

ROLES AND STRATEGIES OF COMMUNITY RADIO AND COMMUNITY COVID TEAMS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN VIETNAM

Nguyen Huu Dzung

Academy of Journalism and Communication, Hanoi, Vietnam, 25A2010001@ajc.edu.vn

Abstract

The study was conducted with the aim of understanding the operation and role of community radio stations and community COVID-19 teams in Vietnam during the pandemic. To conduct the research, the author used the methods of observation and in-depth interviews. By observation, the researcher directly observes the commune radio stations and their operation. As well as their activities related to communication about the COVID-19 epidemic. The in-depth interviews were conducted with a number of people in different residential areas, in different provinces to further clarify the findings from the observations and to obtain the generalisability of the study. Observational results show that with regular and continuous activities of the community radio stations and community COVID teams, people feel that the community is always with them, and no one is left behind, contributing to people's peace of mind and trust in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: community radio station, COVID team, communication, Vietnam

Introduction

In Vietnam, the radio broadcasting system has five levels: national radio stations, radio stations of provinces and cities, radio stations at the district level, radio stations at the community level and radio stations at residential areas (Nguyen, D.D., 2014). The most numerous are the community radio stations (CRS). Particularly in Hanoi, there are 579 radio stations in communes, wards and townships, providing essential information to the people (Viet, A., 2021). CRS was once the most popular mass media in Vietnam until television, electronic newspapers and internet, and social networks appeared (Nguyen, D.D., 2014). Although it no longer maintains a leading position in the media, radio broadcasting and CRS operations still retain their own position and audience. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the advantages of grassroots radio stations once again were promoted and they made an important contribution to epidemic prevention and control in Vietnam (Viet, A., 2021).

Along with the development of modern technology, CRS has undergone drastic changes in the production and broadcasting process. For example, in the current Bac Ninh province, CRS uses the internet in combination with 4G technology to broadcast wirelessly (Minh, L., 2021). This 4G smart radio system was used for both district, commune and residential broadcasts. This system has a high level of availability and can operate at any time, in any location with an internet-connected device. The CRS brings information directly to people in residential areas. Urban residential areas where basic radio stations are not installed, as in Hanoi, have mobile radio crews (Viet, A., 2021). Also during the COVID-19 pandemic, in Vietnam, along with CRS, group communication activities, and personal communications in residential areas, especially isolation and blockade areas, there were new creative developments. The birth of the community COVID team (CCT) is an example.

The CCTs were established in residential areas. The number of members of the team depends on the epidemic situation and the number of people in the area. The CCT was born as a combination of community health authorities and socio-political organisations, social organisations and people of residential areas. "The task of the CCT is to go every day, knocking from door to door to communication, mobilise and remind people of measures to prevent and control the epidemic; request and guide people to self-monitor their health, proactively make medical declarations when themselves or their family members show signs of illness (Ministry of Health Portal, 2021)". Members of CCT participate voluntarily.

The media has made an important contribution to the achievements in the prevention and control of COVID-19 in Vietnam in the past two years (Information and Communication Emagazine, 2021),

including the active participations of CRS and CCT (Ministry of Health Portal, 2021). Realizing that, the author has conducted a study to find out and clarify the role and method that CRS and CCT have coordinated with other media in communicating about COVID-19 pandemic in Vietnam.

Methods

The study was carried out through observation, in-depth interviews, and data collected from electronic portals and online newspapers. The in-depth interviews conducted were based on two major issues: First is on accessing information during the epidemic and the problem of fake news. The second one is about CRS and CCT. Through social relationships and social networks, the researcher interviewed 29 people. The selected informants include people living or working in the provinces of Bac Giang, Bac Ninh.

The researcher made observations in Bac Ninh province and Bac Giang province, two industrial provinces with a large number of workers and once the epicenter of the epidemic during the fourth outbreak, from 27 April 2021. Bac Ninh province alone has about 332,000 employees working in ten industrial zones, “the COVID-19 epidemic has caused more than 200,000 workers to stop, quit and social distance (Nhat, T., 2021)”. As for Bac Giang, during the peak of the epidemic, four industrial parks in the province with about 150,000 workers had to stop operating (Thien, T., 2021).

The researcher directly observed the CRS system and its operation in communicating about the COVID-19 epidemic in residential areas, thereby, assessing the usefulness of information about the epidemic that people were updated with and the advantages of information from CRS. For CCT, the researcher observes their activities in residential areas, the information that CCT provides to the people, and the impact of that information on the people. At the same time, in that process, the researcher compares the information from CRS and CCT with information on other media such as television, online newspapers and social networks, and compares CRS with CCT in analysing the ability to support each other in the process of communicating about the epidemic to the public.

For the purpose of understanding and clarifying the role of communication messages from CRS and CCT, the author conducted in-depth interviews with people, mainly from districts of Bac Ninh province. Due to epidemic conditions, in-depth interviews were conducted by phone. The author selects interviewees who are active in social interactions because their information can ensure the representativeness of the residential community. Interviewees include both men and women; both young, middle-aged, and elderly people; accommodation from urban to rural with many different occupations.

Through in-depth interviews, this researcher assesses the impact of messages from CRS and CCT on people’s awareness, attitudes, and behaviours in response to the pandemic in Vietnam. From that, the author draws out the role of CRS and CCT in the prevention and control of COVID-19.

Research Findings

CRS systems and their operation

Observational results show that each residential area was installed with 6-15 speaker clusters, each cluster has 1-2 speakers, including 4G wireless speakers and wired speakers. The number of speaker clusters depends on the conditions of geography and population in each region. CRSs were installed in high positions and were capable of spreading sound to a large number of households in a residential area. In Yen Phong district, Bac Ninh province, the researcher found that there were 476 4G speaker clusters in 11/14 communes.

CRS was used for broadcasting activities at three levels namely district, commune and residential area. The district level has a fixed distribution time frame: 6:30, 11:30, and 17:00. In the commune, there was a schedule to distribute at 6:00 and 18:00. In residential areas, depending on the actual conditions, it is possible to choose a time suitable for the content to be communicated. In case of emergency, they could communicate at any time. For example, during peak times communication frequency can be up to 20 - 30 messages per day. The earliest news can be broadcast at 5:00 and the latest can be until 23:00.

CRS uses outdoor loudspeakers for broadcasting, so it was affected by outdoor conditions and weather conditions. There were locations where people cannot hear or clearly hear the sounds from the CRS. CRS work is based on the main device's internet connection and depends on 4G signal at the installation site. If the 4G mobile signal is not stable, it will affect the radio quality.

CRS provides information on the COVID-19 epidemic situation directly related to people in residential areas, including information on disease prevention and control; 5K, 5T messages, epidemic levels, government policy, number of cases, medical isolation cases, locked areas; information on registration and vaccination. These are all specific and practical information aimed at serving the people of each residential area. This information is completely not available from other media such as television, online newspapers or social networks. In emergency cases, the responsible people of the government directly broadcast information to counter incorrect messages spread among the people and on social media networks.

The target audience of CRS is mainly elderly people. They do not have the ability to access or have little access to other information sources such as online newspapers, television and social networks. However, in the centre of epidemic areas, CRS is the main means of communication for the general community.

Based on the collected data, Vinh Phuc province, where the CCT models started, had 1,496 groups with 11,314 members (Tran, Q.V., 2021). Da Nang city had more than 2,200 CCTs in residential groups and residential areas. As for Ho Chi Minh City, there were 19,000 CCTs with 52,000 members, operating on a voluntary basis, under the organisation and management of local authorities and professional guidance from the health sector (Diep, C., 2021). In Yen Phong district, Bac Ninh province, the researcher counted 816 CCTs in 14 communes with 1940 participants.

Each CCT is organised by 3-5 members; they went to people's houses, especially families infected with COVID-19, or families in isolation or under blockade, to communicate, mobilise and to remind them of epidemic prevention and control measures in each household. They requested them, for instance, to stay at home, limit going out when not really necessary, wear the mask, wash hands with soap, keep their distance, and limit their contact with outsiders.

Communication messages from CCT have the advantages of personal communication, a direct impact on people's thoughts and feelings, making them feel secure and confident in the prevention and control of the epidemic. At the same time, information from CCTs contribute to correcting false information about the epidemic. In addition, information from CCTs is important in supplementing the information from CRSs and other media.

Discussion

CRS is a mass media that had appeared in the 1970s (Duc, D., 2003), and so far it is no longer the main means of communication. But we can see, through the collected data, that in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic, in Vietnam, CRS thanks to its advantages, still has its own place and position (Viet, A., 2021).

Modern media such as online newspapers, social networks and television have the ability to spread messages about the epidemic on a very large scale but cannot provide detailed information on the situation of each residential area. Meanwhile, with a limited scope of impact, CRS is arranged in a large enough number to be able to inform the majority of residents in residential areas in a timely and accurate manner about the local epidemic situation, along with other useful information.

The limitation of CRS is fixed installation. But there is also an advantage of CRS. When there is information about the epidemic, people can actively go to CRS installation locations to update information or at least focus on the direction of CRS to listen to information.

The sound from the CRS is susceptible to weather and ambient noise. But it has one advantage which is the power of direct speech. The direct speech of the broadcaster has the power to affect the listener's emotions, making them ready to express their attitudes and respond behaviourally to the received messages. At the same time, the broadcaster can also adjust the intonation to suit the audience who are the elderly and do not depend on strict standards.

The CCT is considered as an innovative solution to epidemic prevention and control in Vietnam. CCT has both responded to information and communication needs about the COVID-19 epidemic in

residential areas more quickly, proactively, and drastically, while helping to control the source of infection, trace the disease and take care of people in residential areas. The birth of CCT created a decisive turning point in the fight against COVID-19 in Vietnam (Tran, Q.V., 2021).

Data from surveys show that Vietnamese people were very concerned about the disease. Most of them took the initiative to understand the disease from the early days of the outbreak, around the end of 2019 to the beginning of 2020, and they always follow any updates on the pandemic. When information became too much, many people were overloaded with information on social networks and online newspapers. They turned to monitoring only with a limited frequency and only through mainstream media such as television and radio. In epidemic areas, many people were only interested in information from CRS and CCT without paying attention to other sources.

That said, when an issue is communicated to the public long enough and with extreme quantity, the recipients are overloaded with information and they will no longer be interested in that information unless it is directly relevant to their lives. At that time, they will look to reliable information sources and only follow information from that source.

Since Vietnam transitioned to a safe coexistence with the epidemic, when the Government issued Resolution 128, marking a new turning point in epidemic prevention and control (Vietnam Government Portal, October 2021), information from CRS and CCT becomes more and more interesting and in demand. The epidemic situation of each locality is continuously updated and there are changes in standard procedures based on the level of the epidemic to ensure both epidemic prevention and economic development. Therefore, information about the local epidemic situation is very important and such information is only available on SRC and CCT.

In addition, we must also affirm that, in order to build a picture of information about the epidemic to form an objective and comprehensive view for the public, it requires the involvement of the entire media. The mass media provide broad information covering the whole society. Individual and group media provide in-depth, local information. That coordination has been very evident in Vietnam. The mass media is also actively involved in social networking platforms. Information about the epidemic is continuously provided by authorities, along with measures to prevent and control the epidemic. This information about epidemics in the world as well as throughout the provinces and cities in the country is continuously updated (Zalo of the Ministry of Health).

On a local level, information channels are also very rich and diverse. But the most prominent at the commune are CRS and CCT. The combination of CRS and CCT created a deep and wide information coverage in each residential area, and at the same time is a reliable information channel. During the epidemic, when people had to distance themselves and were not allowed to gather in large numbers, it affected not only their daily activities but also their spiritual lives. Therefore, CCT is not only a personal communication channel, it is also deeply spiritual during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In conclusion, this study shows the importance of group communication and individual communication during the pandemic in isolation and lockdown areas, as they spread the spirit of community, love for people, and the spirit of humanity. The study also shows the significant role of CRS and CCT to help in communicating information about the epidemic as well as the policies and procedures of the government and local authorities. The coordination between CRS and CCT is one of the important deciding factors in epidemic prevention and control in Vietnam. This model of cooperation is a valuable and very creative experience that can become a lesson for others. However, the total involvement of the media is significant to convey the messages of the government and authorities in a timely and coordinated manner.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge Associate Professor Luong, K.H., Associate Professor Mai, D.N, and Dr. Luong, N.V. for assisting the author to complete this study.

References

- Anh, T. (2021, September 6). Chu tịch UBND TP Ho Chi Minh livestream truc tiep chia se ve dinh huong sau ngay gian cach [Chairman of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City live-streamed sharing the orientation after the quarantine day]. *Nhandan.vn*. <https://nhandan.vn/tin-tuc-xa-hoi/chu-tich-ubnd-tp-ho-chi-minh-livestream-truc-tiep-chia-se-ve-dinh-huong-sau-ngay-gian-cach-663429/>
- Bac Ninh Province. (2021). *Online portal of Bac Ninh province* [Facebook page]. Facebook. Retrieved October 25, 2021, from <https://www.facebook.com/congthongtindientutinhbacninh>
- Binh, Y., & An, K. (2021). *To Covid cong dong: "La chan" chong dich hieu qua* [Community Covid team: An effective "shield" against the epidemic]. <http://tiengiang.gov.vn/chi-tiet-tin?to-covid-cong-ong-la-chan-chong-dich-hieu-qua/32066049>
- Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper. (2021). *Canh bao thong tin gia* [Fake information warning]. Retrieved October 25, 2021, from <https://dangcongsan.vn/canh-bao-thong-tin-gia>
- Diep, C. (2021, September 17). *To Covid cong dong: "La chan" chong dich hieu qua* [Community Covid team: An effective "shield" against the epidemic]. *Qdnd.vn*. <https://www.qdnd.vn/y-te/cac-van-de/to-covid-cong-dong-la-chan-chong-dich-hieu-qua-671577>
- Dinh, T. T. H. (2016). *Giao trinh tin va ban tin phat thanh* [Textbook of news and radio bulletins]. The Publishing House of Political Theory. <http://thuvien.ajc.edu.vn/ViewPDFOnline/document.php?loc=0&doc=113773646459468778046262233401271792516>
- Dinh, T. T. H. (2017). *Truyen thong va xa hoi (Giáo trình nội bộ sau đại học)* [Media and society (Graduate internal syllabus)]. Academy of Journalism and Communication. <http://thuvien.ajc.edu.vn:8080/dspace/handle/123456789/7128>
- Duc, D. (2003). *Ly luan bao phat thanh* [Theory of radio journalism]. Academy of Journalism and Communication. <http://thuvien.ajc.edu.vn/ViewPDFOnline/document.php?loc=0&doc=150755119024364221016478545256771486949>
- Government Information. (2021, September 6). *Sharing information with the people of Ho Chi Minh City government* [Video]. Facebook. Retrieved October 25, 2021, from <https://www.facebook.com/thongtinchinhphu/videos/552050266046324>
- Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. (2020, February 2). *Number of operational community radio stations in the country*. <https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/No.%20of%20operational%20CRS.pdf>
- Laodong.vn. (2021). *Chuyen doi so tai Viet Nam va nhung thong ke an tuong dau nam 2021* [Vietnam's digital transformation and impressive statistics in early 2021]. Retrieved October 20, 2021, from <https://specials.laodong.vn/chuyen-doi-so-tai-viet-nam-va-nhung-thong-ke-an-tuong-2021/>
- Le, N. H. (2019, July 5). Van dung ly thuyet truyen thong va co che hinh thanh du luan xa hoi [Applying the theory of communication and the mechanism of forming public opinion]. *Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper*. Retrieved October 30, 2021, from <https://dangcongsan.vn/tu-tuong-van-hoa/van-dung-ly-thuyet-truyen-thong-va-co-che-hinh-thanh-du-luan-xa-hoi-527395.html>
- Luong, K. H. (2007). *Ly thuyet truyen thong va van dong* [Communication and advocacy theory]. Academy of Journalism and Propaganda. <http://thuvien.ajc.edu.vn:8080/dspace/handle/123456789/5572>
- Luong, K. H. (2013). *Giao trinh ly thuyet truyen thong* [Communication theory textbook]. National Politics. <http://thuvien.ajc.edu.vn:8080/dspace/handle/123456789/62>
- Luong, N. V. (2021). *Giao trinh ly thuyet va ky nang truyen thong chinh sach* [Theory and skills of policy communication]. The Publishing House of Political Theory. <http://thuvien.ajc.edu.vn:8080/dspace/handle/123456789/8672>
- Luu, H. M. (2009). *Truyen thong Viet Nam trong boi canh toan cau hoa* [Vietnamese media in the context of globalization]. Dan Tri Publisher. <http://thuvien.ajc.edu.vn:8080/dspace/handle/123456789/1316>
- Luu, Q. (2021, July 27). Tin gia lien quan Covid-19 gia tang tren mang xa hoi [Fake news related to Covid-19 on the rise on social networks]. *VnExpress*. <https://vnexpress.net/tin-gia-lien-quan-covid-19-gia-tang-tren-mang-xa-hoi-4330938.html>
- Minh, C. (2021, November 20). Phat huy hieu qua cua to COVID cong dong [Promoting the effectiveness of the community COVID team]. *So Y Te Ha Giang*. <http://ytechiang.org.vn/tin-tuc/phat-huy-hieu-qua-cua-to-covid-cong-dong.html>
- Minh, L. (2021, April 9). Hieu qua he thong loa phat thanh trong phong chong dich COVID-19 tai Bac Ninh [The effectiveness of the loudspeaker system in the prevention of the COVID-19 in Bac Ninh]. *Trang chu – So Y te – Cong thong tin dien tu tinh Bac Ninh*. <https://sy.tbacninh.gov.vn/news/-/details/22511/phat-huy-hieu-qua-he-thong-loa-phat-thanh-trong-phong-chong-dich-covid-19>
- Nguyen, C., & van Vinh. (2021, August 31). Xu ly nghiem hanh vi lo'i dung dich benh de tung tin sai su' that [Strictly handle the act of taking advantage of the epidemic to spread false information]. *Cong an Nhan dan Online*. <https://cand.com.vn/Ban-tin-113/xu-ly-nghiem-hanh-vi-loi-dung-dich-benh-de-tung-tin-sai-su-that-i626354/>
- Nguyen, D. D. (2014). *Bao chi phat thanh hien dai* [Modern radio journalism]. Academy of Journalism and Communication. <http://thuvien.ajc.edu.vn/ViewPDFOnline/document.php?loc=0&doc=20913484945395172319786866410514894212>
- Nguyen, T. T. G., & Nguyen, T. V. (2021, November 3). Bao dien tu thong tin phong, chong dai dich Covid-19 [Electronic newspaper to prevent and control the Covid-19 pandemic]. *Tap Chi Dien tu Hoc Vien Bao Chi va Tuyen Truyen*. <https://lyluanchinhtrivatruyenthong.vn/bao-dien-tu-thong-tin-phong-chong-dai-dich-covid-19-p25537.html>
- Nguyen, V. D. (2011). *Bao chi truyen thong hien dai (Tu han lam den doi thuong)* [Modern media journalism (From academia to everyday life)]. Ha Noi National University. <http://thuvien.ajc.edu.vn:8080/dspace/handle/123456789/1467>
- Nguyen, V. D., & Do, T. T. H. (2012). *Truyen thong: Ly thuyet va ky nang co ban* [Communication: basic theory and skills]. National Political Publishing House. <http://thuvien.ajc.edu.vn:8080/dspace/handle/123456789/61>
- Nhat, T. (2021, June 4). Bac Ninh kiem soat the nao voi khoang 200.000 cong nhan nghi viec? [How does Bac Ninh control about 200,000 workers leaving?]. *Giadinh.Net.Vn*. <https://giadinh.net.vn/bac-ninh-kiem-soat-the-nao-voi-khoang-20000-cong-nhan-nghi-viec-172210604163936162.htm>
- Tap Chi Online. (2021). *Nganh thong tin va truyen thong 2021: 7 su kien noi bat* [Information and communication industry 2021: 7 outstanding events]. <https://ictvietnam.vn/nganh-tttt-nam-2021-7-su-kien-noi-bat-do-tap-chi-tttt-lua-chon->

- 20211216092928658.htm
- The Socialist Republic of Vietnam Government Portal. (2021). *Detailed information Executive directive documents*. Retrieved October 20, 2021, from http://vanban.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/chinhphu/hethongvanban?class_id=509&page=1&mode=detail&documentid=204272
- Thien, T. (2021, October 24). Giai phap hieu qua tu Bac Giang [Effective solutions from Bac Giang]. *Bao Dien Tu Chinh Phu*. <http://baochinhphu.vn/Hoat-dong-dia-phuong/Giai-phap-hieu-qua-tu-Bac-Giang/450695.vgp>
- Tieng, V. (2021). *Branded Vietnamese rice makes inroads into global market*. The Voice of Vietnam. Retrieved October 25, 2021, from <https://english.vov.vn/en>
- Tran, Q. V. (2021, September 17). To COVID cong dong: Nhung chien sy tien phong trong phong chong dich [Community COVID Team: Pioneers in epidemic prevention]. *Vietnam Plus*. <https://www.vietnamplus.vn/to-covid-cong-dong-nhung-chien-sy-tien-phong-trong-phong-chong-dich/741343.vnp>
- Tran, T. V. (2021, October 9). Hieu qua hoat dong cua To Covid cong dong trong cong tac phong, chong dich Covid-19 tren dia ban huyen [Effectiveness of the community Covid team in the prevention and control of Covid-19 in the district]. *Huyen Yen the Tinh Bac Giang*. https://yen.the.bacgiang.gov.vn/chi-tiet-tin-tuc/-/asset_publisher/rGPJoF5ZctAY/content/hieu-qua-hoat-ong-cua-to-covid-cong-ong-trong-cong-tac-phong-chong-dich-covid-19-tren-ia-ban-huyen
- Trang Chu – Cong Thong Tin Bo Y Te. (2021, June 15). *To COVID cong dong- vu khi chong dich doc dao cua Viet Nam phat huy hieu qua tai Bac Giang* [Community COVID team – Vietnam’s unique anti-epidemic weapon is effective in Bac Giang]. https://moh.gov.vn/tin-lien-quan/-/asset_publisher/vjYyM7O9aWnX/content/to-covid-cong-ong-vu-khi-chong-dich-oc-ao-cua-viet-nam-phat-huy-hieu-qua-tai-bac-giang
- Van Tien, van Minh, D., & Lam, P. (2021). *Phat huy vai tro to COVID cong dong trong phong, chong dich COVID-19* [Promoting the role of the community COVID team in the prevention and control of COVID-19]. <http://dakrong.quangtri.gov.vn/index.php/en/news/Thoi-su-chinh-tri/Phat-huy-vai-tro-cua-To-COVID-19-cong-dong-trong-room-chong-dich-2895/>
- Viet, A. (2021, May 7). Phat huy vai tro cua he thong thong tin co so trong tuyen truyen phong, chong dich Covid-19 [Promoting the role of the grassroots information system in propagandizing the prevention and control of the Covid-19 epidemic]. *Nhandan.vn*. <https://nhandan.vn/tranghanoi-tin-chung/phat-huy-vai-tro-cua-he-thong-thong-tin-co-so-trong-tuyen-truyen-phong-chong-dich-covid-19-645042>
- Viet, X. (2021, July 7). Hurong dan hoat dong cua to phong, chong dich cong dong [Guidelines for the operation of the community epidemic prevention and control team]. *Phuong Huong Xuan*. <https://huongxuan.thuathienhue.gov.vn/?gd=7&cn=109&tc=4741>
- Vietnam, Ministry of Health. (2021, August 31). *Cap nhat dien bien dich Covid-19* [Update on developments of the COVID-19 epidemic]. Retrieved October 25, 2021, from <https://covid19.gov.vn/big-story/ca-nhat-dien-bien-dich-covid-19-171210901110957364.htm>