

SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS THE NEW DEMANDS OF THE CURRENT VIETNAMESE RADIO AUDIENCE

Dong Manh Hung¹, Tran Huong Tra²

¹Radio The Voice of Vietnam, School of Journalism and Communication (SJC) - University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH) - Vietnam National University, Hanoi (VNU)

²Radio The Voice of Vietnam, Universitas Prof. Dr. Moestopo (Beragama), Jakarta

Email correspondence: dmhungvov@gmail.com; huongtravov@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Given the strong development of technology, the trends and psychology of the audience of different media have been changing drastically. The same goes for the radio audience in Vietnam, as they no longer sit for hours listening to pre-recorded radio programs (passive listening), but are switching to listening to programs anytime, anywhere, and through digital devices and platforms. To clarify the habits, tastes, and trends of radio listening in Vietnam today, we have conducted a "Survey of the audience of main radio channels of the Voice of Vietnam (VOV)" in 8 provinces/cities: Hanoi, Son La, Thai Nguyen, Da Nang, Dak Lak, Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho and Ben Tre during the last 6 months of 2020. The survey results are an assessment report. This was the first in-depth assessment of the audience of major radio channels of the Voice of Vietnam, which was deployed on a large scale, representing all regions nationwide. The research team used mixed methods such methods as conducting questionnaire surveys, interviews, and case study observation.

The researcher was conducting a systematic process to get the answer and solution to certain problems or questions logically, which is called research. In this part, the researcher employed research design descriptive qualitative to analyze and to describe the changes among the radio audience in Vietnam, and propose some solutions to radio stations in Vietnam so that they can innovate their contents and distribution processes to best meet the needs of their audience by introducing the survey results (with comparisons with those of previous studies) to show the changes among the radio audience in Vietnam, and propose some solutions to radio stations in Vietnam so that they can innovate their contents and distribution processes to best meet the needs of their audience. Descriptive qualitative research is a method of research that is aimed to get naturally understanding about a particular phenomenon of human behavior or social setting and to describe the fact and characteristics of the object or subject systematically and accurately without seeking any relation among variables or linkage among different elements (Ary, 2000; Sugiyono, 2010).

Keywords : Radio, audience, Vietnamese, Solutions

INTRODUCTION

The development of science and technology has changed the approach to information among the public, including radio listeners. Statistics in the Report on the Population and Housing Census of Vietnam published in 2018 showed that: "If in 1999, 45.6% of households in the whole country used radio, up to now (2018) this ratio has reduced by more than a half, to only 22.5%. The reduction in urban areas is slightly higher than in rural areas, 56.1% to 26.7% and 42.2% to 20.7%, respectively. According to another report by the Hanoi Statistics

Office in the "Hanoi Statistical Yearbook 2019", only 50% of the households in the urban inner districts and 60% in the rural inner districts of Hanoi had radios (Hanoi Statistical Yearbook, 2019). These numbers might show that the number of people listening to radio programs today has decreased to an alarming level.

However, reports from the Ministry of Information and Communications of Vietnam show that the number of Internet and mobile phone users has increased sharply in recent years. Statistics found in the We Are Social Digital report as of June 2021 showed that the number of internet users in Vietnam was nearly 70 million, an increase of 0.8% from 2020 to 2021, and the number of social media users was nearly 72 million, which also means that radio was getting more audience using mobile devices and the Internet. In addition, in Vietnam, the number of cars in recent years has increased significantly. According to the statistics by the Vietnam Register, if by June 2018 in Vietnam there had only been 3 million cars in circulation, by June 2021, that number had increased to over 4 million 500 thousand (<http://www.vr.org.vn/thong-ke/Pages/tong-hop-so-lieu-phuong-tien-giao-thong-trong-ca-nuoc.aspx>, 2021). An increase in the number of cars also means an increase in the number of people listening to the radio, because "in cars, the only means of receiving information is the radio". (Phan Van Kien, Phan Quoc Hai, Pham Chien Thang, Nguyen Dinh Hau, 2016, p.79)

Based on the above figures, we can see that the ways of listening to radio programs among the audience in Vietnam have changed. As the number of people listening to programs while sitting in front of the radio for hours has declined, there has been a relatively large number of people listening on the go; in particular, a lot of people "listen to the radio while surfing the internet". (Phan Van Kien, Phan Quoc Hai, Pham Chien Thang, Nguyen Dinh Hau, 2016, p.162).

Another notable thing is the changes in the age range of radio listeners. If 10 years ago, a study by VOV showed that the most active group of radio listeners in Vietnam was between the ages of 45 and over 60, the 2018 research findings confirmed that the radio audience in Vietnam today has been rejuvenated, with 41.5% of radio listeners were between the ages of 25 and 45. And this also showed that leaders, entrepreneurs, staff and officials, and office workers and students listened to the radio more frequently than in previous surveys. (Dr Pham Thi Thanh Tinh, 2013, p.79). The way the audience listens to the radio is also different than before. Up to 50% of respondents said they listened to the radio at any convenient time (without waiting and selecting their favorite programs as before). (Dr Pham Thi Thanh Tinh, 2013, p.145).

Currently, the radio listeners have become more active, as they tend to seek interactions and participation in the production process of radio stations, which was difficult in the past when technology and cognitive barriers acted as the main barriers.

The statistics and research findings mentioned above show that the Vietnamese radio industry is welcoming a huge opportunity; if it knows how to take advantage of its strengths, it will definitely be able to overcome its inherent limitations, especially to promote competitiveness with other robust media in Vietnam such as television and Internet.

METHOD

For the best results, we use 3 main research methods

1. Document analysis:

This method was used mainly at the initial stage of the study, especially for developing its research toolkit. At the same time, during and after the survey, this method also helps clarify many of the results. The main documents analyzed include (i) List and time frames of programs broadcast on major radio channels; (ii) VOV's reports and assessments on programs, contents, plans, and development orientations for major channels; (iii) Other relevant reports and documents on VOV, and a radio audience in general.

Data processing and analysis in research is an activity that is very important and requires accuracy and criticality from researchers. According to Zurich (2006, p. 198) that: In principle, there are two ways to process data or analyze data, it depends on the data, namely: (a) non-statistical analysis, which is carried out on qualitative data, usually literary or empirical studies. In this case, qualitative research invites someone to study a problem that wants to be investigated fundamentally and deeply to its roots, and (b) statistical analysis, which is based on quantitative data. Each type, model, or statistical formula used to analyze data is based on assumptions that must be met.

2. Survey:

This is our primary method. Descriptive research also aims to show the facts or conditions that exist without being affected by the subjective factors of the investigator. There are several types of research that can be categorized as descriptive research, namely: survey research, case studies, developmental studies, follow-up studies, and document analysis. , and correlation studies (Arikunto, 2009, p. 236).

In this research, the team use survey research and case studies. The survey is designed into 6 main parts: (i) screening of respondents; (ii) media preferences and habits; (iii) hobbies and habits of radio listening; (iv) favorites, habits, and levels of interest in VOV's channels; (v) public demand for radio listening; (vi) respondent's information. The questions are scientifically designed to help investigators retain information during the collection process and make quality control easier. The questionnaire also includes content for both respondents who have listened to the radio and those who have not. The questionnaire before the official survey was carried out was also tested in Hanoi.

3. In-depth interview:

Usually, market studies pay little attention to this method as they only focus on questionnaire-based methods. However, in-depth interviewing plays an important role in helping to interpret and analyze the results of quantitative research, especially concerning studies aimed at identifying solutions to improve and renovate programs and timeframes like this study on VOV.

According to Esternberg (Sugiyono, 2010, p. 233) Semistructured Interview is included in the in-depth interview category because in its implementation it is freer when compared to structured interviews. The purpose of this interview is to find problems more openly, by asking the interviewee for their opinions and ideas. Therefore, conducting in-depth interviews is necessary. In-depth interviews were

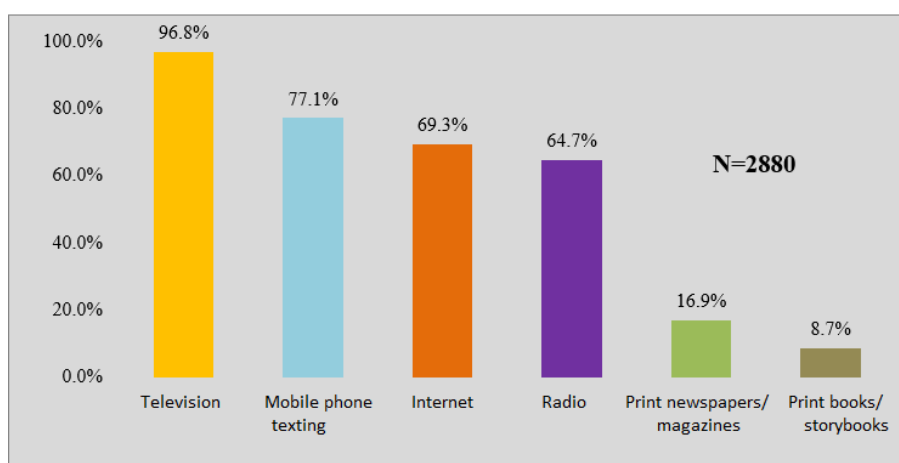
conducted with listeners and journalists of VOV to find out the related issues from the perspective of the production and broadcasting units. The in-depth interviews focus on describing and explaining the viewpoints, methods, and selection of broadcast contents, the determination of broadcast timeframes by significant radio channels, and the behaviors and level of interest, views, and needs of the audience regarding VOV's main radio channels.

4. Observation.

This method is used to complement the other methods. According to Zuriah (2006, p. 173) suggests that: Based on the type, observations are divided into two, namely as follows: (a) direct observation is an observation made where the observer is with the object under investigation, and (b) indirect observation, namely Observations or observations made not at the time of an event to be studied, for example through a film, a series of slides, or a series of photos. In this research, the observations were made through questionnaire-based interviews and in-depth interviews. This method focuses on the habits and behaviors of the public when accessing and using VOV's main radio channels, such as their methods and means of radio listening, their ways of listening to VOV, the level of information shared between the audience, and their relatives, and other people on VOV.

DISCUSSION

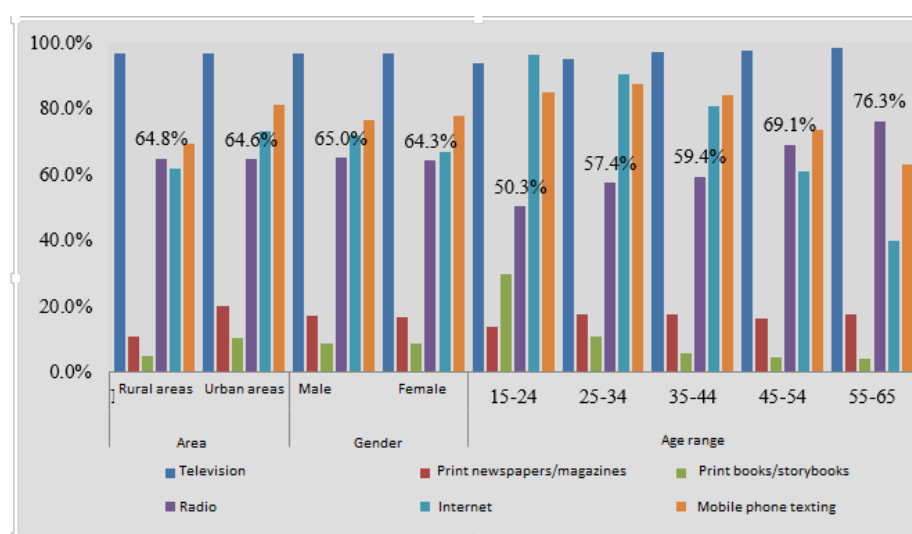
One of the recent problems of the Vietnamese media industry is that when the Internet and social media develop, the audience of traditional newspapers decreases. This is an established fact, and at the beginning of the survey, we assumed that the number of radio listeners, especially in cities, where the Internet is strongly developed, would decrease. However, the survey results are surprising, compared to previous studies. On a normal day (not Saturday, Sunday, or a public holiday), the listeners are exposed to/use many different media types. Television accounts for the highest rate of exposure (96.8%), followed by mobile phone texting (77.1%), the Internet (69.3%), and radio (64.7%). Other types such as print newspapers/magazines or storybooks account for tiny percentages.



Picture 1. Public exposed to various types of media in a normal day (%)

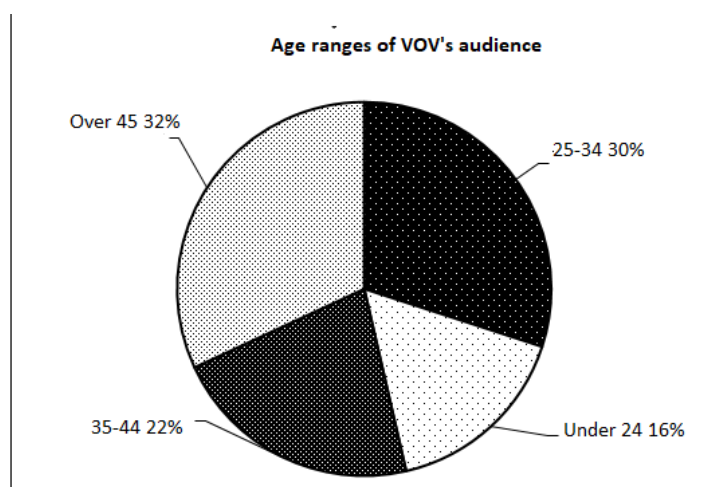
Compared with other media types, radio can garner a relatively high proportion of the audience. This can be considered an acknowledgment of the efforts of radio stations under the current explosion of information and communication. However, because this study focuses specifically on the audience of radio channels, it is possible that these figures do not fully reflect the actual ranking of radio stations compared to other media types. Moreover, the behaviors of the audience are the key factor that needs to be determined.

In this survey, the number of radio listeners in Vietnam still living in urban areas increases by about 64% compared to 25% in the 2008 report by the Central Propaganda Committee.



Picture 2. Public exposed to various types of media in a normal day by demographic characteristics (%)

When it came to radio in Vietnam, it was often thought that this was a medium for farmers and rural areas, because survey reports showed that up to 80% of the population in rural areas listened to the radio. Therefore, the production of radio programs in Vietnam was also firmly aimed at the rural public. However, with the results of this survey, radio producers can rethink and innovate their programs to serve urban residents. As the number of urban radio listeners increases, there has been a change in their age ranges. Previously, it was thought that most radio listeners were middle-aged, retired, and older than 46. But our survey results show that the radio audience in Vietnam is rejuvenating, with 30% of people aged 25-34 listening to the radio daily.



Picture 3. Age ranges of VOV's audience

This can be explained by the increase in the number of internet and mobile phone users. The majority of internet and mobile phone users are youngsters, so radio listeners using these platforms also increase. Moreover, due to the higher number of car owners in Vietnam, the number of young people listening to the radio in cars increases. For the same reason, another survey showed that radio listeners' educational level and social status also changed; specifically, the number of radio listeners who were cadres and civil servants accounted for a relatively high percentage of 25% of the people surveyed. The remaining 28% were farmers, freelance workers, housewives; 26% were students; and 21% were drivers, industrial workers, and business people.

Thus, it can be seen that people aged 45 and above express the most "favorable" evaluation and recognition for radio. These people believe that the most significant advantage of radio is its "fast and complete information" and radio gives them the means to "express their views". According to the results, civil servants listening to the radio frequently shows that they are a group in significant need of information and information processing to support their work and contribute to the national socio-economic development.

As for how much time is spent listening to the Voice of Vietnam, the results are as follows: the people who spend 1 hour a day are primarily cadres and civil servants (57.7%); 1-3 hours a day are drivers, workers, and business people (40.7%); while farmers, self-employed workers, and housewives spend 1-3 hours a day listening to VOV.

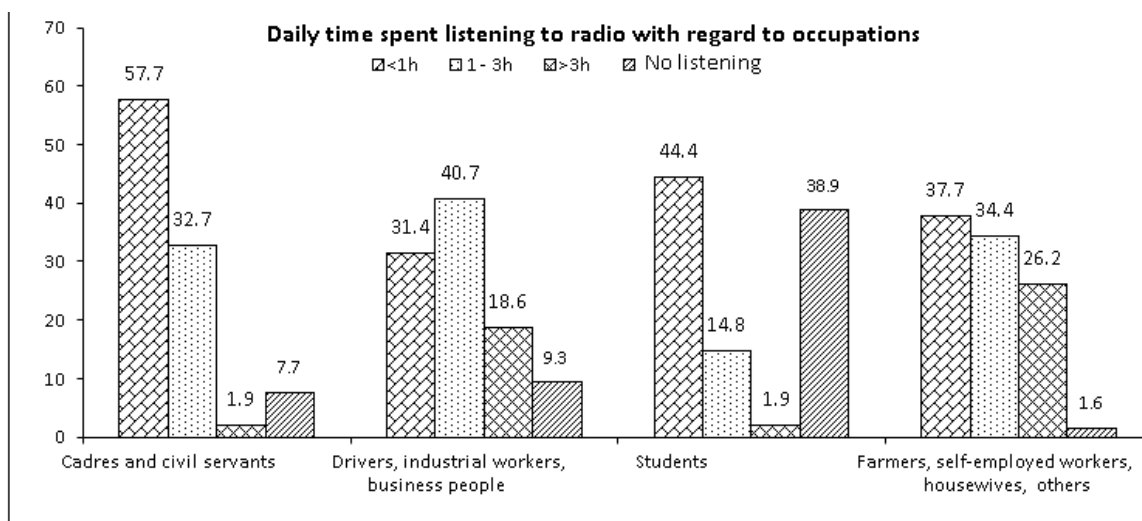
DISCUSSION

Result

Based on the results of the analysis and description above, it can be concluded that 1) overall student achievement results from pre-test to post-test showed an increase. This can be seen from the increase in scores from pre-test to post-test so that the Mean and Standard Deviation values at the post-test also increase. 2) Due to the increase in the Mean and Standard Deviation scores at the post test, the acquisition of the high category (T) at the test post was only achieved by 3 students, while in the pre test there

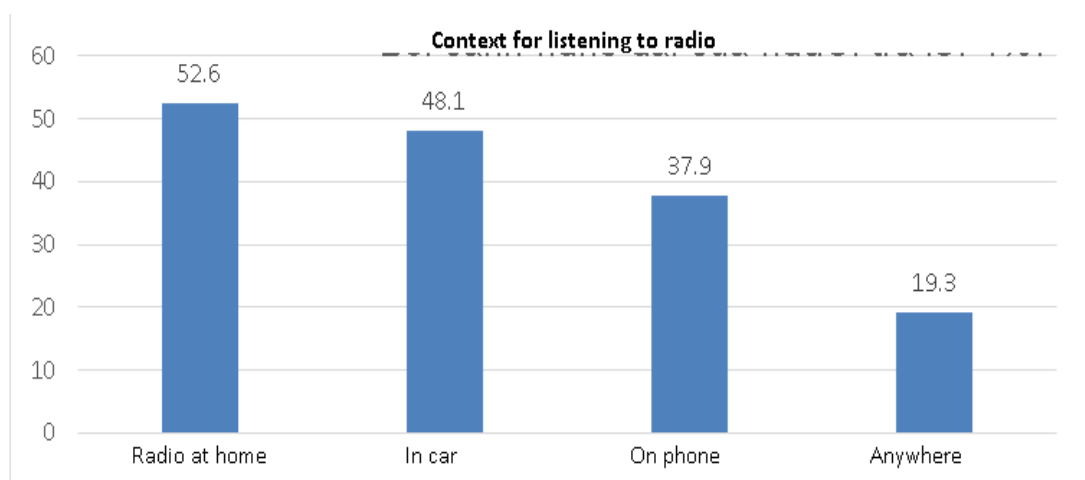
were 5 students who achieved the high category score (T). 3) The categorization of student achievement results from pre-test to post-test, there are only two samples (samples 4 and 8) that experience a change in value from High to Low, while the others are in the same categorization. However, the score seems to have increased from pre-test to post-test. The results on the pre-test tend to be low, this can be seen from the comparison of the average score for the achievement on the pre-test is 6.75, while the average score for the post-test has increased to 9.

Based on the results and discussion above, the researcher would like to suggested that the Problem Based Learning method can be used as a method in learning English. In this case the use of the PBL method shows that students must communicate with friends in their group in order to solve existing problems. PBL is one of the methods used in teaching speaking and has shown an increase in student learning outcomes. Increase in students' abilities using the Problem Based Learning method in teaching Speaking and this became the starting point for researchers to review on the other hand, namely the extent to which the understanding of English teachers in using this method in teaching English, in particular speaking skills. One of the factors that influence students' interest in learning or motivation is the use of varied teaching methods or techniques that are adapted to students' learning preferences as well.



Picture 4. Daily time spent listening to radio with regard to occupations

This is a notable fact for radio stations to consider so they can change their program formats, contents, and styles to suit their audience. The ways the public listens to radio have also changed markedly. Among these ways, listening to the radio at home account for the highest rate of 52.6%, but the number of people listening to the radio in their car also reach 48.1%. And especially, people who can listen to radio anywhere (via the internet, through other platforms) also account for 38%. These numbers show that the audience in Vietnam not only listens to the radio in the traditional way but can opt for many other different modes such as in their car and through digital platforms by downloading a smartphone app...

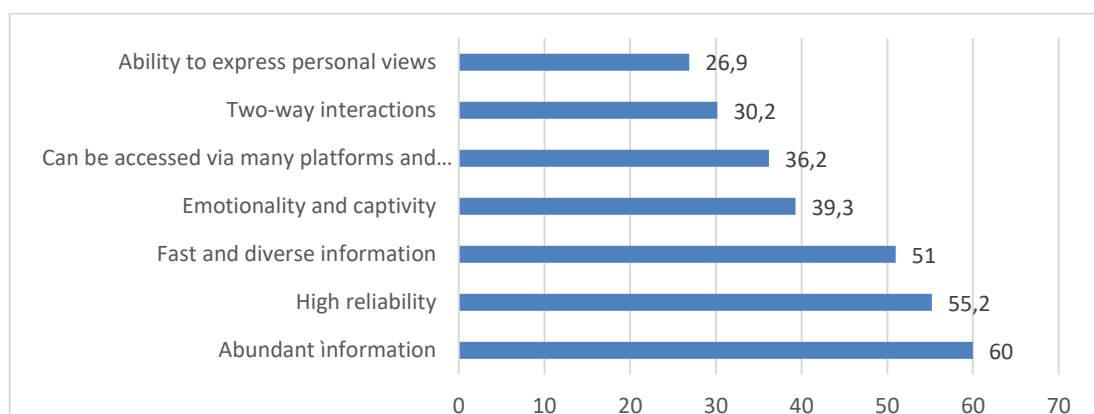


Picture 1. Context for listening to radio

The ways of listening to radio also determine the production methods, which aim to help the audience listen to the radio anytime, anywhere, conveniently. In addition, the habit of listening to the radio on digital platforms helps producers or the production crews quickly receive feedback from the audience, thereby promptly adjusting their contents to attract and capture more listeners' attention for the channel.

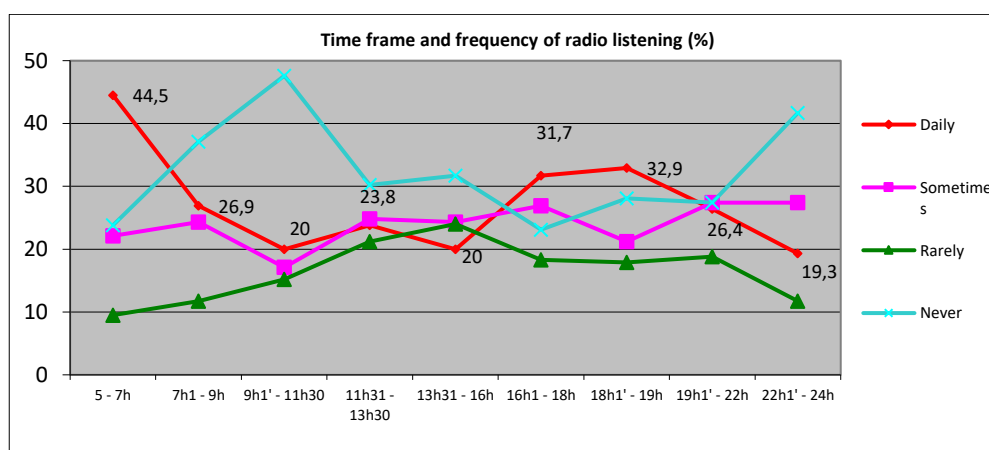
The 7 reasons why listeners choose to listen to radio are also its inherent strengths: radio has a lot of information (60%); its news has high reliability (55.2%) and broadcast information is assessed as fast and diversified (51%); it can be accessed through many platforms and infrastructures (36.2%) and it facilitates easy two-way interactions (30.2%) as well as the ability to express personal views (26.9%).

Clearly, in an age of rampant fake news, radio has become a trusted source of information that people can choose to listen to, and they can verify it. Therefore, the organization of radio news sources, so that information can be both quick and accurate, is an issue that needs addressing for radio producers in Vietnam. When the audience's trust is strengthened, the medium will undoubtedly attract a large audience, which is also the determining factor for its existence and development.



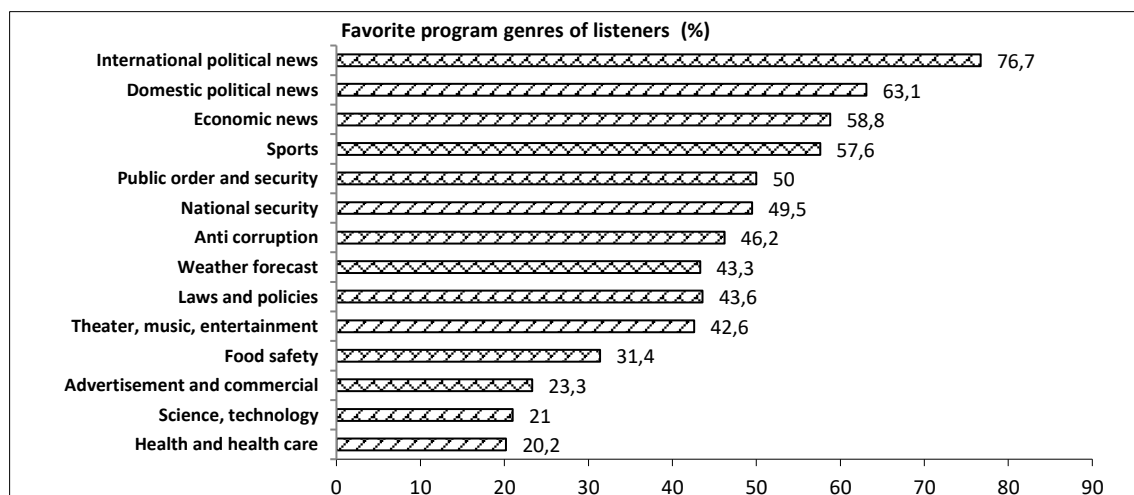
Picture 6.Context for listening to radio among respondents

According to our survey results, the golden hours of radio stations in Vietnam, or the time frame that attracts the most radio listeners, have not changed much. The time frame from 5:00 to 7:00 a.m. daily is still when radio attracts the largest audience, with 44.5% of listeners. From 7:00 am to 9:00 am, the ratio is 25%. The afternoon's time frame from 16:00 to 19:00 is also the period that attracts quite a lot of radio listeners, with a ratio of 31.7% - 32.9%. In the noon and evening, the number of people listening to the radio decreases, and for later periods (22:00-24h00), the ratio gradually declines to 19.3%.



Picture 7. Time frame and frequency of radio listening (%)

These results show that lifestyles and work styles affect the audience's radio schedules. As for the type of information that the audience is interested in, given the diverse types of information broadcast on radio, up to 76.7% of surveyed listeners are interested in international political news and 63.1% in domestic political news. For domestic information, the surveyed respondents express their interest in economics information (58.8%); sports information (57.6%); information related to anti-corruption affairs (46.2%), and daily weather forecast (43.3%).

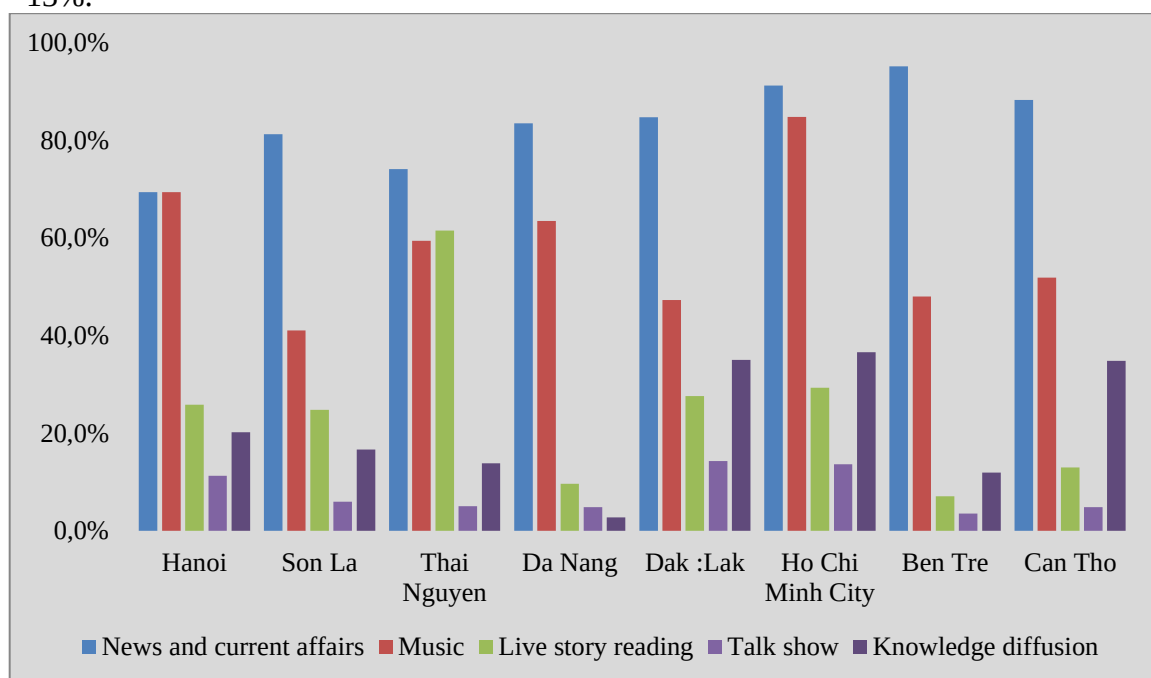


Picture 8. Favorite program genres of listeners (%)

By region, listeners in Southern provinces have a very high demand for news and current affairs, as the percentage of listeners who are interested in this topic in Ben Tre reaches the highest ratio of 95.2%, followed by Ho Chi Minh City (91.2%) and Can Tho (88.3%). These are also the three provinces with the highest percentage of respondents having the highest demands for news and current affairs.

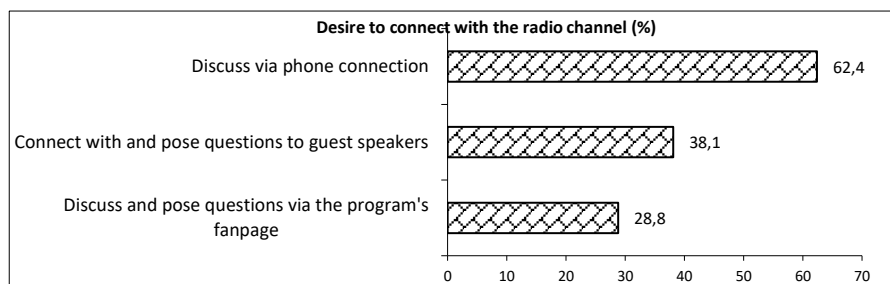
The audience in Ho Chi Minh City has a very diverse demand for their program genres, and the percentage of the listeners that have demands for all 4/5 program genres (except live story reading) is relatively high compared to the remaining regions.

In Hanoi, the audience's demands for news and current affairs and that for music programs are equal (both accounting for 69.4%). In Thai Nguyen, besides the demand for news, current affairs, and music, this province's demand for live story reading is currently the highest among 8 provinces (up to 61.5% of respondents have a high demand for live story reading). Meanwhile, the percentage of respondents interested in live story reading in Da Nang only accounts for 9.7%, in Ben Tre it is 7% and Can Tho 13%.



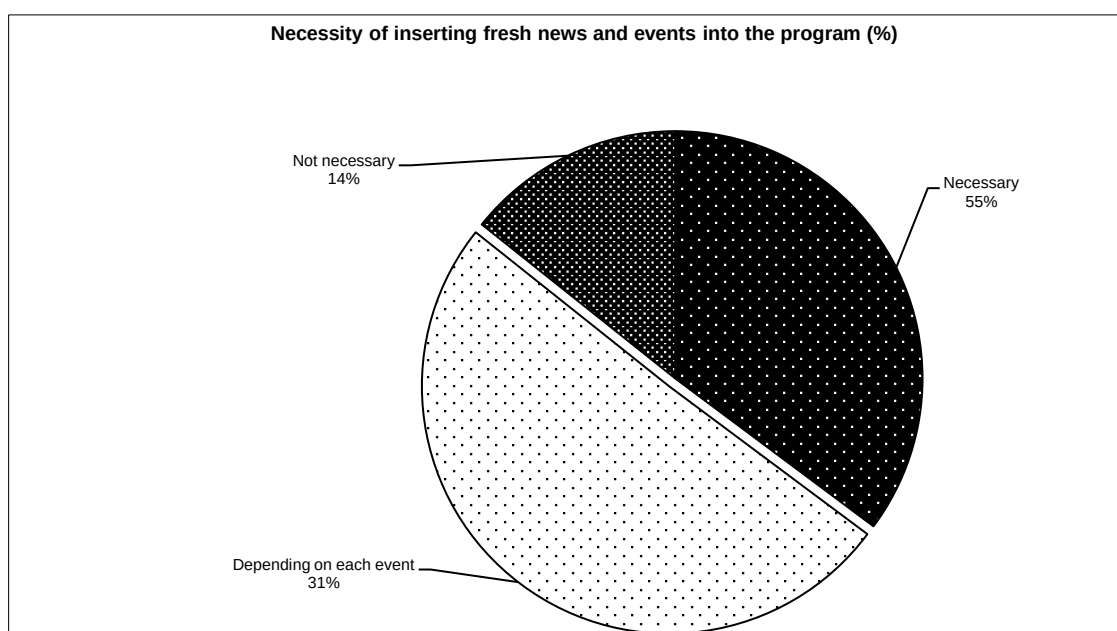
Picture 9. Demand of the local public for radio content(%)

Today, listeners also express a desire to convey their views on radio, which was previously very much limited by technical reasons or the restrictions put forth by the producers. When asked "Do you want to connect through phone to exchange ideas about the issue you are interested in being broadcast on the radio?", up to 62.4% of the total 475 respondents say they want to connect with the station through phone; 38.1% want to connect and ask guest speakers questions, and 28.8% want to interact and ask questions through the program's fanpage.



Picture 10. Desire to connect with the radio channel (%)

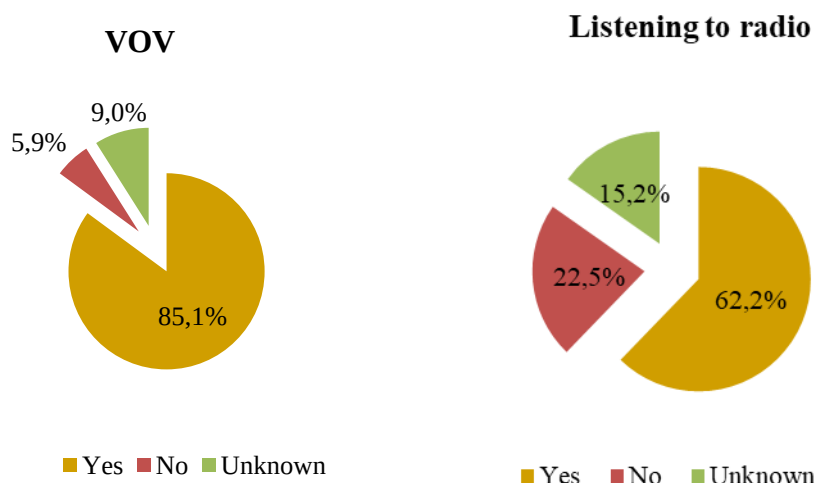
Currently, the time spent for live broadcasts by radio stations in Vietnam is not considerable. For VOV1 News, the leading radio news channel in Vietnam, the percentage of live broadcasts is only 40%. Therefore, updating hot, fresh, and breaking news is still limited. Therefore, listeners are eager to receive open program frameworks in which news and events in Vietnam and internationally are constantly updated. When asked, "Do you find it necessary that fresh news are constantly put into radio programs?", up to 55% of respondents consider it necessary to update news. There are 31% who think that it is required, but events that interrupt the current program should be selected.



Picture 2. Necessity of inserting fresh news and events into the program (%)

In the current context, radio is being competed by many other media types. However, that does not mean it has lost its place in the public's hearts. Because, in fact, there are still many listeners who are passionate and in touch with their radio listening habits. The results show that out of the total respondents surveyed, 62.2% intend to listen or continue to listen to radio. In particular, 85% of this group say they will listen or continue to listen to VOV's channels, 9% are hesitant, and 6% confirm they will listen to radio but not to VOV's channels.

Basically, the ratio of 85% can also be considered a success for VOV channels in gradually developing a solid foothold in the hearts of the radio audience.



Picture 12 .Planning to listen to radio and listen to VOV channels (%)

The success of a radio channel is not only shown in retaining a loyal audience but, more importantly, in attracting more and more new listeners. Basically, the radio channel can retain nearly 84% of loyal listeners who have and will continue to listen to it shortly. The percentage of respondents who have listened to the radio in the past year and announced giving up the habit of radio listening is only about 4%. The remaining 12% are hesitant - these are the audience that radio stations need to continue attracting in the near future.

In the group of respondents who have not listened for a long time or have never listened to the radio, about 12% say they now start listening or continue listening to the radio, while about 23% are hesitant. The remaining 65% are still "resolute" to maintain their stance of not listening to the radio in the near future.

Thus, the potential for broadcasters to exploit is still significant. The issue of how to both retain loyal listeners and attract new audiences for radio channels requires effective strategies and determination to innovate among radio channels.

In the 21st century, in addition to television and the Internet, radio continues to be a media type widely accepted by the Vietnamese audience. Despite the superior attractiveness of television and the Internet, in modern times, radio stations still have plenty of opportunities to develop, and there are still a lot of listeners who look forward to and are interested in listening to radio programs. Our survey of the audience of VOV's main radio channels has shown several positive signals from VOV's efforts to innovate itself to better meet the public needs.

According to the survey, radio is still a medium of communication exposed to and used quite often by the public, besides television and the Internet. In part, this is due to the significant advantages of radio, such as the quality of information, sound, and ease of use. Although there have been many positive results, radio in general and VOV's radio channels, in particular, need to generate more efforts to compete with other media types. The assumption of the audience that there are "too many choices of more attractive media" is still putting a lot of pressure on radio stations. (<https://vov.vn/xa-hoi/noi-nao-co-thinh-gia-noi-do-co-phat-thanh>). In addition, listeners have made essential changes in their habits of receiving information from radio

stations. As such, recognizing the public needs to better serve and attract all groups of the audience is an important task that VOV needs to implement in the coming time. Specifically:

First of all, the favorite type of content that the listeners in Vietnam mainly look for on radio is news. The domestic news segment is more desirable than the international news one. In particular, the topic of politics, security, and order is the most popular. Listeners want news and information on the radio to be always up to date. To serve this demand, radio stations in Vietnam must increase the duration of live broadcasts because news updates will be made faster and easier when live broadcasts are enhanced. (Steve Ahern, 2010, p.245)

Increasing interactions between listeners and radio stations to ensure that listeners are proactive in radio listening is also a mandatory requirement. The current situation shows that radio listeners, in particular, and the majority of the media users in general, in receiving and using various media types, not only want to act as passive users but also desire to actively participate and make interactions in media programs. (Valerie Geller, 2011, p. 245). For radio listeners, too, increasing interactivity in radio programs can also be seen as attracting more listenership. This interactivity should not only be restricted to consulting programs, online exchanges, or through such programs as audience feedback, music shows, talk shows about health, love, marriage, and family counseling, or through forums and fan pages, but should extend to receiving and fulfilling listeners' demands for the ways radio programs are presented.

Each genre is proposed to feature different broadcast time frames. In particular, news broadcasts are suitable for starting a new day, when demand is the highest, from 5–7 AM. Entertainment programs such as music shows, story reading shows, and talk shows are highly desired in the evening, after 8 PM.

According to our survey, the program time frames of radio channels, including VOV1, are still packaged and closed with fixed durations (10 minutes - 15 minutes - 30 minutes) and feature scheduled broadcast periods. This makes not only updating news but also interactions a challenging task. Therefore, Vietnamese radio stations need to change the format and structure of their programs. The program time frames need to be designed to be more open, with big shows having durations of 30 minutes - 45 minutes - 60 minutes - 90 minutes and even 120 minutes to 180 minutes. In each show, it is necessary to have enough news and entertainment information for the audience, especially to ensure at least 15 minutes dedicated to updating fresh and breaking news and interactivity with the audience. With a show, listeners can then get more information.

Whenever turning on the radio, they can get the types of information they want, such as domestic and international news; health and medical information; transport, defense, and security information; entertainment information; and common knowledge - these are the topics whose duration listeners recommend extending. (Steve Ahern, 2010, p. 207). Thus, the programs can quickly provide both diverse and in-depth information. To attract listeners, besides developing traditional topics such as news and current affairs, radio channels also need to work towards renewing their existing programs and creating "unique" and "exotic" radio programs, which are closer to young listeners - the potential audience group of VOV's channels today.

CONCLUSION

Radio stations must take advantage of other forms of media to boost radio appeal. In particular, it is possible to take advantage of social media to promote and bring radio products

closer to the audience. Currently, VOV has also developed and operated many websites and fan pages of channels and programs. However, audience exposure and interaction on these websites are not high. Therefore, it is necessary to improve interactivity on the websites and fan pages of VOV's channels because of the huge number of listeners using the Internet. (Valerie Geller, 2011, p.20). Moreover, it is necessary to put radio programs on digital and handheld mobile platforms to serve the audience better, especially young listeners and those in urban areas who tend to use these platforms more.

In summary, as shown by our survey results, we find that the radio audience in Vietnam has changed dramatically. From listening to radio passively, they now listen to it actively; from just listening to traditional radio devices, they now use more modern devices such as the Internet, social media, apps, and especially on the move in their car. And a younger and more dynamic audience has appeared. The need to receive quick and up-to-date information and to participate in radio programs...have posed many challenges for the Vietnamese radio stations. But it is, in fact, an opportunity for them to transform. The solutions we offer to innovate their contents, forms, and methods are just preliminary. Innovation requires further research and especially a specific strategy to address this issue./.

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