women through educational training. As noted by Nguyen, “the French educational policies created a new class of educated women who worked as teachers, journalists, secretaries, and poets. The notion of equality liberated Vietnamese women from the kitchen corners and their low position in Confucian thoughts.”¹⁰ Under the Socialist period (1946-present day), women received a new form of social emancipation, as it was recognized they would play a critical role in the country’s anti-colonial movement. Yet, the Confucian role of women as caregivers was still very much emphasized. Following country’s liberation, “women became responsible for both family and nation or, in the words of one national slogan used in the 1960s and 1970s, good at national tasks, good at household tasks.”¹¹

This understanding of women continues with the above-mentioned VWU. This is an organization that fervently promotes women’s advancement and gender equity, which has resulted in increased economic opportunity and support, as well as improved health programs. Yet, the organization also encourages women to maintain harmony in the family by way of their demonstration of obedience to husbands, fathers, and sons. In other words, the Union promotes equality between women and men without threatening the *status quo*.¹² This *status quo*, as shown by a study conducted by the [Institute for Social Development Studies \(ISDS\)](#), is supportive of traditional gender roles, with a preference for patriarchy, through which traditional notions of masculinity and femininity are reinforced. While women are expected to sacrifice for the overall stability of the family, men are expected to act as the pillar of the home, particularly as it concerns being the economic breadwinner, which results in pressures to choose specific career paths associated with lucrative earnings. The report shows how these norms are rooted in a biological essentialist¹³ view of gender, of which Vietnamese people are taught at an early age through a range of channels like family, religion, popular media, and educational environments. The norms, supported by the biological essentialist view and complementary social activities, become internalized. There have been, however, indicators of support for gender equality by young men in the country’s urban populations. Younger men are increasingly willing to share ownership of properties and assets with their wives and equally participate in housework ([Men and Masculinities in a Globalising Vietnam, 2020](#)). These norms are reflected across the country’s social media landscape.

Social Media Landscape in Vietnam

There were 76.95 million social media users in Vietnam (78.1% of the country’s population) in 2021. Social media is most popular with the 25-34 age demographic (30.7% of all users), followed by the 18-24 aged demographic (25.6%) and 35-44 age demographic (17.6%). Facebook is the most used social platform (93.8%), followed by the country’s homegrown service, Zalo (91.3%), and Facebook Messenger (82.2%). Tik Tok and IG are used by 75.6% and 59.7% of social media users. The main reasons to use social media are “keeping

¹⁰ Nguyen, “The Vietnamese Values System,” 37.

¹¹ Tine Gammeltoft, *Women’s Bodies, Women Worries: Health and Family Planning in a Vietnamese Rural Community* (Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 176.

¹² Schuler et al., “Constructions of gender in Vietnam: In pursuit of the Three Criteria,” 391.

¹³ Biological essentialism suggests that biological influences precede influences from cultural and social spheres.

in touch with friends and family” (62.2%), “reading news stories” (57.1%) and “seeing what’s being talked about” (37.8%).¹⁴

Identity construction and self-presentation are key reasons for why Vietnamese, particularly the youth, use social media.¹⁵ How older Generation Z and younger Millennial women present themselves on Facebook, through digital photographs, comments, sharing, and status updates, involves a negotiated mixture of three competing social forces: Confucian ethics, socialist ideology, and neoliberal global culture. Women are acutely aware of the participatory surveillance character of contemporary social media,¹⁶ and thus wish to present an image of themselves depicting: a) an ideal appearance by adhering to the culturally prescribed beauty standards; b) competence through a display of financial independence and by avoiding arguments, as they may lose ‘face’ for not being able to adequately defend their views; c) positive sentiment by avoiding negative or discontentment expressions.¹⁷ These findings demonstrate that Vietnamese women users on Facebook engage in self-surveillance and censorship to negotiate their self-presentation in accordance with the perceived socially acceptable norms of their imagined audience, with explicit awareness of how these presentations can have significant disciplinary ramifications for their self because of the platform’s panopticon character. Social media platforms and post-feminist modalities of subjecthood have resulted in a regulatory gaze on women.¹⁸

While social media has certainly shown itself as a site wherein a narrow and stereotypical set of gender roles and norms are propagated, especially based on advertising appeal and algorithmic outcomes,¹⁹ these platforms are also capable of expanding and diversifying society’s understanding of gender roles and norms, particularly through campaigns targeting key demographics, via their scale and reach, speed and timing of engagement, creating and sharing content that is visually and emotionally engaging, allowing for informal and conversational engagement, creating both publicly assessable content and fostering closed communities, anonymity, and breaking down barriers to engagement.²⁰ However, the intersection between social media and gender norms is limitedly understood in Vietnam, as the current academic attention is mainly given to restructuring the socio-cultural and political infrastructures hindering gender equality. Hence, this study demonstrates how gender is discussed on social media, with specific emphasis on Facebook, and to evaluate the impact of Investing in Women, an initiative of the Australian government, and their campaigns

¹⁴ Simon Kemp, “Digital in Vietnam 2022,” February 15, 2022, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-vietnam>

¹⁵ Brian McCauley, et al., “Facebook in Vietnam: Uses, Gratifications & Narcissism,” *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 4 (2016).

¹⁶ Anders Albrechtslund, “Online Social Networking as Participatory Surveillance,” *First Monday* 13, no. 3 (2008).

¹⁷ Thanh-Nha Nguyen, et al., “Gender relations and social media: a grounded theory inquiry of young Vietnamese women’s self-presentations on Facebook,” *Gender, Technology and Development* 24, no. 2 (2020).

¹⁸ Rosalind Gill, “Surveillance is a feminist issue,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Feminism*, ed. A. L. Press & T. Ouren (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019).

¹⁹ Stephanie Diepeveen, “Hidden in plain sight: how the infrastructure of social media shapes gender norms,” ALIGN Report, last modified February 18, 2022. <https://www.alignplatform.org/resources/report-hidden-in-plain-sight>

²⁰ Katie Washington & Rachel Marcus, “Hashtags, memes and selfies: can social media and online activism shift gender norms?,” ALIGN Report, last modified March 7, 2022. <https://www.alignplatform.org/resources/report-social-media-online-activism>

to support inclusive economic growth through women's economic empowerment in Southeast Asia.

IW's work in Vietnam is informed by the results of a [2018 Social Norms, Attitudes, and Practices Survey \(SNAPS\)](#) about women's and men's roles in the home and workplace. This survey, which included 6000 millennial respondents, split evenly across both genders, revealed five key findings:

- Women's professional ambitions are similar to men's (regardless of whether single or partnered).
- The motivations to work for both men and women are to become economically independent and contribute to the family's income; however, other reasons to work vary, with women valuing having money for themselves and men valuing the opportunity to develop professionally.
- While two thirds of the survey's respondents believe women and men can do the same jobs, women continue to encounter discriminatory attitudes and practices in the workplace, particularly as it concerns the retirement age.
- Although women and men share domestic and care work in the home, there is a discrepancy between Vietnamese women's and men's perceptions of how much their spouses contribute to fulfilling domestic duties.
- Women and men are overwhelmingly supportive of parental leave for both fathers and mothers. However, this support for parental leave is not reflected in the level of take-up of parental leave, especially by men.

Through these findings, IW has been able to deepen its understanding of gender norms in Vietnam and create local interventions in collaboration with key social enterprise partners such as [WISE Vietnam](#) (Women's Initiative for Startups and Entrepreneurship), [CARE International in Vietnam](#), and [ECUE](#). With these interventions, IW and their local partners aims to shift the perceptions about following gender-related norms identifiable across Vietnam:

1. A woman's primary role is in the home as a carer for children and family members
2. A man's role is the primary income earner/monetary provider for the family.
3. Women and men contain distinct skills applicable for specific types of work.
4. Men are better suited as leaders; women are better suited for supportive roles

Each IW partner has proposed an approach to address gender norms in accordance with their organizational aims. For instance, WISE engaged a collective of scholars, artists and urban millennial women and men who analysed and reinvented gender portrayals in cultural symbols and everyday messages in Vietnam with the intent of promoting women's economic roles. CARE's campaign promoted the concept of "a house with many pillars," addressing the perception that men are pillars of the home as main income earners and that women primarily perform the caring roles. They targeted urban millennials through a multimedia campaign and engaged the advertising industry to facilitate gender-equal portrayals. Finally, ECUE built platforms for conversation between urban millennials and business leaders advocating for freedom of economic choice. The campaign leveraged the interaction between these two generations to spark broader conversations and create progressive narratives on the role of women and men at home, in the economy and society. In collaboration with these local partners, by 2023, IW aims to witness a visible increase in public awareness of the ways in which the above-mentioned gender norms are limiting women's economic opportunities and a

greater volume of well-informed conversations influencing positive shifts in media and social media.

Building on the above findings, this report addresses the following research questions:

- a. How effective are IW-supported social media campaigns in creating channels for targeted urban millennials to demonstrate attitudes and behaviours supportive of gender equality?
- b. What kinds of responses do urban millennials elicit from their reference groups (including their social media connections) when they demonstrate attitudes and behaviours supportive of gender equality?
- c. How effective are the campaigns in connecting early adopter urban millennials with each other and with stakeholders that can support them in addressing criticism?

Methods

Textual and qualitative thematic analyses were employed to achieve the above research questions. Textual data (i.e., Facebook posts) were collected from two types of Facebook pages (FBPs): organic FBPs and treatment FBPs. Figure 1 depicted textual data collection stages and explains how selection of FBPs took place. Organic FBPs were created by different public entities (e.g., individuals, communities, and institutions) whereas treatment FBPs were pages managed by IW partners, who endeavoured to promote a shift in perceptions of gender norms through the themes as stated above. Respectively, these FBPs are located below in Tables 1 and 2.

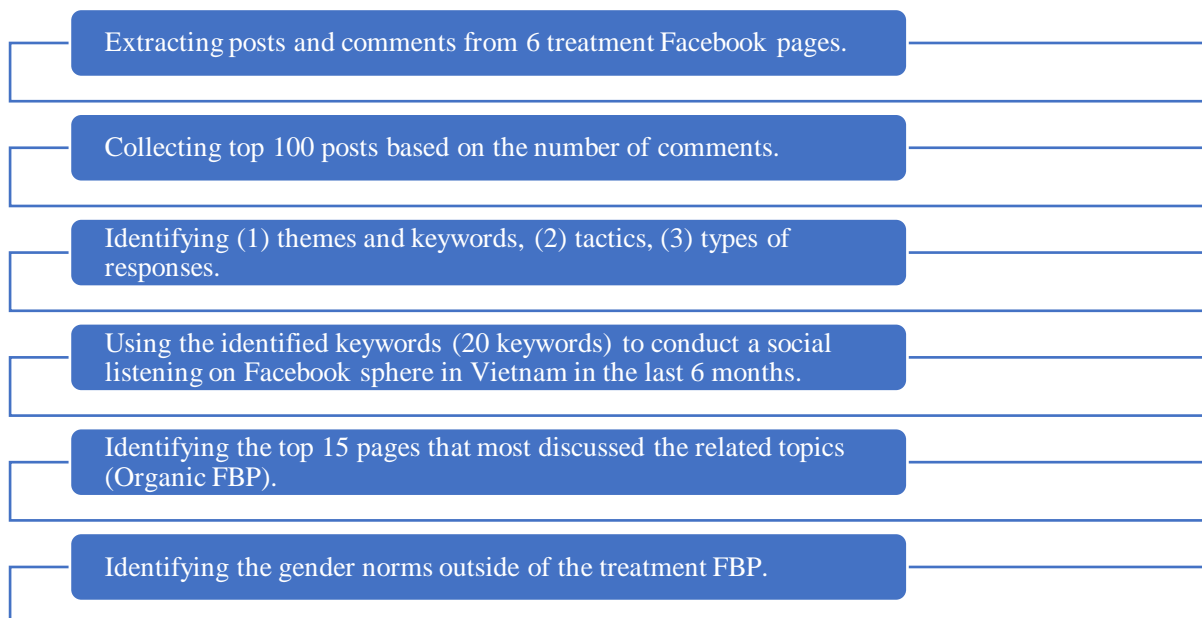


Figure 1 Textual data collection stages

	Facebook page	Description	Link
1	Eva.vn	A showbiz news & media website featuring stories about women and their challenges in life.	https://www.facebook.com/evavietnam/
2	Bestie	A public site targeting women and girls as audiences.	https://www.facebook.com/BestieVN
3	The Gioi Phu Nu	An entertainment page for women.	https://www.facebook.com/thegioiphunuviet/
4	Phu Nu+	An entertainment page for women.	https://www.facebook.com/phunuplus/
5	Bí Kíp Yêu	A public site about love stories.	https://www.facebook.com/bikipyeu/
6	Man TV	An entertainment page for men.	https://www.facebook.com/mantv.vn/
7	Bi mat showbiz	A news media website that mainly features stories about showbiz/ hot news.	https://www.facebook.com/bmsb.vnn
8	Tiin.vn	A news and media website that mainly features stories about showbiz/ hot news.	https://www.facebook.com/tiin.vn
9	LGBTUSUKVietnam	A public site for LGBT and people who love US and UK music.	https://www.facebook.com/lgbtusukvietnam/
10	Blogtamsu Chuyện Chúng Mình	A page related to stories about marriage life.	https://www.facebook.com/blogradio.blogtamsu.vn/
11	Bạn muốn hẹn hò	An official fan page of a popular dating show in Vietnam	https://www.facebook.com/MCV.Banmuonhenho/
12	Vietnam's Next Top Model	An official fan page of a modelling competition in Vietnam	https://www.facebook.com/vnntm
13	Trac Thuy Mieu	A female Key Opinion Leader who practices controversial gender norms.	https://www.facebook.com/JasmineTracThuyMieu/
14	Ngo Thanh Van	A female Key Opinion Leader who has posted things related to women and career.	https://www.facebook.com/veronicangothanhvan
15	Ha Anh Vu	A female Key Opinion Leader who often posts things related to her life/ her thoughts about gender.	https://www.facebook.com/ha.a.vu
16	Hữu Công	A male Key Opinion Leader who often posts things related to wife and husband.	https://www.facebook.com/huucong.69

Table 1 List of Organic Facebook Pages²¹

²¹ The colours of the table indicate the following: green (key opinion leaders), white (fan pages), and orange (news pages).

Facebook page	Organization	Start of the campaign	Total downloaded posts	Total downloaded comments	Selected posts	Selected comments
Goodvertisings in Vietnam	CARE	March 2021	128	638	3	247
Nhà Nhiều Cột	CARE	October 2020	254	4294	46	3612
He Can	WISE	June 2020	561	3469	39	2621
Ở Kia We Trust	WISE	March 2021	355	740	5	193
Vai diễn ở trên vai	ECUE	June 2021	80	62	0	0 ²²
VGEM	ECUE	September 2020	235	781	7	206
Total			1613	9984	100	6879

Table 2 List of Treatment Facebook Pages

The research team collected data from the treatment FBPs in February 2022. In total, 100 posts posted from the start of the campaign to 31 December 2021 were analysed to identify themes and frequent keywords (see Table 3 below). Then, the team collected posts from the organic FBPs in May to June 2022. In total the research team collected 51,107 posts posted from 01/01/2020 to 01/03/2022. To specifically address the research questions, only posts that contained the keywords generated from the treatment FBPs or 12,771 posts (24,99%) were analysed.

Keywords (Vietnamese)	Keywords (English)	Mentions/ 100 posts
phụ nữ/ nữ giới/ đàn bà/ gái	women/ female/ girls	317
đàn ông/ nam giới/ con trai	male/ men/ boys	201
LGBTQIA/ đồng tính	LGBT	36
gia đình	family	157
chăm sóc	caring/ take care of	64
kết hôn/ hôn nhân	marriage	63
sinh con/ đẻ/ sinh sản	give birth	49
việc nhà/ nữ công gia chánh	housework	48
nấu	cooking	35
rửa bát	washing dishes	30
làm mẹ	motherhood	9
kiếm tiền	earn a living	6
STEM	STEM	5
lãnh đạo	leader	4
công sở	work/ company	3
tình dục	sex/ sexual	29
hiếp	rape	19
bạo lực	violence	18
sinh học	biology	11

²² Posts were not collected from this campaign, as they did not fit the project's inclusion criteria.

quấy rối/ quấy rối tình dục	harassment	4
làm điệu/ đẹp	make yourself beautiful/ be pretty	36
nam tính	manly	21
“nam tính mềm”	soft masculinity	12
ngoại hình	appearance	10
bình đẳng giới/ bất bình đẳng giới	gender equality/ gender inequality	73
khuôn mẫu/ chuẩn mực	standard/ model/ norms	49
tự do/ lựa chọn	freedom/ selection/ choice	43
truyền thống	tradition	13
hiện đại	modern	12
trân trọng/ tôn trọng	respect	9
nữ quyền	Feminism (women empowerment)	25

Table 3 Keywords derived from treatment Facebook pages

Paired with the above textual data, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with the administrators (n=11, 7 women) and members (n=14, 7 women) of the treatment FBPs were conducted in May-June 2022. The average age of the discussants and interviewees was respectively 30 and 25 years old. Both discussions and interviews lasted for approximately 1 hour. Because of the pandemic health protocol placed during the data collection time and different locations of the research participants, the discussions and interviews were performed remotely (see Appendix 1 for the key discussion and interview questions and Appendix 2 for the demographics of research participants).

The textual analysis of the treatment FBPs posts was conducted in two stages. First, the team conducted a content analysis of the posts' content and the efforts to shift norms using inductive coding. For example, the content was coded based on the key topic of the posts, which may include sharing household chores, sexual harassment, beauty standards, or biological differences. The tactics are coded based on the approach in which the content is delivered, which may include content sharing, questioning norms, or having a testimonial. The critical topic of each post was coded to explore which aspects of gender equality most concerned the users. The comments were coded into (1) support gender equality, (2) against gender equality. A qualitative open coding analysis was then performed to unveil whether the comments were supportive or against gender equality. Second, the team performed word frequency and cooccurrence analyses to make sense of the gender norms appearing across FBPs and identify the FBPs on which the keywords appeared most frequently. Word cooccurrence analysis was used for drawing a cognitive inference regarding the connection between words that appeared together. For example, the word *đẹp* (beauty) cooccurred with the word *gái* (girl) more frequently than with the word *con trai* (boy); based on the team's understanding of the local context and the content of the original posts, it was inferred that the pressure on meeting the beauty standard was higher for girls than boys.

The team closely read the interview and group discussion to understand the lived experience of the participants and then coded this data inductively to allow for different themes to emerge. The team then sampled 15% of the posts and coded them manually (n = 15), resulting in some initial themes. Through research discussions, these themes were deduced and

refined. The refined themes then were used for coding the rest of the posts. To conclude, the themes were presented to the administrators of the treatment FBPs for feedback.

Findings

Social media has amplified traditional gender norms and patriarchal preference in Vietnam

The quantitative data from organic FBPs showed that traditional gender norms and patriarchal preference were evident in the Vietnamese social media sphere, seemingly as a reinforcement of those observable in the offline sphere. Hence, social media became an extension of these rather than an open space where a range of gender norms could circulate equally. For the complete word cooccurrence list, see Appendix 3. Table 4 shows the prevalence of expressions supportive of patriarchy and traditional gender norms and roles on the organic FBPs:

Expressions in support of traditional gender norms		Frequencies	Percentages
Vietnamese	English (<i>trans.</i>)		
Phụ nữ/ nữ giới/ đàn bà – đẹp	Women/ female – beauty	459	3.59%
Gái – đẹp	Girl – beauty	524	4.10%
Gái – gia đình	Girl – family	544	4.26%
Đàn ông/ nam giới – đẹp	Men/ male – beauty	294	2.30%
Con trai – đẹp	Boy – beauty	117	.92%
Con trai – gia đình	Boy – family	212	1.66%
Kết hôn – phụ nữ/ nữ giới/ đàn bà	Marriage – women/ female	131	1.02%
Kết hôn – Đàn ông/ nam giới	Marriage – men/ male	118	.92%
Kết hôn – gái	Marriage – girl	141	1.10%
Kết hôn – gia đình	Marriage – family	180	1.41%

N= 12,771 posts

Table 4 Traditional gender norm expressions on the organic Facebook Pages

Women, as reflected in the words *Phụ nữ/ nữ giới/ đàn bà*, seemed to be pressured to be beautiful or pay attention to looks (*đẹp*) more than men. Respectively, the word *đẹp* (beauty) cooccurred with the words associated with women (3.59% of posts) 1.29 percentage points higher than it did with the words associated with men (2.30%). The pressure to pay attention to looks was even higher to girls (4.10%) compared to boys (.92%). The same tendency was also observable in the pressure to get married and have a family among girls. Traditional definitions of marriage and family remained dominant, thus the decision to be single and family free could be seen as defying traditional gender norms. This evidenced that, despite the growing awareness of gender equality in Vietnam, norms supporting patriarchal dominance persisted in the online sphere.

In tandem, the social media posts magnified chronic patriarchal values in Vietnam. As Table 5 shows, the words associated with cooking and caring cooccurred with the words associated with women .45 higher than they did with the other gender. The cooccurrence of the word ‘cooking’ (*nấu*) with ‘girl’ was nearly 1% or about 3 times higher than with ‘boy.’ This indicated that the domestication and feminization of cooking in Vietnam transcended to the online sphere. Moreover, such a biased view of neutral work like cooking was related to the conception of marriage and labour distribution in a patriarchal society as reflected in the

cooccurrence of the word family & beauty and family & women. In this sense, despite social media’s potential to expose users to a range of progressive gender norms, in Vietnam traditional interpretations of gender and patriarchal values continued to shape the mainstream discourse on gender inequality. As qualitative data was not collected for the organic FBPs, posts demonstrating explicit sentiments expressed around gender are unavailable.

Gender-focused expressions		Frequencies	Percentages
Vietnamese	English (<i>trans.</i>)		
Phụ nữ/ nữ giới/ đàn bà – gia đình	Women/ female - family	394	3.09%
Phụ nữ/ nữ giới/ đàn bà – chăm sóc	Women/ female - caring	193	1.51%
Gia đình – đẹp	Family - beauty	353	2.76%
Đàn ông/ nam giới – gia đình	Men/ male - family	373	2.92%
Đàn ông/ nam giới – chăm sóc	Men/ male - caring	136	1.06%
Nấu – gái	Cooking - girl	124	.97%
Nấu – con trai	Cooking – boy	41	.32%

N= 12,771 posts

Table 5 Gender-focused expressions on the organic Facebook Pages

Challenging traditional gender norms and patriarchal preference in Vietnam (case studies from organic FBPs)

While social media amplified offline traditional gender norms and patriarchal preference, findings from the organic FBPs showed that #LGBTUSUKVietnam, specifically, seemed to be defying this trend. Across the organic FBPs, keywords associated with gender, such as women and men, appeared 130 times in every 100 posts on #LGBTUSUKVietnam. In an FBP that specifically catered to women lifestyles, for example: #phunuplus, the same keyword appeared only 22 times/100 posts. Although it tended to challenge the existing gender norms, #LGBTUSUKVietnam still had a focus on the importance of ‘family’ as evidenced in the appearance of the word family for 41/100 posts (See Figure 2). Putting this into context, it centred the idea of gender equality and norms around family values, which seemed to be salient in the context of Vietnamese society. In other words, the way it wanted to defy the traditional gender norms was by galvanizing the aspect of life that many Vietnamese people valued, potentially making the attempt to transform gender norms more resonant with a wider audience.

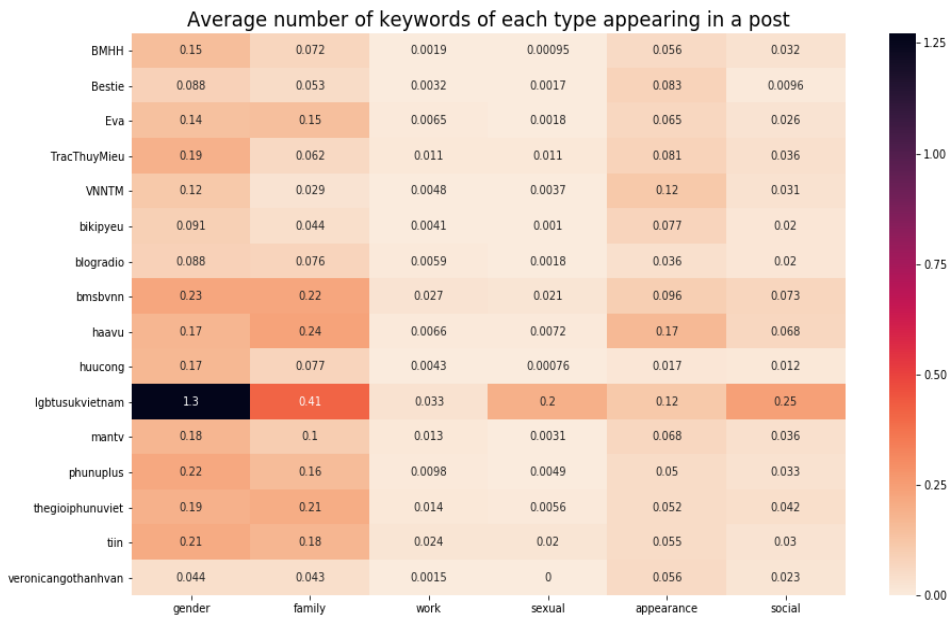


Figure 2 Keyword frequencies across the organic Facebook Pages

In particular, as shown in Figure 3 below, the words associated with women (i.e., *phụ nữ* [12.73%], *nữ giới* [2.23%], *đàn bà* [3.36] and *gái* [10.06%]) appeared the most on #LGBTUSUKVietnam, if compared to the words associated with men (i.e., *đàn ông* [14.25%], *nam giới* [4.63%], *con trai* [6.50%]). Although distributed differently, the total appearance of the words associated with women and men was equal at 25.38%.

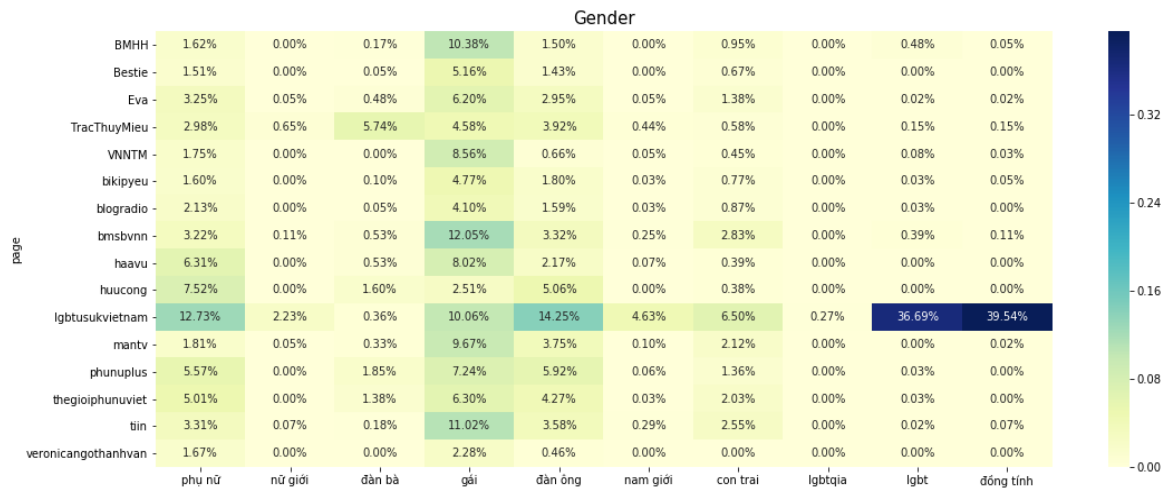


Figure 3 Gender related keywords on #LGBTUSUKVietnam

The activism of #LGBTUSUKVietnam in promoting non-traditional gender norms was even more apparent on gender-oriented holidays celebrated in Vietnam compared to other organic FBPs, such as #phunuplus (See Figure 4 and 5 for comparison). During ‘regular days,’ the word woman (*phụ nữ*) appeared in 12.93% of 1,123 posts whereas on #phunuplus the same word only appeared in 5.57% of 3,465 posts. A similar trend was also observable for the word girl (*gái*), respectively, 10.22% and 7.20%. However, on holidays, such as Valentine’s Day, the two pages’ posts paid attention to different genders. On #LGBTUSUKVietnam, the words girl (*gái*) and man (*đàn ông*) increased around 4% from 10.22%. On #phunuplus, in comparison, there was no change for ‘girl’ but the word *đàn ông* increased to 16.67% or about

10% higher compared to non-holidays. Observationally, this difference in attention indicated that #LGBTUSUKVietnam centred their message around women whereas a FBP catering to women like #phunuplus seemed to predominantly focus on men. In that regard, #LGBTUSUKVietnam held a stronger commitment to women’s needs and rights whereas #phunuplus linked women’s need to men’s, which could be interpreted as a sign of patriarchal preference and support for traditional gender norms.

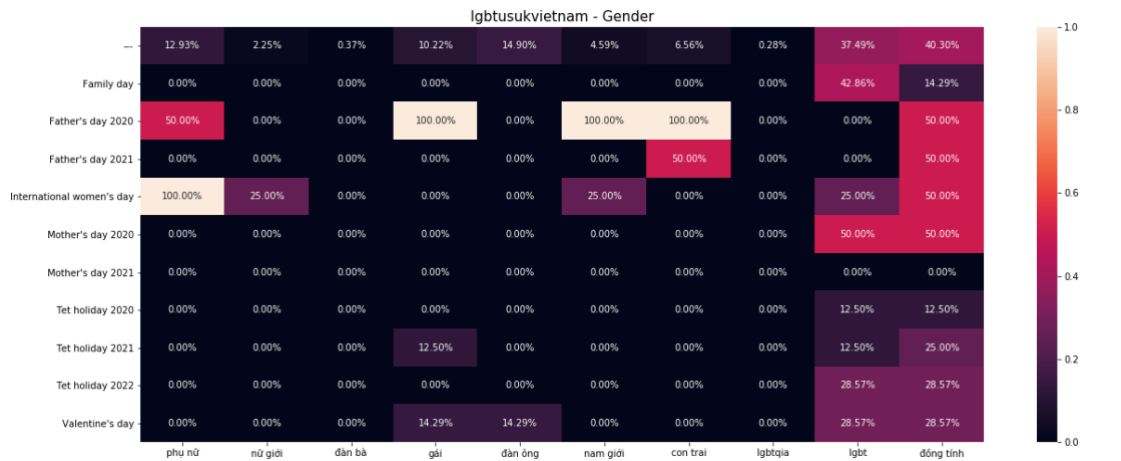


Figure 4 Gender related keywords on #LGBTUSUKVietnam.

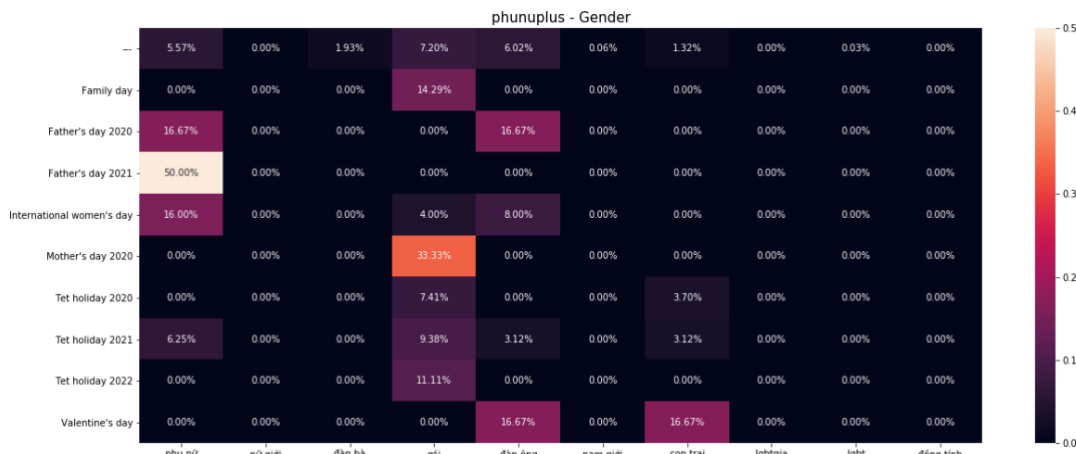


Figure 5 Gender related keywords on #phunuplus

Deconstructing gender norms: examining the supporters on the treatment FBPs

The interview data suggested that gender equality referred to equal opportunities regardless of gender identities. Broadly, the interviewees participating in the study suggested that people should be able to contribute to economic sectors per their capabilities without facing any forms of gender-based stereotypes perpetuated by patriarchal preference and established (traditional) norms. Although the emphasis on equality was vivid, it should not be interpreted as, ‘50-50, whatever a man can do, a woman has to do it, pushing a woman to the battlefield, a man to the kitchen, not being able to decide his own life’ (Interviewee 9 – Female, 26-34). To challenge the status quo, altering the legacy of patriarchy and traditional gendered-roles and norms that manifested in stereotypes and unequal social standards was necessary.

For me, gender equality brings many opportunities for my study and work as a young woman. This is important for people who grow up with a lot of stereotypes, pre-imposed prejudices (Interviewee 13, Female, 18-25).

The excerpt stressed the impact of challenging the traditional norms on the young girls who might have been trying to meet the social standards and stereotypes imposed on them. Formulating messages that most people could resonate with and easily digest was considered key to deconstructing the gender norms. In accordance with the goals of the campaigns, this could be done by demonstrating how gender equality would lead to increased work opportunities and tangible effects to people’s everyday life. Grounding the abstract notion of gender equality was believed to be more effective in changing the existing gender norms.

An example of everyday discussions related to gender norms was observable in the posts containing words ‘chore sharing’ and ‘family love’ (see Table 6). Dishwashing was among the salient examples of housework sharing. Traditional dining etiquette allowed men to be fully served and pushed women to oversee both preparing and cleaning (dishwashing). While “cooking requires specific skills that women could do better, dishes could be washed by anyone” (Comment 1567). On the same side, commenter 1568 also shared her stories:

I don't understand why I had to go to the kitchen as soon as I arrived. But my older brothers just sit around and talk with the relatives as if he is not going to eat. Aunts, moms, and sisters must focus on cooking and cleaning, while drinking and talking is men's business. At least, my brother should move his ass and help us to wash the dishes.

The division of labour among different family members was a topic revolving around family love, where participants of the treatment FBPs implied the importance of distributing responsibilities as an act of service and care for the family members, such as giving gifts to mothers.

Topic	Number of posts	Total comments
Housework sharing at home	19	1275
Family love	8	1199
Women and sexual practice	3	486
LGBTQIA+	3	196
Soft masculinity	3	160
Women's role at work	3	154
Sexual harassment	3	138
Children and women's responsibility	3	115
Others	35	2474

Table 6 Discussion topics on the treatment Facebook Pages

These issues were also discussed during the interviews. Some participants, comprising both genders, expressed changes in attitudes following their being exposed to positive deviance, as well as enthusiasm about their participation and the participation of others. Examples of each, respectively, include:

Personally, when participating in campaigns and activities related to gender equality, I have a chance to read more stories about what I have not known, have not seen or seen but thought it is a common thing. I no longer feel like I'm on the side-lines. The philosophical knowledge of gender equality is really important for each individual to join hands. It is important to avoid gender discrimination ideology, which has been “normalized” for a long time (Interviewee 24 – Female – 18-25).

I was affected by He Can campaign, and I feel a little changed. Especially after I joined the contest and help spread the gender equality message, I have changed my mind about how gender equality is important to everyone (Interviewee 12 – Male – 26-34).

Glad to see more and more people coming together to voice and act on gender equality and related issues. I really want these campaigns could share, spread those values to more people (Interviewee 25 – Female – 18-25).

One additional interviewee expressed optimism about the current social trajectory, stating that conversations about gender equality were more accepted, and that the benefits for both genders had become more visible. One comment below, is particularly useful by way of its linking toxic masculinity with the society's restrictive gender roles for men:

I think the public now already has a more multi-dimensional view. Gender equality is not only for the women but also challenges the concept of harmful masculinity and gender stereotypes (Interviewee 13 – Female – 18-25).

Additional comments from participants also expressed that gender norms were restrictive for men. One, in particular, addressed the backlash towards emerging trends, such as men utilizing cosmetics that have, until recently, been exclusively for women. About the restrictive gender norms, this commenter wrote: “they're totally sexist! So, boys can't wear make-up or can't dress up beautifully? Such non-sense. (Commenter 493).

Overall, the treatment FBPs acted as a channel to gather like-minded people, where participants could learn from each other and gain motivation to raise their voices in real life:

The campaigns create a space for discussion. Campaigns have an immediate impact on those directly involved, like me, and they can have a spillover effect on those involved. At least the issue of gender equality, which is easily marginalised and considered unimportant, is becoming more present in social discussions thanks to these campaigns. (Interviewee 23 – Female - >35)

I made new connections through taking courses like VGEM. Although I'm not in the habit of sharing things online, I am more vocal in GE groups, where members are clearly more concerned with the issue. (Interviewee 22 – Male – 26-34)

Additionally, some active participants viewed the FBPs as a place where they could meet new people online. In this friendship, participants do not need to know much about each other's personal information; rather, it was their shared perspective on gender that connected them.

By participating in the campaign, I have made some new friends who make me more confident when raising my voice about gender equality. I can share opinions and

knowledge with them, and they give me the mental strength to speak up. (Interviewee 20 – Female - >35)

The campaign provides me with new people who have the same opinions as me. When I face any criticism for supporting gender equality online, I can find them to share my stories and discuss more. If I do not have supporters like that, there is no motivation for me. Some of my usual friends don't really care about gender equality; they often don't know how to follow up with my issues or they just stay silent. (Interviewee 25 – Female – 18-25)

For some passive participants, however, the FBP administrator should have created a more specific space (e.g., a private group) so they would feel more comfortable sharing and afforded a chance to make new friends.

I didn't make new friends while participating in the campaign. In my past experience, there are a few campaigns or contests where the organisers set up a Facebook group or chat group so that the participating members have the opportunity to exchange and share with each other. At that time, it was easier to make new friends, and we see it as fun to share new things with others. However, this campaign only stops at calling people to join, like, and share the article. There is no private group chat for campaign supporters, so I am not very interested in actively looking for people. There is not a certain space or situation for us to make new friends. (Interviewee 13 – Female – 18-25)

Deconstructing gender norms: examining the detractors on the treatment FBPs

Resistance from detractors against efforts to defy dominant gender norms happened within the treatment FBPs. This resistance typically came from (1) men who viewed gender equality would erode their social status and advantage (2) economically privileged women who did not interpret themselves as affected by the ramifications of the gender norms²³ and (3) supporters of the established norms and practices, who were often a part of the older generation. These different types of detractors were identifiable across a range of social networks, e.g., from a total stranger to close contacts. The detraction embodied in direct denials to the claims the supporters made to deconstruct the dominant gender norms. In this sense, labelling the claims as too extreme and the case for supporting them as outliers were common ways of silencing messages criticizing the dominant gender norms. On other occasions, personal attacks and hateful utterances became direct responses to those positing issues related to the urgent need of transforming gender norms. Specifically, these responses indicated an annoyance towards the person's desire to speak out on behalf of others. One user exemplified a personal attack they received:

I often receive [negative] responses to my comments on the posts. Those criticisms are often not directed to the content of my comment but mainly about my lifestyle. For example, "how people think and live is their own choice, it has nothing to do with you, why you keep raising your voice?" (Interviewee 12, Male, 26-34)

²³ By economically privileged, the research team means those that can voluntarily choose not to work, or are employed in specific positions where gender equality is interpreted as common practice. These women have never been forced to work in the informal economy, where social protections do not exist, or in laborious service positions, and are seemingly unaware of the gender-specific issues therein.

In comparison, resistance from detractors sometimes arose from close contacts such as family, friends, and colleagues. Rather than publicly expressing their objections to critical comments about dominant gender norms, this type of resistance often used private communication channels such as Facebook Messenger to assert their objections. Their resistance was often masked by unsolicited advice and thoughts. Gaslighting and belittling were methods for reducing the validity of the claims made by supporters of gender equality, who in many cases were younger than the detractors. A common reaction a supporter of gender equality received from someone in opposition to their view was that they were “too young to understand how the world works.” Two users further exemplified the form of resistance they received from the older generation:

My relative told me that young people these days are progressive in a toxic way, as the progress [I wanted] is not in accordance with the customs and traditions. Some even told me that I am disrespectful and lying. The elderly’s views carry many gender stereotypes (Interviewee 19, Female, 26-34).

In fact, my friends and brothers and sisters all support what I share and criticize. Only adults in the family, sometimes there are things they feel are not suitable for themselves and their views, they will send a private message to question instead of criticizing or criticizing directly at the link I shared. (Interviewee 12 – Male – 26-34)

The excerpts suggested that the resistance against transforming gender norms to some extent can be attributed to the generation gap. A clash between the perceived norms against progressive ideas happened as the view on gender equality polarized between different generations. The elder generation wanted to maintain the status quo whereas the youth desired change. Tension between them emerged as the social norms of Vietnam were that youth should not challenge the elders given their esteemed position in the social hierarchies. In this regard, a segment of the older generation, as detractors, resisted gender norm transformations by imposing their worldviews and exercising their power embedded in the social norms to personally attack the youths seeking change.

Culturally, the supporters of gender equality were broadly perceived as selfish. The perceived selfishness appeared in comments such as ‘only think about themselves and their wishes, without considering the family and society value’ (Comment 4564) and ‘only lazy people want equality’ (Comment 8430). Echoing the personal attacks towards the supporters of gender equality, the cultural stigmatization against them evidenced that the detractors of gender norm transformations happened at an individual level, which in this case the advocate of the gender equality was seen as lacking the necessary quality to live within a society where an emphasis on collectivistic values was premium. In this case, gender equality was seen as a threat to family values, as the idea of gender equality, as interpreted by those in opposition to it, was perceived as rooted in individualism.

In relation to that, supporters of gender equality were associated with being ungrateful, another negative quality. This was observable when the discussion revolved around family matters, as reflected in the following comments:

If we refuse to get married, it is undutiful. Who will maintain the continuity of a family line? (Comment 9903)

Please stop criticizing men who don't do housework; it's so frustrating. Vietnamese culture will be like America, with modern feminism of all kinds. When a woman

chooses a husband who must have money, she still asks him to clean the house and wash the dishes. During the party, men have to worship their ancestors already, that's why women need to cook. (Comment 4564)

In the family, supporters of gender equality were criticised as "ungrateful to parents." This criticism was rooted in the misconceptions that refusing to get married and give births would contribute to ending the family bloodline or that nobody would worship ancestors and deceased parents in the future. In addition, supporting gender equality would encourage women to not do the housework alone, consequently bringing additional tasks for husbands and brothers who were believed to already have important tasks at work and school. In other words, the notion of gender equality was culturally seen as disrupting traditional gender norms, thus, constraining any efforts to deconstruct them. The division of labour as the above comments demonstrated suggested that the resistance stemmed from the preconception that practicing gender equality was unaligned with Vietnamese cultural values.

Socio-politically, the gender equality supporters were stigmatized as westernized and rebellious, and viewed as 'being lured by Western examples,' as the following comments show:

Could you name any successful woman with a happy family? There is too few compared to those who fail in their private life. Most of your examples are from Western countries. I affirm that a successful wife and a successful husband could never be happy together. (Comment 4979)

It's obviously culture-stealing. You think you are freely expressing yourself, but actually, you are just trying to mimic other cultures. (Comment 148)

Such comments on the treatment FBPs evidenced the existing misconceptions toward gender equality, which to a greater extent was an excess of the Western style promotion of equality without an adequate localization. In this sense, the use of examples imported from foreign cultures was seen as a logical fallacy given that most Vietnamese tend to adhere to their national identities. Hence, the tension between the fight for gender equality and the intent to preserve national identities often escalated as the supporters backed their claims with the success the country had achieved prior to the widespread visibility of gender-focused social media-based movements, such as #MeToo.

Given that, there were occasions that support for gender equality was seen as having the capability to undermine the country's foundations. In this regard, the assertions put forth in the public sphere by supporters of gender equality might, at some point, threaten the country's stability and its ambition to advance economically. A comment exemplified just that:

Society nurtures and supports you, so that you can give birth to the next generation who will join the workforce later. But you are so happy and crazy. All of you want to stop giving birth until this country is exhausted. I could understand naïve teenagers, but you guys are stupid people. (Comment 18)

Those against gender equality stigmatized those in favour as rebellious against the benevolent of society. Vietnam was believed to be an embodiment of the collective that had given those in favour of gender equality a better life compared to previous generations. Hence, their intent to break the circuit of gender biases was connected to the idea of ungratefulness, disobedience, and even stupidity. Challenging gender norms was considered as 'forgetting traditional values.' For example, women's participation in public sectors would lead to family neglects while

supporting LGBTQIA+ communities or deciding to be child-free would discontinue the national regeneration, leading Vietnam to an aging society and economic downturns. Such ill understanding became a political expression as the detractors connoted the supporters as a disruption to nation building.

Finally, some commenters seemed satisfied with the progress that had seemingly been made. For instance, one commenter suggested that “the idea of gender discrimination is still there, not disappeared, but has already reduced. (Commenter 1463). Although the comment acknowledges the presence of gender discrimination, it equally implies that the country has made evident progress in that area. Other forms of resistance included downplaying the discrimination faced by women and instead emphasising the role women play in hindering a man’s development and self-confidence. For example, one comment suggested that men frequently experience harsh judgement within the country’s dating scene, and are discriminated against on the basis of their body:

Have you ever heard girls say boys are short [and unsuitable for dating]? Have you ever heard girls make fun of men’s body? You think men are not laughed at. In fact, the rate of men being laughed at about their work and appearance is much higher than that of women, and they fall into depression a lot. (Commenter 4579)

How gender equality advocates respond to online criticism on the treatment FBPs

In response to the foregoing resistance, supporters of gender equality exercised their agency at individual and organizational levels. At the individual level, supporters (70%) tended to ignore or leave exchanges of content (e.g., online debates, controversial conversations) to prevent their messages on gender equality from being twisted, attacked, and misused. A small number (20%) used positive examples for countering the resistance they received on online platforms. Thirty percent of the interviewees would refer to external contents such as “how to make an appropriate argument” or “what is gender equality” to strengthen their arguments. Such different forms of agency were not mutually exclusive, as one supporter said, ‘First, I will try to debate, but if they keep arguing, I will just keep silent’ (Interviewee 12, Male, 26-34). Supporters of gender equality would block or report users who gave unsolicited or negative contents. In this sense, there was a belief that engaging with detractors was unnecessary as entertaining their content would only derail the focus of the discussion, as one supporter stated, ‘I am angry, but I don’t dare to argue, they are too toxic (Interviewee 13, Female, 18-25).’

In fact, the more we respond to this harmful content, the debate is more likely to move away from the main issues. Vietnamese netizens are world-famous for how toxic they are, so the debate will become a war hate speech. Usually, I just respond gently like “when you have a family, you will understand” (Interviewee 12, Male, 26-34).

Although the participants did not explicitly express experiencing exclusion from detractors on the treatment FBPs, they did exhibit hesitancy towards expressing beliefs or engaging with hostile actors. Given the blatant antagonism of some detractors, the campaign participants could be less confident in their beliefs (including those with minimal knowledge about how to express or defend them without disrupting the traditional norms and expectations) and thus tended to choose to remain silent. This was particularly likely given that these conversations occurred in a public forum through which individual identities were visible.

At the organisation level, supporters employed various ways of promoting gender equality in the online sphere. Table 7 below shows the examples of the tactics the members

and administrators used for illuminating gender equality. The most prominent tactic was inviting users for sharing their personal experiences and perspectives, which might lead further discussions. See Appendix 4 for examples of user stories. Another way for spreading gender equality awareness was by stimulating discussions related to new perspectives and everyday events the users considered containing to biased gender norms in the society. Such tactics, at least to the Facebook users, were believed to demystify forms of inequalities and injustices resulting from the perpetual reinforcement of the norms to women. This way, those opposed to gender equality would be able to see real examples for the ramifications of traditional gender norms and patriarchal preference to the groups who have been historically marginalized. Although the focus within these conversations tended to focus on women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, illustrating evidence of a collective struggle. For those wanting to defy the norms, that might provide inspirations as to how to deal with the resistance they faced in both online and offline spheres.

Tactics	Number of posts
Call for gender related storytelling	28
Competition-related information	20
Challenging gender norms	12
Discussing an uncommon perspective	9
Sharing about current entertainment/ social media trend	7
Sharing about current international affairs	7
Sharing about current national affairs	6
Asking for examples	5
Sharing about talk show-related information	3
Sharing about workshop-related information	2
Sending wishes for special occasions	1

Table 7 The organizational agency against detractors as appeared on the treatment Facebook Pages.

Despite the presence of detractors, the organizers of the FBPs broadly expressed enthusiasm about their achievements. They were particularly pleased with reflective considerations (such as men critically thinking about men) and the voluntary sharing of ideas for content. For example:

A few men begin to speak out about their views on men. We totally hope that it will happen more and more because otherwise it will be too one-sided. The response, whether positive or negative, clearly shows their interaction. We all appreciate that (Interviewee 4 – Female - >35).

For me [a campaign administrator], success is when people inbox us to share a story and give us some suggestions to develop new content. It means the followers do not just passively consume the content; they turn themselves into contributors who want to fight for gender equality. However, if they ask for consultation, we refer them to the more appropriate page or organization. We just want to provide more perspectives on gender issues. We understand our impacts, so we do not give any personal advice. (Interviewee 9 – Female – 26-34)

The impact of the campaign can also be measured in the visibility of expressed changes, such as attitudinal changes, strengthening of beliefs, and behavioral changes. Examples of each are provided below:

After participating in the campaign, I am more cautious about gender issues in my daily practice. I pay more attention to the culture and context where it happens, so that I can have a more appropriate response to the gender critics. (Interviewee 18 – Male – 18-25)

My view is strengthened. I have a clearer idea about what are the current gender stereotypes, what are the norms, and what are the causes of gender inequality. (Interviewee 14 – Male – 26-34)

I got more and more inclusive knowledge about gender equality (Interviewee 21 – Male – 18-25).

I used to think that gender equality did not mean much for a person who just did freelancing jobs like me. I also didn't see it as a problem when my sister cleaned the house herself. I used to ask my mom to clean my room because I am a workaholic, and for me, work is the most important thing. All the time I have will be spent working. Therefore, sometimes I implicitly think that, with the support of my younger sister and my mom, there is no need for me to do it. After joining the campaign, I got rid of that kind of toxic thinking and changed my behavior a lot. (Interviewee 12 – Male – 26-34).

Conclusion

While the usefulness of social media for mobilizing support to gender equality holds, it also presents unintended consequences. In Vietnam, the online sphere has become an extension of dominant ideologies that consistently govern social interactions in the offline sphere. Gender norms biased against women were prevalent on social media as reflected in the social expectations on physical appearance and remaining busy within the domestic sphere. Another commonly expressed view is meeting the beauty standard will lead to having good families, of which women are expected to nurture throughout their lifetime. Social media posts shared by major news outlets targeted for women, variety shows, and influencers have magnified such norms. Rather than amplifying a need for transforming traditional gender norms and challenging patriarchal preference, the posts tend to sustain them.

Both supporters and detractors of gender equality are observable in the organic and treatment FBPs. Respectively, they represent the proponents and opponents of gender equality principles in the online sphere. Given the prevalence and adherence to traditional gender norms and patriarchal preference in Vietnam, #LGBTUSUKVietnam proved to be the most visible online divergent that actively promotes equality regardless of gender and sexual identities. It denotes a progressive force in Vietnam as reflected in their intent to mainstream equality through social media. Its content centres around equitable needs of different genders rather than around the necessity of meeting patriarchal standards, which seem to be common in various popular social media outlets, even those expressing a commitment to women and women's issues, such as shown within #phunuplus.

In comparison, detractors of gender equality principles tend to consist of individuals with varying degrees of social privilege (such as those with access, a high potential for upward mobility, and economic advantages). Their status systemically protects them from the ramification of gender injustices and men who believe that gender equality will socio-culturally, economically, and politically disadvantage them. Additionally, many detractors also belong to the older generation, a demographic that typically adheres to and advocates for

traditional gender norms and values. Given the compositions of the detractors, social norms emphasising the preservation of traditional values and national identities are ingredients for challenging any efforts to transform gender norms. In this vein, supporters of gender equality, regardless of whether strangers or personally known, are likely to be stigmatized as selfish, westernized, and rebellious as they articulate their discontents and grievances toward the existing gender norms that have disfranchised their rights and potential for being.

In response to these detractors, the supporters of gender equality exercised a range of agency. The interviews from campaign participants and comments left on the treatment FBPs suggest that at the individual level the supporters prefer to ignore online discussions that potentially lead to unnecessary online debates and acrimonies. Alternatively, supporters of gender equality will block the detractors or counter their arguments with positive messages. At the organizational level, the agency to tame the resistance manifests in the effort to stimulate sharing personal experiences in a hope for igniting constructive discussions pertaining to gender equality. In this vein, supporters of gender equality frame messages related to gender equality within everyday stories, seemingly with the intent to ensure the messages resonate with a wider audience. The stories are often tied with current issues and scenarios familiar to other users, which encourages further participation and discussion.

This observable agency illustrates that the treatment FBPs were effective in creating spaces where attitudes and behaviors supportive of gender equality could manifest. Moreover, the exhibited support in response to the detractors shows that the treatment FBPs were effective in connecting proponents of gender equality together. What was not viewed, however, were comments on the treatment FBPs explicitly tying the four IW norms to women's economic empowerment. Although the campaigns frequently focused on duties in the domestic sphere and their relation to gender norms (such as being supportive of husbands and caretakers for the family), rarely were these messages directly tied to economic empowerment and liberation. This omission is evident in the lack of conversations about the tangible economic benefits associated with women joining the workforce in Vietnam. Additionally, no evidence could be found indicating that conversations originating within the campaign shifted to non-campaign channels, such as individual profiles or other public groups.

In conclusion, this report has shown the lingering resistance from a range of actors against gender equality, as well as mitigation strategies applied at individual and organizational levels, such as the aforementioned sharing of personal stories, employing positive messages, and ignoring toxic commentary. More importantly, it has illuminated the continuation of offline traditional gender norms and patriarchal preference while identifying progressive forces advocating for gender equality in the online sphere. Broadly, social media has magnified the emergence of enablers and barriers to promoting gender equality in the Vietnamese online sphere. The enablers aim to transform the dominant gender norms as their presence have limited their opportunities to participate in socio-economic sectors and fully articulate their gender identities. Barriers frequently originated from individuals who politicized social norms and national identities, seemingly to preserve status and the socio-cultural, economic, and political gains that arise from it. Other barriers came from people who feel that gender equality has or is at least near to being achieved, and is therefore not worth pursuing further. Others seem to feel that the conversations focus predominantly on women, and are therefore one-sided. The intent to transform gender norms in Vietnam therefore needs to be targeted at reforming such systemic barriers while strategically communicating the universal benefits of living in an equal and just society. In future campaigns, specific emphasis could also be placed

on communicating how traditional gender norms and patriarchal preference, as system barriers, severely hinder economic growth by restricting women’s potentiality to the domestic sphere.

Recommendations

With the above conclusion in mind, the research team offers the following recommendations to transform traditional gender norms and counter patriarchal preference in Vietnam:

- Create opportunities for the supporters and detractors to develop common grounds in both online and offline spheres. This intervention will nurture alliances for collectively transforming the traditional gender norms, which in the long term may be able to diminish the prevalence of traditional (restrictive) gender norms and patriarchal-supportive online contents.
- Engage heteronormative men in efforts to promote equality by centering the collective struggle and progress that members of diverse genders envisage and experience. This intervention is intended to raise an awareness on how the notion of equality will benefit everyone while gradually demystifying the misconceptions around it.
- Harness local values and cultures that promote equality and seed alliances among different entities regardless of their gender expressions and identities. This intervention will help neutralize the acute politicization of social norms and national identities to resist against gender equality.
- Endeavor to make clearer connections between gender equality and economic empowerment/liberation. Data conveying gender equality as a business benefit could be a convincing angle given Vietnam’s current economic goals, particularly in the creative industries sector. This data could also be tied to UNESCO’s Sustainable Development Goals.
- Given the cultural significance of older generations in the Vietnamese social hierarchy, promoting intergenerational dialogues on equality will help narrow the gap in understanding equality that is rooted in competing worldviews between different age groups.

Appendix 1 Research participants’ demographics

	Gender	Age	Role	Organization/ Campaign
Interviewee 1	Male	18-25	Organizer	ECUE
Interviewee 2	Male	26-34	Organizer	ECUE
Interviewee 3	Male	<35	Organizer	ECUE
Interviewee 4	Female	>35	Organizer	WISE
Interviewee 5	Female	>35	Organizer	WISE
Interviewee 6	Female	>35	Organizer	WISE
Interviewee 7	Male	26-34	Organizer	WISE
Interviewee 8	Female	18-25	Organizer	WISE
Interviewee 9	Female	26-34	Organizer	CARE
Interviewee 10	Female	18-25	Organizer	CARE
Interviewee 11	Female	18-25	Organizer	CARE
Interviewee 12	Male	26-34	Participant	Ô Kia We Trust, He Can

Interviewee 13	Female	18-25	Participant	Ở Kia We Trust, He Can
Interviewee 14	Male	26-34	Participant	VGEM
Interviewee 15	Female	26-34	Participant	Nhà Nhiều Cột, VGEM, Ở Kia We Trust, He Can
Interviewee 16	Male	18-25	Participant	VGEM
Interviewee 17	Male	18-25	Participant	He Can
Interviewee 18	Male	18-25	Participant	Nhà Nhiều Cột, VGEM, He Can, Others
Interviewee 19	Female	26-34	Participant	VGEM
Interviewee 20	Female	>35	Participant	VGEM
Interviewee 21	Male	18-25	Participant	VGEM
Interviewee 22	Male	26-34	Participant	Nhà Nhiều Cột, Goodvertising, VGEM, Ở Kia We Trust, He Can
Interviewee 23	Female	>35	Participant	VGEM
Interviewee 24	Female	26-34	Participant	Nhà Nhiều Cột, VGEM, Others
Interviewee 25	Female	18-25	Participant	Nhà Nhiều Cột, Others

Appendix 2 Key interview and discussion questions

Opening	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What does gender equality mean to you? 2. Display one key message from the campaign, then ask participants to share their responses to it. 3. Overall, how was your experience in participating in the campaign and/or its related activities?
Participation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. How does your view on gender equality issues change after participating in the IW-supported social media campaigns? 5. Have you discussed issues related to gender norms outside of the campaign channels? If so, please elaborate on what, how, with whom, and where. If not, why? 6. If you have discussed gender norms with other people (on social media), could you tell us how they reacted to the topics?
Support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Have you been in a situation where people are being supportive to the gender-related content you shared online? 8. Could you tell us about such supportive responses and why you think the other users (people) were being supportive?
Criticism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Have you been in a situation where you are being criticized on social media when sharing gender equality related content? Could you tell us about the criticism, how you responded to it, and the characteristic of the critics? 10. In retrospect, understanding the situation of the other users, how would you convey the content differently to prevent such criticisms from appearing in future?
Connection with others	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. How do you describe your interactions with other members of the social media channels you are following? 12. If everyone in the channels are strangers, ask: by chance, did you make new friends? What sort of content/information did you share with other members? 13. If most members are friends prior to joining the group/channel, ask: did participating in this channel to some extent shape your friendships? How did such friendships affect your inclination to share gender-equality content to a wider audience? 14. Have you responded to any online content related to gender equality posted by strangers or acquaintances or people you don't know in person? Could you please give us an example? What was the reason for responding to that content?

Appendix 4 Examples of user stories posted on the treatment Facebook Pages

Content	Interactions
<p>My father is like many other fathers, he is a busy man who is rarely at home.</p> <p>However, since the COVID-19, I feel like I have another father. My dad now can cook, and even do laundry. Except for washing dishes, because I'm too good at this job haha.</p>	<p>33 shares 144 comments</p>
<p>Dear my daughter,</p> <p>I used to think that I am very good at making money, and chores were easy so that your mom can do it herself. I often said that I was tired for not doing any housework. I didn't even want to comb your hair because it was mom's task.</p> <p>And in this COVID, your mom had joined other doctors and nurses to fight against this virus. The day I knew that she passed away, my heart was broken.</p> <p>I tried my best to do all of the tasks, and I felt guilty to your mom. These are too many things to do to keep our house a home to live. I realize that it should never be "mom's tasks" or "dad's tasks" as we are living under the same roof.</p> <p>I hope one day you will meet a man who cares about you and who understands equality.</p>	<p>3 shares 89 comments</p>
<p>My husband washes and dries my clothes for me.</p> <p>Due to the distance between the working place, my wife and I can only be together every weekend. COVID is a valuable time for us to share the chores and work together. From small to big things, from entertainment to sports, we do it together.</p> <p>"Modern life, not afraid to share" exercising equal rights is also the way to a better life, with a higher quality. So, "a different me" is what you, your family and my family need to change today, joining hands for a brighter society and world.</p>	<p>46 shares 24 comments</p>
<p>"Taking care of the children, cleaning the house - ordinary tasks that I never thought were so hard"</p> <p>This is a picture of my brother in Van Ban taking his children to fly kites during the Covid epidemic break. Previously, he thought that taking care of children was his wife's duty, and the house was already managed by his wife. He comes home from work and plays sports with his friends; otherwise he watches TV. His wife also nags a lot, but he thinks those are just small things to care about.</p>	<p>45 shares 24 comments</p>

<p>Now that he quit his job due to the Covid epidemic, his wife has to work away from home, so the full-time childcare now of course becomes his responsibility. Taking care of the children all day, taking them out to play, teaching them to study, and cleaning the house and cooking. He just realized that “Taking care of the children, cleaning the house – ordinary jobs that I never thought were so hard. Now I have to share the housework and take care of the children with my wife.”</p> <p>So, we see that all household chores, from small to large, need to be shared between husband and wife. There is sharing, there is understanding, the family is full of happiness and warmth.</p>	
<p>AT HOME, MY MOM HAS NEVER ASKED ME TO DO THESE TASKS, WHY DO YOU ASK ME TO?</p> <p>This is what my husband used to tell me when we first fell in love.</p> <p>That day, every time my husband came over, I was always in the kitchen cooking all kind of dishes, and he sometimes studied, were glued to his phone, rarely helped me especially with cooking. I was angry for a long time, and even said: "Then I'll stay with my mother for the rest of my life, don't stay with me"... Just like that, my husband just did whatever he wanted to do and, of course, I always feel uncomfortable with that.</p> <p>It wasn't until later, when we were both older, more mature and had a different view of the story. My husband has also changed a lot. We have more common voices, sharing and love each other more.</p> <p>As a result, after 8 years of love, we got married and have lived in the same house. I have seen my husband really differently, a "genuine" version, although I have also seen the change before, but this is probably the opportunity to show the most that I see.</p> <p>People often know their husband with the image of a doctor. Because it is also my husband's favourite daily job. In addition, people can also see that a "young teacher" who delivers a lecture at the university. And those jobs are almost busy enough to take up all of my husband's time. But during the holidays, those jobs were temporarily put on hold. My husband became a real family man.</p>	<p>20 shares 61 comments</p>

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