

THE CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE OF LOCAL JOURNALISM IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARINE ECONOMY IN CENTRAL VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the constructive role of local journalism in the sustainable development of the marine economy in Central Vietnam. The analytical framework is built on a combination of Agenda Setting theory and a constructive, sustainable journalism approach. Specifically, from an agenda-setting perspective, the study focuses on the selection of topics, the level of prominence, and the way titles are phrased in journalistic works related to the marine economy. From a constructive journalism perspective, the study analyzes the level of solution orientation, the types of solutions, the ability to provide recommendations, guidance for action, future orientation, and the role of stakeholders such as citizens, businesses, and the government in marine economic information. From a sustainable development perspective, the study assesses the extent to which economic, environmental, and social factors are addressed, and considers the possibility of integrating these elements within a single journalistic work. Based on an analysis of 162 journalistic works published online by five local journalism outlets in Central Vietnam, combined with in-depth interviews, it was found that local journalism outlets have a focused approach to agenda setting, tending to emphasize solutions and action directions, and initially integrating elements of sustainable development into their content. However, the level of coverage across topics is uneven, with limited specific solutions and a lack of balance in empowering stakeholders involved in marine economic development. Given this situation, the essential requirement for local journalism outlets in Central Vietnam is to improve content quality by comprehensively addressing the topics, balancing the empowerment of stakeholders, enhancing the feasibility of solutions in information, and moving towards sustainable marine economic development.

Keywords: Marine economy, Central Vietnam, constructive journalism, local journalism, sustainable marine economy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Resolution No. 36-NQ/TW dated October 22, 2018 on the strategy for sustainable development of Vietnam's marine economy to 2030, vision to 2045 [1] shows that sustainable marine economic development is becoming one of Vietnam's strategic orientations. Meanwhile, the Central region, with its advantages of a long coastline, diverse marine ecosystems and rich economic activities such as aquaculture, fishing and seafood processing, island tourism, maritime economy and island economy, is increasingly playing an important role in regional growth. However, marine economic development should not only focus on growth but also ensure sustainability in all three aspects: economic, environmental and social. In this process, local press not only performs the function of

information but also participates in shaping awareness, leading public opinion and contributing to promoting action of relevant stakeholders.

From a theoretical perspective, the agenda-setting approach demonstrates the press's ability to select and emphasize priority issues in the public sphere, thereby shaping societal concerns. Meanwhile, constructive journalism emphasizes the role of the press not only in reflecting issues but also in seeking solutions, recommending actions, and promoting stakeholder participation. Simultaneously, the sustainable development framework demands a harmonious integration of economic growth, environmental protection, and social development. Combining these three approaches allows for a deeper analysis of the role of local journalism in Central Vietnam in shaping information content and promoting sustainable development in the marine economy.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on the marine economy, the simultaneous application of theories and approaches to analyze the constructive role of local journalism in sustainable marine economic development remains limited, especially in the coastal areas of Central Vietnam. Addressing this research gap, this paper focuses on analyzing the content of 162 journalistic works published on local online newspapers in 2025, combined with in-depth interviews with 9 journalists and editors to answer three main research questions. First, how has local journalism in Central Vietnam set the agenda for sustainable marine economic development? Second, to what extent has local journalism applied a constructive journalism approach in reporting on the marine economy, particularly in proposing solutions, guiding action, and empowering stakeholders? Third, how have local journalism outlets integrated economic, environmental, and social factors into their communication about sustainable marine economic development? Answering these questions will help clarify the constructive role of local journalism in promoting sustainable marine economic development in Central Vietnam.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1. Related concepts and terminology

First of all, the marine economy has many interpretations, but in a way that is appropriate and complete with the natural conditions of Vietnam in general, it can be approached in two directions: broad and narrow. In the narrow sense, the marine economy includes “All economic activities taking place at sea, mainly including: 1. Maritime economy (sea transport and port services); 2. Seafood (fishing and aquaculture); 3. Offshore oil and gas exploitation; 4. Marine tourism; 5. Salt production; 6. Search and rescue services; and 7. Island economy”[2]. Meanwhile, in a broad sense, the marine economy includes all economic activities taking place at sea and “economic activities directly related to the exploitation of sea and islands, although not taking place at sea, but these economic activities are due to the sea or directly serve marine economic activities in the coastal land strip, including: 1. Shipbuilding and repair (this activity is also classified in the maritime economic sector); 2. Marine mineral exploitation and oil and gas processing industry; 3. Seafood processing industry; 4. Provision of marine services; 5. Marine communication; 6. Marine science and technology research, training of human resources to serve the development of the marine economy, basic investigation of marine resources and environment”[2]. In this study, we define the concept of marine economy in a broad sense, encompassing both economic activities taking place at sea and economic activities directly related to marine exploitation in the coastal land strip.

Sustainable marine economic development is a complex concept. First of all, marine economic development is the development of all economic activities based on the potential and unique advantages provided by the resources and natural conditions of the sea area to develop the agricultural, industrial and service sectors of the sea area [3]. Meanwhile, sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without harming

the ability to meet the needs of future generations [4]. This development process is closely linked and harmonizes with the three factors: economy, environment and society. From here, sustainable marine economic development is about meeting the current needs of people in exploiting the sea and coastal land areas while still ensuring the ability to meet the needs of future generations. Sustainable marine economic development always ensures the requirement of harmony between economic, social and environmental aspects [3].

According to Resolution 60-NQ/TW (2025), Central Vietnam includes 11 provinces and cities: Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Tri (Quang Binh merged into Quang Tri), Hue, Da Nang (Quang Nam merged into Da Nang), Quang Ngai, Gia Lai (Binh Dinh merged with Gia Lai), Dak Lak (Phu Yen merged with Dak Lak), Khanh Hoa (Ninh Thuan merged into Khanh Hoa) and Lam Dong (Binh Thuan merged into Lam Dong) [5]. These 11 provinces and cities all border the sea to the east, with rich potential for marine economic development.

2.2. Thematic approach

This study combines the Agenda Setting Theory and the Constructive, Sustainable Journalism Approach. This combination aims to clarify the constructive role of local journalism in the development of the coastal economy of Central Vietnam.

First, Agenda Setting theory emphasizes that the press does not reflect the whole reality but selects and emphasizes certain issues. This selection and emphasis on certain issues leads to the media shaping public interest [6]. In this study, Agenda Setting theory helps to determine which topics local press focuses on, to what extent, and how to highlight issues related to the marine economy.

Meanwhile, sustainable development is an approach proposed nearly 40 years ago with the view that development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [4]. Ten years later, this view was further supplemented with a sustainable development model consisting of three main pillars: economic, social, and environmental [7]. In this study, we approach the issue using a sustainable development model to assess the extent of the contribution of the press in promoting sustainable marine economic development.

Constructive journalism is a new approach and way of thinking about journalism initiated by Haagerup and further developed by scholars such as Gyldensted, McIntyre, Hermans, etc. Constructive journalism provides information that proposes solutions, encourages action, is oriented towards future development, has a long-term vision, and is positive. In the book "Constructive News," it is argued that constructive journalism is critical, objective, and balanced journalism; addresses issues that society is facing, not trivial matters; is unbiased; has a calm tone not overwhelmed by scandals and outrage; is bridging instead of dividing; is forward-looking and oriented towards the future; is multi-layered and has a clear context; is based on facts; promotes highly informative debate on widely recognized solutions to problems [8]. In the research work *Elements of Constructive Journalism: Characteristics, Practical Applications and Public Evaluation*, it is argued that constructive journalism has the following elements: future orientation, solution orientation, depolarization techniques, co-creation with the public [9]. The approach from the perspective of constructive journalism allows for the assessment of the extent to which journalism proposes solutions, recommends specific actions, and empowers people, businesses, and the government. It also helps to determine the long-term vision in works related to the marine economy.

Combining the above elements, the research approaches three directions: (1) journalism selects and highlights issues; (2) journalism guides solutions and actions; (3) journalism contributes to promoting sustainable values. This approach considers both the information content and the social impact of journalism. As a result, the constructive role of local

journalism is clarified, with both a practical vision and alignment with the sustainable development orientation of Central Vietnam.

2.3. Analytical framework and research model

2.3.1. Analytical framework

Based on theoretical frameworks and approaches such as agenda setting, constructive journalism, and sustainable development, this research constructs an analytical framework focusing on three main content groups.

Firstly, for the theory of agenda setting, we determine the priority levels of marine economic issues in local journalism. The analytical framework includes factors such as subject matter, frequency of appearance, publication location, and level of prominence in the information. Through this, the study identifies prioritized areas, as well as how the media highlights important issues.

Secondly, regarding the approach of constructive journalism, we focus on evaluating the depth of content. Journalistic content is considered based on the following factors: proposing solutions, guiding specific actions, empowering stakeholders such as citizens, businesses, and the government, and setting future directions.

Thirdly, regarding the sustainable development approach, we assess the level of journalistic information across three pillars: economic, environmental, and social. The study examines the reflection of economic growth, resources and environmental protection, community development, livelihoods, and employment for coastal communities. In addition, the analytical framework measures the ability to integrate these elements within a single journalistic work to determine the extent of contribution to sustainable marine economic development.

Based on the three content groups above, the analytical framework allows the study to examine local journalism not only in terms of what it reports, but also in how it reports and the significance of that information for sustainable development. This framework reflects both the information focus and assesses its constructive role in practice.

2.3.2. Research model

The research model is constructed in a linear fashion. Specifically, the press, through setting the agenda, will select and highlight issues related to the marine economy; based on this, the constructive press plays an intermediary role in guiding solutions and actions; thereby contributing to the goal of sustainable development.

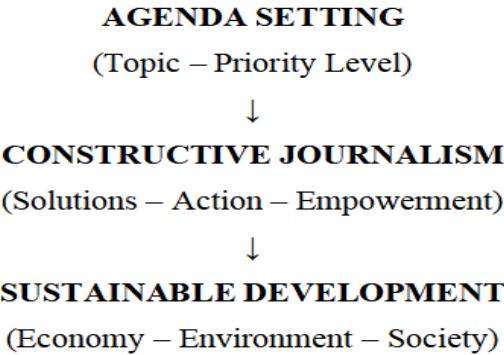


Figure 1. Research model on the constructive role of local journalism outlets in sustainable marine economic development in Central Vietnam.

Source: Own research, 2025.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a combination of content analysis and in-depth interviews. The objective is to clarify the role of local journalism in Central Vietnam in promoting sustainable marine economic development, from topic selection and content prioritization to the ability to propose solutions and guide action for relevant stakeholders.

Content analysis was the primary method. The research data included 162 journalistic works on the marine economy, published in 2025 on local online publications: Nghe An Newspaper and Radio, Television; Quang Tri Newspaper and Radio, Television; Da Nang Newspaper and Radio, Television; Gia Lai Newspaper and Radio, Television; and Khanh Hoa Newspaper and Radio, Television. These five journalism outlets were selected based on the following sampling criteria: representative of three regions of Central Vietnam: North Central (Nghe An), Central Central (Quang Tri, Da Nang), and South Central (Gia Lai, Khanh Hoa); representative of provincial (Nghe An, Quang Tri, Gia Lai, Khanh Hoa) and city (Da Nang) administrative management; representative of regions with very strong (Da Nang, Khanh Hoa), strong (Nghe An), and developing (Quang Tri, Gia Lai) marine economies; and the brand of the media outlet according to its level. Meanwhile, the articles examined in this study were selected through purposive sampling: using keywords from the concept of marine economy embedded in the search engine available on the websites of press agencies, such as searching with Khanh Hoa Newspaper, searching with Google. Each work was coded according to three groups of criteria: (1) agenda setting – topic and priority level; (2) constructive journalism – level of proposing solutions, suggesting actions and empowering stakeholders; (3) sustainable development – level of addressing economic, environmental, and social factors and the ability to integrate them in the same article. To ensure the coding process was carried out systematically, ensuring consistency and comparability between works, we trained 5 journalism students at Faculty of Journalism and Communication, University of Sciences, Hue University on constructive journalism and sustainable development knowledge related to the marine economy before they started working.

In-depth interviews were conducted with nine reporters, editors, and managers at local journalism outlets. The interviews focused on journalists' perceptions of the role of the press in marine economic development, how they select and prioritize topics, how they orient their articles towards solutions, how they portray the roles of the government, businesses, and citizens, and their views on solutions to promote sustainable marine economic development. Data from the two methods were analyzed in comparison. Content analysis helped assess the current state of journalistic information, while in-depth interviews added a practical perspective from journalists. This combination increased the reliability of the results, allowing for simultaneous evaluation of both content and information production processes. This provides a scientific basis for drawing conclusions about the potential of local journalism in shaping and promoting action in sustainable marine economic development.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Research results

From a theoretical perspective, by analyzing 162 news articles from 5 local journalism outlets in Central Vietnam, we arrive at the following assessments:

Firstly, local journalism outlets do not provide scattered information but focus on key areas, concentrating on livelihood-generating industries, while other areas of interest are not given sufficient attention. Specifically, the topic of aquaculture, fishing, and seafood processing accounts for the highest percentage at 38.9% (63/162 entries), followed by marine and island tourism at 30.9% (50/162 entries). Areas with low to average percentages include

maritime economy at 9.3% (15/162 entries) and island economy at 6.8% (11/162 entries). Meanwhile, other sectors such as search and rescue services, marine science and technology research, maritime communications, salt production, marine mineral exploitation, human resource training for marine economic development, marine resource and environmental surveys, oil and gas exploration and processing, and coastal industrial zones all account for very low percentages (below 4%, ranging from 0.6% to 3.7%).

Table 1. Current status of content on marine economic development topics in online publications of 5 local journalism agencies in Central Vietnam, %.

Topic	Quantity	%
Aquaculture - fishing - seafood processing	63	38.9%
Island and beach tourism	50	30.9%
Island economy	11	6.8%
Search and rescue services	4	2.5%
Maritime economy	15	9.3%
Marine science and technology research	2	1.2%
Marine communication	3	1.9%
Making salt	2	1.2%
Marine mineral exploitation	2	1.2%
Training human resources to serve the development of the marine economy	6	3.7%
Marine resource and environmental survey	1	0.6%
Oil and gas exploration and processing, and coastal industrial zones	3	1.9%
Total	162	100%

Source: Own research, 2025.

Secondly, information on the marine economy in the online publications of local journalism outlets in Central Vietnam that we surveyed was not particularly prominent. Most of the news articles on the marine economy were in general sections or categories. Except for the online publication of the Quang Tri Newspaper and Radio & Television, which has a marine economy section within its economic section, the remaining media outlets did not. This indicates a lower priority given to information on the marine economy by media outlets in Central Vietnam, compared to other economic sectors.

Thirdly, in terms of content direction, the headlines of news articles on the marine economy in local newspapers in Central Vietnam focus on solutions. Specifically, headlines emphasizing solutions account for the highest percentage at 59.3% (96/162 works), followed by headlines emphasizing the problem at 21.6% (35/162 works), and headlines emphasizing the impact at 19.1% (31/162 works). This indicates that local newspapers in Central Vietnam tend to reflect solution-oriented approaches rather than the current situation.

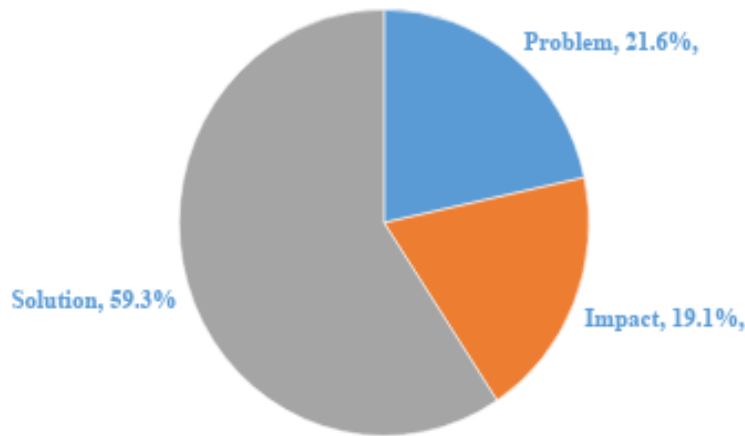


Figure 2. Proportion chart of problem factors, impacts, and solutions mentioned in the titles of journalistic works on the marine economy in the online publications of 5 local journalism outlets in Central Vietnam.

Source: Own research, 2025.

Thus, the content analysis results show that local press gives significant priority to topics related to the marine economy, clearly reflecting the development orientation of coastal localities. This stems not only from the need for information but also from policy orientations and the role of the press in shaping public opinion, as some in-depth interviews have stated: "The local press's prioritization of the marine economy is not just a trend but a key political task" [In-depth interview, 2026], "The selection and prioritization of topics related to the marine economy by local press agencies is inevitable..." [In-depth interview, 2026]. These observations show that the role of the press in setting the agenda goes beyond simply selecting topics and contributes to shaping social awareness of strategic development areas.

From a constructive journalism perspective, through an analysis of 162 news articles published on the online platforms of 5 local journalism outlets in Central Vietnam, we arrive at the following assessments:

Firstly, the majority of articles on the marine economy in the online publications of the Central Vietnam local newspapers we surveyed mentioned solutions. Specifically, articles mentioning solutions accounted for 82.7% (134/162 articles), while only 17.3% (28/162 articles) did not mention solutions. The solutions mentioned in the articles revolved around policy (103 times/259 proposals, accounting for 39.8%), technology (82 times/259 proposals, accounting for 31.7%), and community (74 times/259 proposals, accounting for 28.6%). Most articles mentioning solutions were articles, with 102 articles mentioning two or three types of solutions, and 32 articles mentioning one type of solution. Meanwhile, 28/162 articles (17.3%) did not mention solutions. These works are mostly news articles.

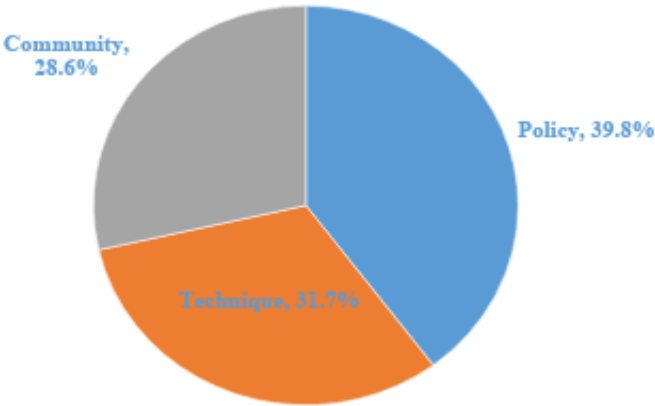


Figure 3. Proportion of different types of solutions mentioned in journalistic works on the marine economy in the online publications of 5 local journalism outlets in Central Vietnam.

Source: Own research, 2025.

Secondly, the majority of articles on the marine economy published in online newspapers of local journalism outlets in Central Vietnam include recommendations and action guidelines. Specifically, 133 articles mention recommendations and action guidelines (82.1%), while 29 articles do not (17.9%).

Thirdly, articles on the marine economy published in online newspapers of Central Vietnam media outlets all focus on empowering stakeholders, namely citizens, businesses, and the government. Specifically, out of 162 articles, there were 194 instances of empowering citizens, businesses, and the government to proactively develop the economy. Citizens were empowered 63 times (32.5%), businesses 45 times (23.2%), and the government most frequently (86 times, 44.3%) (one article may empower multiple stakeholders, hence the total number of empowerment instances is higher than the number of 162 articles surveyed). From a political economy perspective, the marine economy is not simply about economics but is also closely linked to marine and island sovereignty, so the issue of empowerment remains primarily directed towards the government and the people. However, the fact that 45 instances of being granted authority, representing 23.2% of businesses, also shows that businesses, people, and the government cannot be separated or underestimate each other in the development of the marine economy.

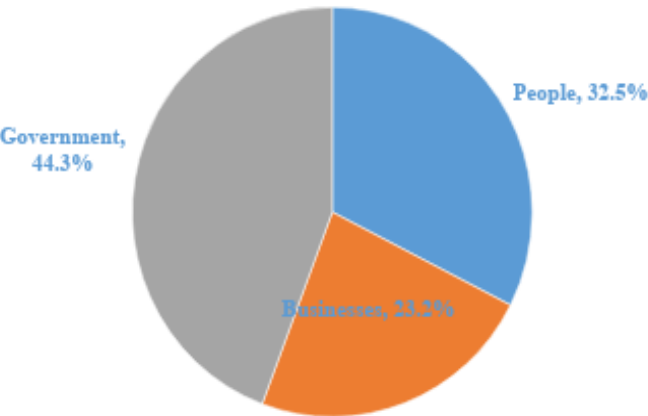


Figure 4. Chart showing the proportion of empowerment in journalistic works on the marine economy in the online publications of 5 local journalism outlets in Central Vietnam.

Source: Own research, 2025.

Fourth, the majority of articles on the marine economy in online publications in Central Vietnam address a long-term, forward-looking vision. Specifically, 145 out of 162 articles we surveyed mentioned a long-term, forward-looking vision (89.5%), while only 17 out of 162 articles did not address this issue (10.5%).

The above results show that works on the marine economy not only reflect the current situation but also tend to increase the content that focuses on solutions, in line with a constructive journalistic approach. This is consistent with the views from the in-depth interview data: “We are shifting from ‘information journalism’ to ‘solution journalism’.” [In-depth interview, 2026], “I am not only reflecting the current situation but also actively incorporating solutions and suggesting actions in journalistic works...” [In-depth interview, 2026]. These views demonstrate a shift in journalistic thinking, from reflection to participation in guiding problem-solving, thereby enhancing the social role of journalism in the development of the marine economy.

From a sustainable development perspective, through an analysis of 162 news articles published on the online platforms of 5 local journalism outlets in Central Vietnam, we arrive at the following assessments:

Firstly, local newspapers in Central Vietnam consistently focus on economic growth when reporting on the marine economy. Specifically, 151 out of 162 articles (93.2%) mentioned economic growth, while only 11 out of 162 articles (6.8%) did not address this issue.

Secondly, despite focusing on economic growth, information on the marine economy from media outlets in Central Vietnam consistently emphasizes the protection of marine resources and the environment, aiming for sustainable development. Specifically, 121 out of 162 works on the marine economy mentioned the issue of protecting marine resources and the environment (accounting for 74.7%), while 41 out of 162 works did not mention this issue (accounting for 25.3%).

Thirdly, sustainable marine economic development cannot ignore community development, job creation, and livelihoods for people in coastal and island areas. Specifically, 138 out of 162 works on marine economics mentioned community development, job creation, and livelihoods for people in coastal and island areas (accounting for 85.2%), while 24 out of 162 works did not mention this issue (accounting for 14.8%).

Finally, information on the marine economy from local journalism outlets in Central Vietnam integrates economic, environmental, and social factors quite well in their works. This shows that the works are not fragmented in their reporting but place the issue of sustainable development within a system for analysis and information. Specifically, 125 works (77.2%) integrated two or three elements in their articles, while 37 works (22.8%) did not.

Research results show that local journalism in Central Vietnam have been demonstrating the role of three main stakeholders: the government, businesses, and the people. However, the level of representation and the linkages between these stakeholders are still uneven. This is strongly evidenced by in-depth interview data: “The press is currently striving to balance the ‘three pillars’ in sustainable development.” [In-depth interview, 2026], “The government creates the legal framework, businesses lead..., and the people comply and transform their livelihoods...” [In-depth interview, 2026]. However, some opinions also point out limitations: “This representation is sometimes still individualistic, failing to highlight the linkages between the parties...” (In-depth interview, 2026), “Sometimes it tends to reflect achievements, failing to delve into challenges and sustainability.” [In-depth interview, 2026]. These observations suggest that local journalism has made progress in reflecting the subjects it represents, but still needs to improve the depth and coherence of its content.

Overall, local journalism in Central Vietnam have been involved in reporting on marine economic issues and have played a positive, constructive role in promoting sustainable maritime economic development.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Local newspapers in Central Vietnam shape public interest in marine economic sectors that are relevant to local characteristics and government policies.

Research results show that local press in Central Vietnam focuses on the following economic sectors: aquaculture, exploitation and processing of aquatic products (38.9%), island and marine tourism (30.9%), maritime economy (9.3%), and island economy (6.8%). This prioritization of information on these marine economic sectors can be explained by three main factors. Firstly, the Central region has many lagoon systems, large aquaculture water surface areas; diverse and abundant marine resources; a long coastline, many bays suitable for building deep-water ports and located in a strategic position. Secondly, it is consistent with the priority order for marine economic development of Resolution No. 36-NQ/TW of 2018: marine tourism and services, maritime economy, exploitation of oil and gas and other marine mineral resources, aquaculture and exploitation of marine products, coastal industry, renewable energy and new marine economic sectors [1]. Thirdly, these marine economic sectors are directly linked to people's livelihoods, generate quick income, and have the potential to significantly impact local growth.

From the perspective of Agenda Setting Theory, the focus of information on certain marine economic sectors that are appropriate to local characteristics and government policies coincides with the views of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. The two authors argue that through the selection of information, the media can shape what the public thinks [6]. The strong focus of local press on aquaculture, exploitation and processing of seafood, marine and island tourism, maritime economy and island economy shows that these sectors are established as priority contents in the discourse of marine economic development in Central Vietnam.

This finding is also consistent with many previous studies on constructive journalism and local development media. Rojas-Calderón (2024) in his study *Constructive Journalistic Roles in Environments of Social Complexity and Political Crisis* argues that journalism has the task of choosing and organizing topics of widespread importance... creating thematic frameworks that depict and streamline the intricate nature of social reality towards promoting dialogue and understanding among different stakeholders [10]. McAdam (2025) in his work *Rethinking "Sustainability" as a Multidimensional Conceptual Framework for Local Journalism Studies* argues that local journalism is a multidimensional framework in which economic factors, although important, must be placed in relation to social, cultural roles and community interests [11]. This approach shows that local journalism is often closely linked to issues directly related to community life. This explains why, in this study, sectors such as aquaculture, marine tourism, and maritime economy appear with significantly higher frequency than other marine economic sectors.

However, it is noteworthy that content such as marine science and technology research, human resource training, or marine services appear at a very low rate. This shows that the local press agenda still leans towards immediately visible development results rather than long-term development foundations. From a sustainable development perspective, this is a limitation, because as Jamil & de-Lima-Santos (2025) in their study *Sustainable Journalism: Reflections from the Global South* emphasized, journalism must embrace an integrated approach—one that secures the sustainability of the news industry while simultaneously prioritizing comprehensive coverage of environmental, societal, and economic sustainability issues [12]. When the press does not give adequate attention to fundamental, long-term industries, the public is very likely to form a narrow understanding of marine economic development,

focusing mainly on exploitation and immediate benefits instead of sustainable development capacity in the future.

4.2.2. The imbalance in empowerment shows that local journalism in Central Vietnam still operate more according to a centralized government model than as co-builders of society.

Research results show that the government accounts for the highest percentage (44.3%) in empowering the resolution of issues related to sustainable marine economic development in Central Vietnam. This reflects that the discourse on marine economic development in local press in Central Vietnam is mainly led by state management entities. This is inevitable, because the marine economy in Vietnam is always closely linked to national sovereignty, marine security, resource exploitation and inter-sectoral governance. The first viewpoint in Resolution No. 36-NQ/TW of 2018 further affirms this issue: "Unify thoughts and perceptions on the position, role and special importance of the sea for the cause of building and protecting the Fatherland in the whole Party, the whole people and the whole army" [1].

From the perspective of constructive journalism, this result shows that constructive journalism in the Vietnamese context does not completely operate according to the "citizen-centered" model commonly seen in Western studies but is more distinctly "state-centered". Hermans and Gyldensted (2019) argue that including constructive elements such as solution orientation, future orientation, depolarizing techniques and seeking co-creation with the public contribute to the well-being of individuals as well as society [9]. However, in this study, the constructive role is mainly placed on the government as the central leading entity. This shows that local journalism is leaning towards a model of supporting public administration rather than a model of social co-creation. Meanwhile, this finding is consistent with the research of Rojas-Calderón (2024), who argues that in non-Western contexts, journalists often support the government in achieving development and social well-being [10]. This similarity and difference show the unique characteristics between countries in the structure of media governance, culture, politics and the degree of autonomy of civil society. In the context of Vietnam, the government is still the entity with the greatest resources, authority and ability to mobilize collective action, so it is understandable that the press prioritizes empowering the state.

However, given the reality that the voices of coastal residents, fishermen, small businesses, and community groups are not adequately reflected, the development communication process easily falls into a one-way, top-down model. In other words, these stakeholders find it difficult to play a co-creating role in development; they remain primarily recipients of information.

4.2.3. The prioritization of economic growth over environmental protection shows that local newspapers in Central Vietnam approach sustainable marine economic development from the perspective of "economy first, environment second"

Research results show that local press in Central Vietnam has relatively comprehensively integrated economic, environmental and social factors. However, the high disparity in the percentage of works mentioning economic growth (93.2%) and environmental protection (74.7%) shows that the priority for development still leans towards growth. This is consistent with Resolution No. 36-NQ/TW of 2018, because the first thing in the overall goal of this document is "to make Vietnam a strong marine nation" and then "to basically achieve the criteria for sustainable development of the marine economy"; while in the specific goal, the environmental issue is mentioned last [1]. This finding also shows that marine economic development is often viewed first as an issue of economic growth, while the environmental factor is considered seriously when an incident occurs.

From a sustainable development framework perspective, this result reveals an imbalance between the three pillars of economic, social, and environmental media. When

the media prioritizes short-term growth too strongly without giving adequate attention to the environment, the public easily develops the perception that resource exploitation is the central goal, while environmental protection is only secondary. This inadvertently weakens the role of the media in providing early warning and risk prevention in sustainable marine economic development.

This finding is consistent with Pinto and Matias (2023), who found that marine environmental issues tend to receive stronger media attention when they are linked to highly visible public concerns such as climate change, marine pollution, biodiversity loss, or direct socio-economic consequences [13].

From a constructive journalistic perspective, the press should not only focus on solutions for economic growth but also show the public the negative consequences of development on the environment. In other words, local journalism needs to shift from a mindset of maximizing development to one of limited development. By doing this, local journalism will better demonstrate its constructive role in the sustainable development of the local marine economy.

4.3. Some recommendations from research results

From the results of content analysis and in-depth interviews, it can be seen that local newspapers in Central Vietnam have made relatively clear choices of topics, focusing on marine economic sectors related to livelihoods such as aquaculture, fishing, seafood processing, and marine tourism. This is consistent with the development orientation of the localities, as "the prioritization of the marine economy by local newspapers is not only a trend but a key political task" (In-depth Interview, 2026). However, fundamental areas such as marine science and technology, human resource training, and marine services still account for a low percentage, indicating that the agenda, while focused, is not comprehensive. Therefore, media outlets need to expand the scope of information and increase coverage of areas that are less frequently mentioned to ensure full access to issues related to sustainable marine economic development.

The research results also show an increasing trend of solution-oriented content in journalistic works, reflecting a shift from informational journalism to constructive journalism. Some journalists affirm that this process is clearly underway as they "shift from 'informational journalism' to 'solution-based journalism'" [In-depth Interview, 2026]. However, not many solutions can yet be concretized into practical guidelines. Based on this, the research suggests that journalism needs to shift strongly towards specifying solutions for specific target groups such as fishermen, businesses, and local authorities; while also increasing articles that provide guidance, practical models, or best practices. This will not only enhance the value of information but also contribute to changing perceptions and modifying social behavior in a sustainable direction.

Regarding the roles of stakeholders, the results show that the press still prioritizes reflecting the role of the government, while businesses and citizens, although mentioned, are not truly balanced. Meanwhile, sustainable development practices require the coordination of many parties, as some journalists have noted regarding the effort to "balance the 'three-legged stool' in sustainable development" [In-depth Interview, 2026]. However, some opinions also point out that this representation "sometimes remains isolated, failing to highlight the linkages between the parties" [In-depth Interview, 2026]. Therefore, the press needs to strengthen its exploration and reflection of the roles of businesses and communities, while clarifying the interactive relationship between stakeholders to promote multi-dimensional participation in marine economic development.

From a sustainable development perspective, although economic, environmental, and social factors have been integrated into many works, there is still a tendency to prioritize

economic growth over environmental and social aspects. Specifically, information on economic growth accounts for 93.2%, while content on marine environmental protection accounts for only 74.7%. This is also reflected in journalistic practice, where journalistic content "sometimes tends to focus on achievements, failing to delve deeply into challenges and sustainability" [In-depth Interview, 2026]. Therefore, it is necessary to further strengthen content on marine environmental protection, sustainable livelihoods, and community development.

Finally, to enhance its constructive role, local journalism needs to continue innovating in both content and communication methods. Practical experience shows that the requirement for journalists is to "go beyond mere news reporting" [In-depth Interview, 2026], aiming for an analytical, critical, and connecting role among social actors. Based on this, the study proposes that journalism should promote the application of multi-platform communication, strengthen its function of policy critique, and play a "bridge" role between the government, businesses, and the people. This requires close coordination between media outlets and management agencies, scientists, and the community. By achieving this, journalism will truly become an active participant in the sustainable development of the marine economy in Central Vietnam.

5. CONCLUSION

Research shows that local press in Central Vietnam has gone beyond simply providing information and reporting; it has clearly demonstrated a constructive role in the sustainable development of the marine economy. By prioritizing sectors such as aquaculture, fishing, seafood processing, marine and island tourism, maritime economy, the press has contributed to establishing an agenda tailored to local characteristics and government policies. The high percentage of works addressing solutions (82.7%), recommending actions (82.1%), and offering long-term visions (89.5%) indicates a shift from an informational function to one that guides, promotes action, and supports development. Simultaneously, local press has integrated economic, environmental, and social factors into its discourse on marine economic development (125 works integrated two or three factors, accounting for 77.2%).

In theoretical terms, this study contributes to expanding the approach to constructive journalism within the context of local journalism in Central Vietnam. While many international studies view constructive journalism primarily as linked to citizen empowerment, public deliberation, and bottom-up community initiatives, this research shows that constructive journalism in the marine economy sector in Central Vietnam operates more strongly according to a top-down, state-centered model. This model allows the government to play a central role in setting development priorities, providing solutions, and coordinating social action. This demonstrates that constructive journalism is not a universal model operating uniformly across all countries, but is strongly influenced by media governance structures, political contexts, and local development specifics. The study also complements agenda-setting theory by demonstrating that local journalism not only determine what the public is interested in but also contributes to establishing an understanding of sustainable development, including what is prioritized and what is not prioritized in the discourse of marine economic development.

In practical terms, the study shows that local journalism in Central Vietnam play a crucial role in connecting marine economic development policies with the lives of coastal communities. This contributes significantly to raising social awareness, creating public consensus, and supporting local governance. However, the results also highlight some notable limitations, such as imbalances in media empowerment and a bias between economic growth and environmental protection. This suggests that local journalism outlets in Central Vietnam need to expand their voice to include coastal communities, strengthening the voices of fishermen, businesses, scientists, and social organizations. Constructive journalism should not

only tell the public what the government is doing but also help society participate in answering the question of how development should proceed.

Despite these contributions, the study still has some limitations. The sample size does not encompass the entire local press system in Central Vietnam, and the methodology, primarily based on content analysis, only reflects media expressions in journalistic products without delving into the news production process within the newsroom. The study also did not directly survey the public, especially coastal communities, thus failing to fully assess the impact of the press on their perceptions and actions. Therefore, further research needs to broaden the scope, incorporating surveys of press agency leaders, reporters, the public, and especially coastal communities to better clarify the relationship between media content, news production mechanisms, and social reception. Overcoming these limitations and conducting comprehensive research will then allow for an accurate assessment of the true constructive role of local press in the sustainable development of the marine economy.

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