Vietnamese Radio Broadcasting in Contemporary Life

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Abstract: *The foundation and development of radio journalism are associated with great scientific and technological achievements in the field of communication. Digital technology has impacted all elements of the radio communication process, formed new styles and working skills for journalists and created a new capacity to respond to listeners' information needs. Along with the transformation of contemporary life, digital technology has created a push to help the Vietnamese radio sector to strongly innovate and develop.*

Keywords: *Radio, Vietnamese radio, radio's role*

1. Digital technology has impacted and created conditions for comprehensive change in radio broadcasting

– New radio broadcast formats and program production methods have been formed.

In the early days of its establishment, Radio The Voice of Vietnam (VOV) produced programs in simple but outdated technical conditions. Radio programs were broadcast live by reading due to the lack of recording facilities. Until 1956, when the equipment was provided by the Soviet Union, Voice of Vietnam began to switch to the mode of recorded programs. And until 1994, after which it was trained by experts from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) on using the modern radio, Voice of Vietnam broadcast 60 minutes of information and music programs live. Today, with the change in production technology and sound transmission from analog to digital, Voice of Vietnam Radio as well as local radio broadcasters have expanded conditions to build and develop different types of broadcasting programs. These include modern-style, live, interactive and reality radio programs to provide listeners with diverse and vivid forms of content and expression.

Currently, Vietnamese radio broadcasters extensively apply the production format of live radio programs. "Live broadcasting can be understood as a method of radio production conducted concurrently with the broadcasting process to convey to listeners information that is current with daily events and can attract listeners to participate in the production of the program"[(1)]. In recent years, Voice of Vietnam Radio as well as local stations have built new live radio programs such as news on VOV1, talk shows and consultation programs on VOV2, ondemand music programs on VOV3, and rush hour programming on

VOV Traffic, Quảng Ninh Radio and Television Station, Hải Phòng Radio and Television Station and others.

In addition, many live radio broadcasts perform in significant moments and attract a lot of listeners' attention. With the new production method of live radio programs, the public can ask questions or share opinions about agriculture, medicine, love, marriage and family, regimes and policies. They can also request music and interact with guest artists. Thanks to live broadcasting, many stations have shown their agility in providing event information and their role of information orientation in dealing with events and problems that life and public opinion are posing. Typically, VOV's radio channels have accompanied important events to provide vivid and comprehensive information, attracting the attention of the public. With events such as the US-North Korea Summit, the fire at the factory of Rạng Đông Light Source & Vacuum Flask, or the tragedy in Essex, England of 39 Vietnamese people suffocating in a truck, Voice of Vietnam paused many scheduled programs to spend time to update, reflect, analyze and comment on the event with different points of view, thereby highlighting the nature of the event in progress.

Modern technology has created convenient conditions for listeners to interact and exchange, so more and more interactive radio programs are formed, meeting not only the need for information, but also the need to share and to sympathize with many people. Changes in the method of organizing and producing radio programs have created a fresh breeze, making radio more attractive to compete with other types of current journalism. This interaction can be done via phones and messages sent to the stations, as well as through "fanpages" on social media with groups of sharing and commenting.

Besides, with the increasingly strong development of the internet, phones, and computers, Vietnamese radio broadcasting has been developing with more new formats such as online radio, and mobile radio that help radio stations to broadcast information with better sound quality to the world. On the website vov.vn and through radio applications on mobile phones, the public can easily and conveniently access Voice of Vietnam's channels. With an online radio site, listeners just need a mobile phone or handheld device such as an iPad or laptop to easily access and follow detailed information on radio channels. Since all programs are integrated online, listeners can also replay the programs they are interested in.

– Changes in the organization and operation of radio broadcasters.

Along with the general development of the Vietnamese press system, Voice of Vietnam has changed and developed into a professional and modern multimedia communication complex. When established, Voice of Vietnam is a radio news agency, but now, Voice of Vietnam has officially integrated all four types of newscasts: radio, print, online, and television. These means and types of media support can now interact with each other to form a synergy for Voice of Vietnam

to fully, accurately, vividly and effectively transmit information serving the public nationwide as well as international friends overseas.

Taking advantage of the internet, VOV has synchronized the content of four types of media on the internet to serve the public. VOV enewspaper (www.vov.vn) is an effective means of being both an electronic newspaper and a transmission instrument for broadcasting and promoting VOV's radio and television channels online. Websites such as www.vovworld.vn are currently being translated into 12 languages including 11 foreign languages and Vietnamese for overseas Vietnamese. www.vov4.vov.vn features minority languages online to serve people of ethnic minorities.

– Changes in radio journalists' method of working.

The application of digital technology in many stages of a radio program's production process has created profound changes in the way journalists produce radio journalism. The journalists must grasp and master modern technologies, and know how to use the applications of recorders, computers, smartphones, internet, 3G, 4G, 5G and so on. By doing so, journalists can promptly provide information to the public anytime, anywhere.

Broadcasting uses synthetic sound as the primary means of conveying information. The development of digital technology in which the introduction of digital voice recorders using memory cards as well as the integration of high-quality recording features in portable mobile devices has helped radio journalists to perform their tasks easily and quickly in any situation, bringing works with good sound quality to the audience.

In addition, the use of computers and audio editing software in radio program production is now common, helping program producers to improve both content and signal quality. With the development of 3G, 4G and 5G technology, as well as fiber optic cable, journalists and radio reporters can still connect to studios directly to send hot news to radio stations no matter where they are, domestically or abroad. The use of cell phones for reporting is also becoming popular among broadcast journalists.

The strong development of the internet and social networking sites have also created a new source of information for radio journalists. Through these platforms, the public can provide information through their private accounts. To be able to exploit this source of information, journalists need to know how to synthesize and filter information carefully, to "bring the public high quality media products, minimizing difficulties for the public to receive useful information, performing well the role of "gatekeeper"[(2)]. They must consider the public as a partner in this working process. Many programs of Voice of Vietnam have promoted interaction with the audience and used the information provided by the audience as an important and indispensable part of the program. The use of social networks to transmit and promote information as well as build relationships with the public through social networks has become popular and effective.

– Changes in public access.

Differing from the past when the public could only access radio through the radio cassette player in the family or the public loudspeaker system of the commune, ward or township, today the public can listen to the radio anytime, anywhere with a cell phone, an internet-connected computer or an integrated car radio system. With the development of new radio types, the public can easily listen to any recorded radio programs they want. Digital technology has changed the way the public listens and receives information from radio broadcasts.

With the emergence of modern digital media, the audience of Vietnamese radio is also expanding. In the past, radio was often considered a type of journalism for the elderly, but in recent years, radio has been attracting many other target groups such as young people, middle-aged people, etc.

Moreover, the development of digital technology applications also helps to enhance interaction with the public. With a phone call, a text message or an email, radio listeners can easily interact with the radio programs they are interested in. Interaction is even easier when radio programs have "fanpages" on social networks. This can be seen in the programs on Voice of Vietnam Radio's VOV Traffic channel. It is the radio listeners who directly provide live information about the traffic situation on the radio by just one phone call from the road to the studio. Or they can ask questions and share information through the program's fanpage. Or with ondemand music programs, listeners used to spend time, effort and money to send letters to the programs, but now their requests are sent directly and quickly by phone calls, emails, messages, and comments which and are responded to instantly, thanks to the convenience, ease and efficiency with which more and more listeners participate in interacting with radio programs.

After receiving information from radio programs, the public can also send their feedback to the station quickly and conveniently thanks to the applications of digital technology. Not only that, responses to feedback from the radio station are faster, creating trust for listeners and enhancing interaction between the radio listeners and broadcasters.

2. The roles of radio broadcasting

– Radio broadcast is a communication channel that saves lives [3], a useful communication channel in emergency situations.

With its continuous development radio broadcast shows its own role, position and unique characteristics. On February 13, 2016, celebrating the 4th World Radio Day, UNESCO promoted the message "Radio Saves Lives" meaning that in life there are time of dangers when unfortunate accidents happen to people, but with the help of radio, damage and loss can be minimized. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO emphasized: "Radio embodies the power of communication to renew hope and this is what we celebrate on this World Radio Day. On this occasion I call on all UNESCO member states to support and strengthen the

capacity of radio. We must always remember that the freedom of information and the safety of journalists is essential in emergencies. And it is a way to strengthen the freedom and security of all: together, let us nurture the full power of radio – Radio Saves Lives"[4].

Radio has provided timely warning information before disasters, helping people reduce and avoid damage. Over the years, radio has proven its ability to save lives during unusual natural disasters such as hurricanes, flash floods, earthquakes, tsunamis or fires in densely populated places such as apartment buildings, basements, railway stations, and airports. At that time, radio is the fastest and most mobile means of communication that sends out warning signals to help minimize damage to people and property. The fast, flexible, and always-on-the-go information capability of radio helps people avoid danger when being warned in advance even by minutes or seconds.

History has also proven that, in emergency situations, radio has played an essential role in saving people's lives in natural disasters. Disasters often cause power outages and while many means of communication such as television, internet, and mobile phones are disrupted, radio will still be there. According to wol.jw.org, Toru, a survivor of the 2011 tsunami that devastated Japan said, "…From the radio in my car, I heard that a tsunami had reached a nearby city. I opened the car window so I could escape if the tsunami hit. Not long after, a massive wave of black water over two meters high collapsed in front of me. The cars in front piled up on my car and we were all pushed further inland"[5]. Though the tsunami caused huge damage to people and property, thanks to the warning of the local radio, many people were able to avoid the "scythe of death". It was very urgent to describe the situation as well as the speed at which the tsunami was approaching to the audience at that time, that helped Japan to significantly reduce the number of casualties.

On a large scale, radio has properties that helps saves lives during natural disasters. It is broadcasting using sine waves, so it can spread widely and reach over many terrains. Receiving information from the radio is also convenient and easy thanks to compact devices, the simple way of receiving it. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his speech on World Radio Day 2016 affirmed: "In times of crisis and emergency, radio can be a lifeline. For people in shattered societies, or caught in catastrophe, and desperately waiting for information, radio will bring life-saving information. Radio can help in emergency response operations and it can assist with rebuilding. This year, as we start carrying out sustainable development goals, let us resolve to use radio for human progress. On this World Radio Day, let us resolve to prove that radio saves lives"[6]. The radio's advantage of accessing the public is reflected in the fact that even in places where the rescue force has not yet arrived, people can still be updated with timely information via radio waves. Information provided by radio is extremely useful in

situations where rescue operations are difficult and aid groups can take a long time to arrive to assist people affected by the disasters.

In extreme natural conditions, such as storms, tsunamis, even earthquakes that can strike anytime, continuously updated weather information helps people recognize and react appropriately. In our country, when being hit by the annual storms, there are usually power shortages at the center of the storm as well as phone disconnection. People in the affected areas can receive the information about the storms online via Voice of Vietnam Radio. Or with millions of fishermen at sea, the radio becomes a tool, an essential companion. How fast the fishermen receive information is often one of the decisive factors, limiting the loss of life and property.

Radio broadcasting has many advantages for effective communication in an emergency. First, radio is the most effective means of assisting people to prepare for a coming disaster thus minimizing loss of life and property. Second, radio can broadcast information quickly, sending an early warning to reduce the risk of a disaster. Third, radio helps to convey information to the affected area and promotes action by humanitarian organizations. Fourth, radio is a technical device that can withstand the impact of natural disasters. In times of crisis, radios can still function with the ability to transmit and receive signals even when the power grid is down.

Experts from the United Nations have also pointed out that, amidst the ruin and isolation of people with feelings of desperation, the information that radio transmits seems to add hope and help calm the minds of people who are panicking. In emergency situations to rescue trapped people, radio is also a means of providing information and a way for those people to know how to coordinate with rescue teams to preserve their lives. "Amidst the ruins and in the face of an emergency, the radio is often the first medium for survival," said Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO. "Its durability is an incomparable advantage, often enabling it to resist shocks and re-transmit messages of protection and prevention to as many people as possible better and faster than other media, thereby saving lives"[7].

– Radio accompanies and serves people's issues. It's a leading communication channel in the implementation of national development goals.

In daily life, community radio channels serve people with high efficiency. Traffic radio channels have been established in most major cities around the world, becoming a practical companion of people. They keep the rhythm of life, reminding people of their travel schedules as a consultant and guide while at the same time expanding their knowledge and also providing entertainment.

In Vietnam, since its appearance, VOV Traffic channel has received a positive response from the public, especially from those who frequently travel on the road. The establishment of VOV Traffic was considered as one of the ten outstanding press occasions that year, contributing to reducing traffic congestion and accidents. Associate Professor Nguyễn Thế Kỷ, Ph.D., the former General Director of Voice of Vietnam Radio affirmed, "VOV Traffic is the only radio channel capable of doing

real-time interaction 24 hours per day. Mobile communication technology creates new ways for you to listen to radio and interact with radio broadcasts on the go. It is both a challenge and an opportunity for VOV Traffic to rise to a new level in its public service career"[8].

The development of community radio channels has played an important role in attracting the public back to radio and helping radio hold an irreplaceable position in the changing media landscape. In addition, radio shows itself as an active and useful channel in serving sustainable development goals.

Currently, climate change is a global challenge, in which Vietnam is ranked as one of the five most vulnerable countries at risk of being affected. According to statistics, long-term risks due to climate change, on average, would cause our country 329 deaths a year, and loss of more than 1% of GDP due to disasters related to climate change [9]. This number may increase if we do not take timely measures to prevent it. Mike Adams, Coordinator of Health Communication Resources, said, "Broadcasters in countries that have a high probability of disasters need to develop detailed plans for effective use of radio to warn of danger and to help rescue and reduce damage [10].

With the mobility and convenience of organizing the production of programs that are closely related to people's daily lives, aside from large program channels, radio broadcasting in local areas also has a proven record of efficiency. In many countries around the world, there is strong development of radio stations and radio programs that serve small groups of populations and bring practical and close information to those people. In Vietnam, besides central and provincial stations, the radio and television systems at district, town and commune levels attach and usefully serve people's lives, transmitting relevant information in a timely manner, while encouraging and guiding people in matters of life and making a significant contribution to the national goal of sustainable development.

– Radio supports the human spirit in life.

Broadcasting also helps to reassure people who are experiencing trouble in life such as illness, economic difficulty, and negative thoughts. Since radio communication is characterized by privacy and intimacy, radio can become a close friend for people. The faster the pace of life, the more pressure people have to deal with and the more they need to share their experience. In fact, when a person loses a friend, a lover, a colleague, or even a special relationship, they need more than ever to express their feelings. At such times, radio is one of the places where people can share without hesitation. Voice of Vietnam's program named "Window of Love, Please Share with Us" has been comforting its listeners, providing professional knowledge and skills, sharing life's risks, and helping them solve their problems and difficulties in private life, and leading them toward a better life.

In addition, radio connects the community, calls for support, and at the same time enhances the spirit of solidarity and mutual assistance. For many people

having difficulties in life, work or health and have no access to treatment, radio has joined hands with organizations and individuals to call for the community's help to send timely support to them. The sharing and support of people will give them motivation to overcome difficulties and continue to live well. Because of these programs with humanitarian values, radio has directly conveyed to people meaningful and positive life messages. And more than that, radio also awakens people who are having negative thoughts and feelings of depression, or who might want to give up this precious life.

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