

The Role of Political Communication in the Fight against COVID-19 at Vietnam



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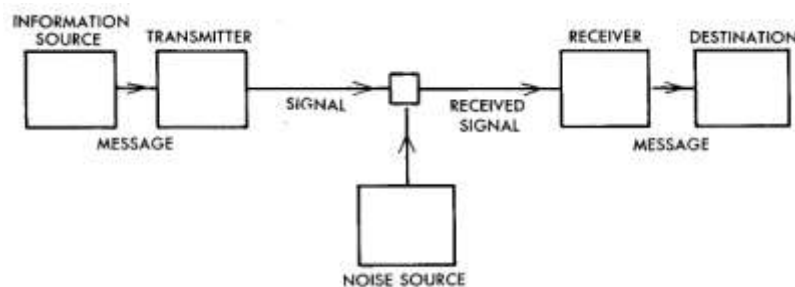
ABSTRACT: COVID-19 pandemic has brought serious detriments of many aspects worldwide. Negative impacts on the economy, social life, and humanity are critical, and history will still refer to this period as a dark picture of all humanity. The complicated and unpredictable changes of the epidemic forced all countries to find ways and use all resources to respond. However, along with new strains, the evolution of the disease is becoming more and more sophisticated. A complete end to this epidemic may not be possible. Therefore, people worldwide have determined to live with COVID-19 and adapt to the situation. Vietnam is no exception to this trend. Since the epidemic broke out in early 2020, the Vietnamese Government has built many solutions to deal with it. If these measures are effective, people must voluntarily and unanimously follow them. The tool that helps propagate and convince people, as well as a channel for people to give their feedback, opinions to policymakers for adjustments and more in line with reality, is through political communication. The article will analyse this communication in Vietnam in both directions, from the Government down to the people and vice versa, in the fight against COVID-19 in this country. The article is divided into three main parts: the first part will provide definitions and concepts related to political communication. The second part gives an overview of the activities and effects of political communication in the fight against the epidemic. The final section will concentrate on comments on this communication in Vietnam.

KEYWORDS: Media, political communication, Vietnam, COVID-19, COVID-19 prevention.

I. THEORETICAL MODEL

There are various definitions of political communication; nonetheless, no conception is accepted widely in international academia because it is challenging to define this concept fully and accurately. The difficulty comes from including many small concepts inside, so using a certain number of words to describe all the activities and elements related to this concept is not a simple thing. So to be able to learn about political communication, we should first start with the two constituent elements, namely media and politics.

The definition of communication is hugely diverse. Some researchers define it according to the target; others define it according to the tools, a few give the concept based on the process, etc... Thus, the selection of a single complete definition for this concept is an impossible thing to do. However, definitions may differ in many respects; most of them refer to five principal elements: initiator; receiver; mean; message; and effects. In other words, the communication process begins with a message formed by a sender. This message is then encoded by translating into a signal or signal series and transmitted over a specific medium or channel to the receiver. The receiver then decodes and interprets the message and returns the message, information that shows that the receiver has understood or not understood the message. This step is called feedback provision. During the transmission of the message, "interference" can occur that makes the information no longer accurate as it was original. This model was soon proposed by Shannon and Weaver in 1949 (Shannon and Weaver, 3).

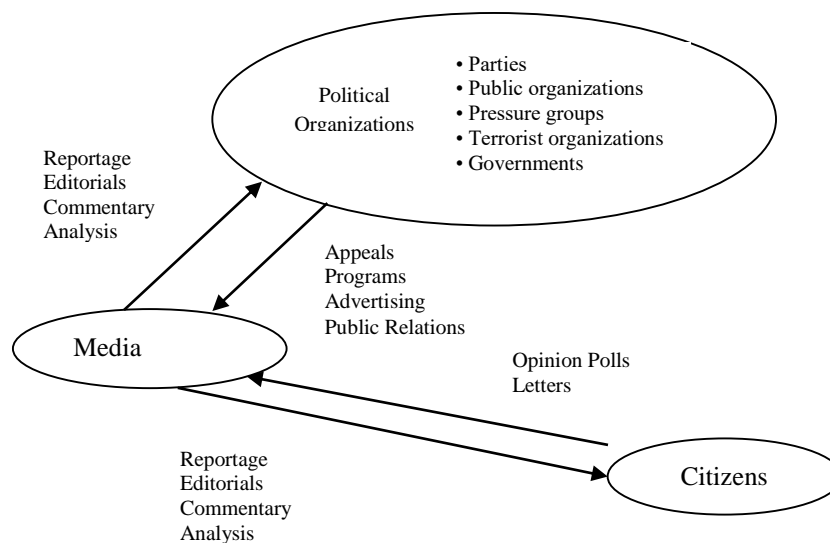


The second is the concept of politics, which means "national affairs" - "affairs of states" in ancient Greek. It has been discussed by many prominent scholars of the past, such as Herodotus, Plato, Aristotle, etc. Scholars today, based on inheriting ideas from their

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predecessors, have developed the concept of politics from many angles, such as Bernard Crick. Accordingly, he argued that: "...politics is a special form of Government whereby people act together through institutionalized procedures to resolve differences, to combine interests and various values while simultaneously implementing public policies in achieving of general goals" (Crick 67).

When combining these two factors in the concept of political communication, researchers have found many approaches, some definitions are very detailed, but others are general conceptual, like Chaffee's definition. According to him, political communication refers to "the media's role in the political process (Chaffee 15). However, other scholars tend to give definitions with more aspects. Pippa Norris is one of them. He believes that political communication is a process of interacting and exchanging information between politicians, media tools and masses. This process takes place in two directions: from the top-down, from the state agencies down to the people, and from the bottom up – from public opinion to the Government (Norris 342-343). As Brian McNair's opinion in *An Introduction to Political Communication* mentioned, political communication is purposeful communication on political topics. All forms of communication carried out by politicians, political organizations, individuals with political elements to achieve a particular purpose or communication activities by people, voters in elections and magazines that aim to influence individuals, political agencies and organizations are all considered political communication. Furthermore, he affirms that communication through news, newspapers and television on political topics are also included in this definition (McNair 4). The author also built a model of political communication as follows:



Thus, the common features of the above definitions of political communication are that communication activities aim to interact and exchange information in two directions. The top-down direction is from political individuals and organizations to the people. The direction of the bottom to up comes from the people to politicians or political agencies and organizations. Both of these effects of each element aim to achieve its specific goals.

II. RESULTS

A. *Communication helps people grasp information, leading effective for new directives and policies*

When Wuhan appeared the first cases and spread to countries worldwide, Vietnamese communication, including radio, television, newspapers, and magazines in paper and online form published articles about the origin of the virus, the level of danger, the situation of the epidemic in the world, data related to infections in countries. etc. For example, reputable newspapers and magazines with high readership rates such as vnexpress.net, tuoitre.vn, cand.com.vn, dantri.com.vn, or qdnd.vn (Alexa) have all had articles writing about the origin of the Corona virus, how to prevent and control this disease according to the guidelines of the World Health Organization WHO.

During the early days of the Coronavirus, when people in other countries were still confused about whether to wear a mask going out or not, how dangerous this virus was (in many places, people think it is no more dangerous than seasonal flu), or rush to accumulate food and necessities such as toilet paper and protest isolation or social distancing measures, etc. In Vietnam, everything seems to be going more smoothly. As soon as the Government of Vietnam issued a series of new regulations and policies, including the obligation of wearing masks when going out and going to public places, regularly washing hands, avoiding large people gathering, that information appeared immediately on all newspapers and radio. At the same time, many media reported on COVID-19, the speed of its spread, the consequences it causes, recommendations on how to prevent and fight the virus, first by wearing a

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mask, regularly washing hands, not gathering in crowds, etc... Results from a small survey through Google with the keywords "wear a mask", "wash your hands", "sanitize", "avoid large crowds" in the period from January 1, 2020, to April 30, 2020 (the early period of the COVID-19 epidemic) turned out that 28,700 articles that mentioned this issue on the website of the Government, online newspapers, and radio and television stations' websites in Vietnam

To make these new guidelines more accessible and receptive to the people, the Ministry of Health of Vietnam has launched many initiatives, including composing songs with new lyrics about the Coronavirus based on the melody of old popular songs. These songs were also introduced with a dance about washing hands often, avoiding touching eyes, nose, and mouth. However, to spread this information in the community, the media turned it into a phenomenon and immediately created a strong response. This song and dance were even mentioned by many international newspapers, such as in the program Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (Oliver) and became a popular trend on the TIK TOK application.

The second and third waves of epidemics appeared more than cases in the community. Facing the complicated situation of the epidemic, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc at that time issued Directive 15/CT-TTg lasting from March 28 to April 15, 2020, with the main content: stopping gatherings of more than 20 people in one room; or more than 10 people outside of offices, schools or hospitals; implementing a minimum distance of 2m between people in public places; stopping religious ceremonies and activities with 20 people or more; stop cultural, sports and recreational activities in public places; suspend the operation of business and service establishments; restrict of people movement and flights from epidemic areas to other places (VGP). Then, on March 30, 2020, the Prime Minister continued to issue Directive 16/CT-TTg. This directive contains more stringent requirements than the previous directive no.15. Specifically, while directive no. 15 restricts people from going out, directive 16 prescribes people to stay at home and only go out when necessary; not gather more than 2 people in public places; stop public passenger transportation. Depending on the epidemic situation in each locality, the local government will apply directive 15 or 16. Each resident can directly receive an announcement about the directive applied in their locality. Besides, when making any phone call, callers will always hear a brief slogan "stay at home is patriotic" to emphasize the importance of limiting contact and going out when not necessary. However, to help people clearly understand the directive's content, the difference between the directives to avoid confusion when implementing must largely depend on agencies in communication. First, when issuing any new directive or policy on COVID-19 prevention, the Prime Minister requires the Ministry of Information and Communications to coordinate with the Ministry of Health to immediately propagate and provide information to the people (Telegram). In addition, the information will be continuously posted by the TV station on the main news. Newspapers (including both in paper and online form) simultaneously put on the first news's page about the directive, along with basic instructions. For example, as soon as the Prime Minister issued directive 16 on social isolation for 14 days, starting at 0:00 on April 1, 2020, about 1,250 websites and electronic media published this news (according to a survey from Google with the keyword "social isolation according to directive 16 starting from 0:00 on April 1" during the period from March 31, 2020, to April 1, 2020). Top online newspapers with a high viewer rate in Vietnam (based on Alexa's synthesis) are vnexpress.net, laodong.vn, zingnews.vn, dantri.com.vn, tuoitre.vn, qdnd.vn, vietnamnet.vn, thanhnien.vn, vtv.vn (websites of Vietnamese television stations) all have articles on the front page, and radio and television channels also include information about the Prime Minister's directive in their main news. In addition, newspapers and radio stations also summarised the main content and pointed out the fundamental differences between the directives, making people easily understand, remember, and follow. Thanks to that, people understand the epidemic prevention measures applied by their local authorities, avoiding confusion. Of course, social distancing makes people's life and work difficult. Because communication in Vietnam continuously updates the epidemic situation in other countries, the human and economic losses caused by COVID-19, level of dangerous and severe consequences for the whole society occurring if each citizen does not raise their awareness and limit going out unnecessarily as a result the people here feel they need to follow the instructions. According to the Government's directive, everyone is trying to stay at home, limit contact, and limit going out because they believe it is the best way to return to normal life soon. As a result, when the directive ended on April 27, 2020, the number of COVID-19 infections in Vietnam had returned to 0 (WHO).

Vietnam is experiencing the 4th wave of COVID-19, more intense than ever. Unlike previous outbreaks, the new strain of the virus makes it very difficult to control the disease situation. With such complicated epidemic developments, Ho Chi Minh City - a large epidemic area - has applied Directive No. 16 from 0:00 on July 9, 2021. The city government immediately issued many announcements confirming that the city had a plan to ensure food resources and support people, which deters food deprivation. These announcements aim to prevent people from worrying and rushing to hoard food or leave their residences. People are still allowed to go out for buying medicine and food during the implementation of directive 16 (MOIT). At the end of the first time of social distancing, the number of infected cases recorded in the community in Ho Chi Minh City, although decreasing, is still high. The government here decided to extend the implemented period of Directive 16. Because the social distancing period lasted longer than expected, many people felt confused and worried due to work and financial pressure. Many of them are freelancers, street vendors, cleaners, etc. Social distancing makes them unemployed and lost income, which deters them from seriously obeying the directive. Realizing this problem, the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City has used many support packages, most recently the second support package with 3,477 billion VND, to help deprived families and freelancers in the city (Vu and Long). In September 2021, the government in Ho Chi Minh City provided the third support package of more than 9,247 billion VND, supporting self-

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employed workers, poor households, near-poor households, people with serious difficulties arising from the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic (Minh Quan). The Government also issued Resolution 68 on a nationwide support package of VND 26,000 billion for people in difficulty due to the epidemic (Government Portal) and required localities to quickly distribute support packages to the people as soon as possible. In addition, to support people reduction in electricity bills is also issued in Resolution 83NQ/CP dated July 31, 2021 (Vietnam Electricity).

To all this critical information reach the people as quickly as possible, it must be through the media. Because people are at home at that time, so electronic newspapers and radio stations and television are their main information channels. They also spend more time updating information from these sources. Any new directive or content issued by the Government is immediately reported on the front page by press agencies and media, emphasized many times, specifically explaining and guiding primary content for people to understand, remember and follow. Based on information about the support packages through the media, they actively register to receive subsidies from local authorities, branches, and associations in their residential area. These units then send the list to higher levels. The process was carried out very expeditiously for the disbursement to be carried out quickly, which aims to promptly meet the expected needs and solve the people's immediate difficulties. Thanks to the media, people have mastered the information related to support packages and become more active in accessing that support resulting in faster speed in resolve. Receiving support reduces the financial pressure of disadvantaged people, leading to them being less likely to go out, creating the effect of Directive No. 16 issued by the Government.

B. Political communication change people's awareness and behaviour

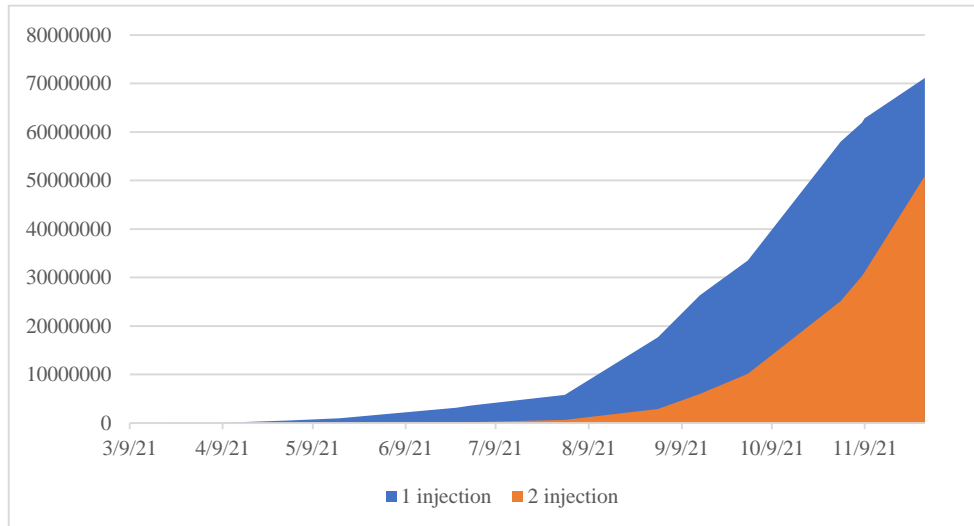
In the resolution of the 13th National Congress of the Party, the focus on mass vaccination of the community was identified as one of the most vital tasks (Toan Van Resolution). According to the direction of the Party, the Vietnamese government has determined to take advantage of the "golden" time during the period of social distancing for completing this goal. The Prime Minister has issued Official Dispatch No. 71/CD-TTg requesting rapid testing on a large scale and organizing vaccination for people aged 18 and over. All localities, especially epidemic hotspots such as Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, Dong Nai, Hanoi, etc., have accelerated to the maximum speed and set the goal of completing the plan by September 15, 2021, which will cover the first vaccination for all people and have the second for those ageing from 18 years old over. Specifically, in Hanoi, based on the Prime Minister's telegram, the City People's Committee Chairman signed and promulgated Plan No. 206/KH-UBND aiming at large-scale testing and vaccination against the COVID-19 virus for people in the city (Hanoi Department of Health). However, it is crucial that people voluntarily go for injections to achieve that goal. Many people were afraid and did not want to be vaccinated because the world and Vietnam had recorded complications after vaccination, leading to death at the same time. They are also concerned about the safety of vaccines because the testing time is too short (My Quyen). Therefore, the vaccination rate in Vietnam in the period before August 1, 2021, is very low, only 5,756,155 doses for people injected one dose, equivalent to 5.9% of the population and 659,069 doses for those who have been fully vaccinated with 2 doses, accounting for 0.7% of the population (Our World in Data).

To achieve the set goals, people need to understand vaccine's benefits bringing to themselves and the community, leading to vaccinating voluntarily. At the same time, political communication plays a vital role in educating people and changing their perceptions and behaviour. Huge articles on the effectiveness of vaccines in the prevention of COVID-19 have been published, and the comments of prestigious experts in the world are also emphasized. Specifically, government-affiliated agencies such as the Ministry of Health and all health departments in provinces and cities have articles about the vaccine's effects, citing sources from the WHO as affirming the safety of vaccines for humans. These units also continuously update news, vaccination data, information about vaccines tested for use in Vietnam, the effectiveness rate of each vaccine, etc. This information reaches people by sending messages to phone numbers, which is possible for people to understand more about the vaccine, resulting in fear reduction. Local organizations such as Party Cells, People's Committees, and branches are all involved in propaganda, go each house to explain the benefits of early vaccination and encourage people to reduce anxiety. In addition, all other media outlets such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations simultaneously emphasized these two main issues: vaccination is the best way to prevent COVID-19-, and vaccines currently allowed for circulation in Vietnam have all been tested be safe for human use. For example, on the digital version of Lao Dong newspaper - laodong.vn, the "The Effectiveness of COVID-19 Vaccine Against Delta Variant" has indicated the vaccine's benefits with the new strain Coronavirus, namely Delta. Accordingly, the vaccine is still effective in preventing this variant, reducing the mortality rate. This article quotes information from the World Health Organization (WHO), written by Dr. Kidong Park - WHO Representative in Vietnam (Labour). Or as the article "New study of Oxford University, US CDC on vaccine effectiveness with Delta variant" in the newspaper tuoitre.vn also introduced two studies by Oxford University and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention of The US (CDC) that shows the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine against both old strains and Delta variants, reducing the possibility of hospitalization and death (Duy Linh). These are very reputable sources of information that people trust. Or in articles about the safety of vaccines, the article "WHO confirms approved COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective" has cited WHO quotes, affirming the types of licensed vaccines are all approved and safe to use (Vietnam Plus). These are just a few examples in a series of articles on the effectiveness and safety of COVID-19 vaccines. Their common

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feature is that there are sources from reputable organizations or leading universities in the world in the UK, USA, etc., making people feel confident and gradually change their minds.

And indeed, this role of the media units has been influential given people changed their awareness and voluntarily participated in vaccination in a short time. This is reflected in the results on September 15, 2021, Vietnam had 26,307,653 people who have received one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, accounting for 27% of the population; 5,988,864 people injected with two doses, equivalent to 6.2% of the population. On November 29, 2021, the whole country had 71,143,392 citizens vaccinated with one dose of vaccine (73.1% of the population), and 50,940,072 people have received two injections (52.3% of the population) (Our World in Data). Vietnam has become one of the countries with the highest vaccination rate per capita in the world, according to November 2021 data. (Our World in Data).



Number of people vaccinated in Vietnam

C. Political communication support to build public confidence

When Vietnam appeared the first COVID-19 cases from people travelling into Vietnam from other countries, the Government has issued a request to isolate all people who flew in Vietnam or to Vietnam by other routes. All costs for screening, testing for COVID-19, accommodation, wifi, and necessities for people under complete isolation are covered by the Vietnamese government (HCDC). Immediately the communication agencies also engaged, they updated and published pictures from these concentrated isolation areas to the people. The article "Life in isolation areas" on the electronic newspaper nhadan.vn has published a series of images reflecting daily life, served meals, space to exercise, quality, accommodation conditions and convenient communication between isolated people and their families via free Wifi, etc. (An Quoc Viet), or true stories of people staying at the isolation area was also recorded in the newspapers, such as the article "The emotional diary of 14 days in isolation from a female student returning from Korea" in Vietnamnet.vn (Cong Sang). These stories are a form of a diary combined with pictures recording the things that happened during the time of concentrated isolation, mixed with the writer's emotions. Most of the stories showed their optimism and joy, their satisfaction with the Government's care for those who carry out the quarantine and provided comments to make services in isolated areas are better. Posting this information makes people feel secure because they see that the government controls the disease well, paying close attention to people's lives, especially those infected or are likely to be infected. Hence, they are ready to isolate themselves if they are in the required situation.

When the COVID-19 pandemic swept into Vietnam in March 2020, marked by the detection of patient number no. 17 in the community (at that time, due to the small number of infected cases in Vietnam, patients were marked by a number), most of the people are extremely worried. They feared that when the Government applies social distancing measures like some countries have implemented, shortages of food or other necessities may occur because they are not allowed to go out. Faced with such a situation, the Vietnamese government has issued a series of measures to localize and trace people with a history of close contact with patient number 17 (these people are identified as F1, F2, F3, in which F0 is the person with the disease, F1 is the person in direct contact with the infected person, F2 is the person in contact with F1, F3 is the person in contact with F2). Those F1 are taken to concentrated isolation and have samples for testing. Those F2 and F3 must self-isolate and monitor their health at home. The residential area where these patients live is completely isolated from the outside area. However, people's lives are not so difficult because the authorities in Hanoi have taken measures to provide all food and other necessities for people in the isolated area. Relating information published in newspapers and radio has helped raise people's understanding and awareness. As a result, the people fully support this anti-epidemic measure of the city government, although their business activities were also affected (Bao). Pictures of people's lives in isolated areas and the local government's free food supply activities are regularly updated on newspapers and radio,

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making people in other places feel secure. That also builds confidence in them that if their area becomes an infected area and has to be isolated from outside areas like the neighbourhood of patient number 17 above, the local government will also support them in many aspects. Therefore, people's confidence in the measures and decisions taken by the government is strengthened. As a result, people are not alarmed, and there is no rush to hoard food and necessities like in other countries.

During the 4th outbreak, the goal was to limit people going out while providing sufficient food and other necessities. Besides giving free food to people, the State of Vietnam also launched an initiative to distribute vouchers to go to the market and supermarket and mobilize the army to help people go to the market. People in residential areas are given vouchers to go to the market on even days (Monday, Friday, Sunday) or odd days (Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday) and can only go to the market on the days indicated on their vouchers. People can also ask the army to help them go to the market once a week. Those in need will write down what they need to buy on paper and send it to the soldiers. Then these soldiers will help people buy items on their lists and bring them directly to their homes (Hoang Trieu).

Pictures of this army activity or pictures of police soldiers distributing free rice and gasoline to people in difficult circumstances who had to leave the city to return to their hometown to relieve financial pressure and sacrifices of medical staff and doctors in treating and taking care of patients with SARS-CoV-2 are portrayed by the media, making people feel incredibly moved. These articles and reports are then re-shared by the people on Facebook or other social applications, creating a strong ripple effect in the community.

Many kind people have supported and given many gifts such as rice, eggs, instant noodles, etc., to residential areas, households or individuals with difficult circumstances. Furthermore, mass media is also an important channel to call for support from the community for the national vaccine fund, contributing to easing some of the financial pressure on the State budget. Users of Zalo - an application for messaging and calling via the Internet - can also directly and actively help disadvantaged people living near them by using Zalo Connect mode, which allows users to post a request for help or search for people who need help.

Since the epidemic outbreak, on the mass media and banners and posters hung on the streets, people have often seen the slogan "Vietnam leaves no one behind". This slogan conveyed that Vietnam cares about each person, helps those in difficult circumstances, and does not leave anyone alone to fight the disease. Images of doctors and nurses trying their best to treat patients or the Vietnamese Government welcoming overseas Vietnamese who want to return to Vietnam to avoid the epidemic in foreign countries represent the meaning of this slogan. This action aroused the solidarity of the Vietnamese people.

With beautiful images of soldiers in the armed forces, information about the Government's disease control measures continuously posted on the media, social security activities such as cash support according to the Government's support packages, providing free food and food for people in difficult circumstances, plus short, easy-to-remember slogans that struck right into the mentality of the Vietnamese people and appeared everywhere. As a result, the public's trust in the Communist Party and the State is strengthened, from which they had more confidence in the issued policies and voluntarily followed.

D. Communication is a feedback channel, expressing people's opinions so that policymakers can make appropriate adjustments

When zoning measures to divide the epidemic by level were prescribed, and at the same time to help limit people going out, the Government issued requirements for travel permits to those who are in necessary cases allowed to go out. According to such directives from the Government, localities also quickly applied but adjusted fit the actual situation in their localities. For example, Hanoi capital was divided into several regions. Areas with no disease cases within 7 days or more are green zones. Areas with many unknown infection sources and difficult to control are red areas. Areas with confirmed cases that are controlled and clear about infected sources are the yellow areas (Nguyen Ha). People in the green zone can move more in their zones while those in the red zones are strictly prohibited from going out. Along with that, Hanoi also applies travel papers to reduce the number of people moving out. A travel permit is a type of permit that clearly states which individuals or organizations can go out on the road with a specific purpose and essential reason. Those who do not have a travel permit are not allowed to go out or go out only when necessary, such as requiring medical care. The travel permit in Hanoi was first applied on July 23, 2021, in which agencies and organizations build their travel papers and issue them to their employees. However, on July 27, 2021, Hanoi has agreed to use only one type of permit for travel.

Realizing that the issuance of this travel permit is not effective in restricting people from going out, the Hanoi People's Committee has adjusted. From August 8, 2021, people who want to go out must present a travel permit, citizen identity card, and work schedule or assignment certified by the agency where they work (Anh Tuan). However, this tightening did not bring the expected results, so Hanoi continued to have the third change on September 5, 2021. From this day, only 6 groups of subjects are issued with a travel permit, including: (1) individuals performing political, official or diplomatic duties; (2) individuals performing essential work duties, public duties or public services; (3) individuals directly involved in epidemic prevention and control; (4) reporters, editors, technicians of press and media agencies; (5) citizens required to conduct obligated medical services; (6) organizations and individuals performing essential public duties and benefits. This new form must have a QR code (Truc Linh). This adjustment causes a lot of confusion for people, agencies, and businesses because most of them worry that they do not belong to one of the allowed six groups, so all production activities will be affected. At this time, the communication agencies acted as a bridge, sending feedback

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from the people to the local and central government. Newspapers, magazines, and radio and television stations all published articles or news reflecting on the limitations of the new directive, traffic jams occurring at the checkpoints that were not controlled by the police force due to huge people. “Hanoi has continuously changed temporary travel permits, entrepreneurs hurt” of the author Mai Ha quoted the opinions of many interviewed businesses who commented that travel permit delayed their production, increasing economic losses (Mai Ha). “Restraints come up from the new temporary travel permits” reflected many people's thoughts about the difficulties in their work and life travel caused by the travel permit (Van et al). All the newspapers and radio stations at that time posted pictures of traffic jams caused by checking travel permits and interviews with people about the new regulation. According to Brian McNairs's model, people can give their opinions to political agencies and organizations by sending petitions and conducting referendums; however, in Vietnam, people through interviews with media agencies, namely newspapers, magazines, radio, and television stations to express their thought. Immediately, the Hanoi People's Committee adjusted the travel permit in response to such feedback. By September 7, 2021, both old and new travel permits were accepted; from September 21, 2021, Hanoi had completely abandoned the travel permit (Nguyen and Van). With the issuance of this new directive, the press and media agencies are the ones who reflect the people's opinions and judgments to the government and also point out the current situation when promulgating and applying these regulations leading to adjustments by the government.

During the fourth outbreak, many cities and localities in Vietnam, which had a large number of infections, also applied social distancing measures, closed schools to switch to online learning, companies, agencies temporarily limited production or kept production at a low level, in addition, people were only allowed to go to the street in case of absolute necessity. Each such period of social distancing usually lasts 14 days. After 14 days, localities will base on the situation of the epidemic to decide whether to extend the isolation period. For example, Ho Chi Minh City, which is considered the largest outbreak in Vietnam in the 4th outbreak, has had to undergo 120 days of social distancing (Huu Cong), while in Hanoi, it is nearly 60 days, from July 24, 2020 to September 21, 2021 (Tuan Son). This social distancing is effective in helping to reduce the number of infections, avoiding the epidemic to spread. However, it has a significant impact on people's lives and the economic development of the whole society. When the government and local authorities are still wondering and considering whether to extend the social distance period any longer, newspapers and radio stations simultaneously reported the opinions of many experts who argued that distancing could not be extended any longer, cannot wait until infections return to zero for reopening, Vietnam needs to adapt to live with COVID-19 and new situation. Experts also pointed out that measures to reopen with fewer risks such as vaccination must be a top priority, gradually opening areas with few or no infections. Enterprises must also ensure that their employees have been fully vaccinated, tested for COVID-19, negative results, when again operation (Anh Thu and Lan Anh). Newspapers and magazines with large viewership including zingnews.vn, vnexpress.net, thanhnien.vn, tuoitre.vn, dantri.com.vn, or Vietnam television stations all published newsletters and analyses showing the consequences of social distancing on social and economic life. For example, in their interviews, expert Do Thien Anh Tuan from the Fulbright University or Mr. Tran Hoang Ngan - Director of the Ho Chi Minh City Research and Development Institute, affirmed that Vietnam should not prolong the distance. Because it is impossible to bring the number of infections back to zero with the new strain, the economy's endurance has reached its limit; even though the Government has many support packages for workers, localities also do well in social security when providing food and food for people, but this cannot be maintained for a long time (Do). In addition, a series of articles regarding the opinion of foreign businesses in Vietnam that if Vietnam is slow to open, investment opportunities from abroad may not return (Tran). The communication agencies also cited evidence from countries that decided to reopen such as Thailand, Singapore, the UK and other European countries. Of course, the reopening also poses many risks, so Vietnam needs to plan to deal with a possible disease outbreak, and vaccination for most people must still be a priority (Vietnam Television; Minh Duc & Tuan Anh). After receiving feedback from the communication about social life after the distancing time and experts' opinions on whether to extend the time of social distancing as mentioned above, on October 12, 2021, the Government issued Resolution No. 128/NQ-CP with the content temporarily not applying directives 15, 16, 19 (instructions on social distancing) and " adapt safely, flexibly, and effectively control the COVID-19 epidemic" (VNDCDC).

III. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

From the above impacts, it turns out that political communication plays a vital role in the fight against COVID-19 in Vietnam. Firstly, political communication provides information to the people quickly and effectively. The Government of Vietnam issued a series of directives 15, 16, 19 on implementing social distancing at various levels to limit the spread of the virus in the community and localize and control the epidemic. The mass media and the government both play an essential role in propagating these directives to people for grasping information, understanding, and voluntarily following. Radio and television stations and newspapers of all kinds (including paper and electronic newspapers) all simultaneously focused on providing information about the content of the new directive to direct the people's entire attention. Therefore, they can pay attention and understand the Government's new policies. The Department of Information and Communications, together with the Ministry of Health, continuously sent messages to each citizen's phone and through popular messaging and calling applications based on the Internet to briefly propagate the directives that each locality was applying, and the requirements of those directives were. Journalists directly worked at epidemic centers to provide

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information to the people to have an in-depth and honest insight into the epidemic's impact on social life, thereby raising their awareness of fighting against the epidemic (Reporters). In addition, information about the Government's economic support is also communicated to the people the fastest through the media.

Thirdly, political communication helps to build trust with the people. With the dissemination of epidemic control measures, the Government's social security support packages, the short slogans, hitting the psychology of the masses that people feel secure and more confident in the Party and State, resulting in following voluntarily with new directives and policies. The images spread on social networks or the media show that the people are very united with the State in fighting the epidemic. This creates an effect in the community, raising people's awareness considering the fight against the epidemic as their own.

Fourthly, political communication is a channel to help people convey their opinions through direct interviews or their representatives, thus, policymakers can make appropriate adjustments.

The form of political communication applied in Vietnam is also very varied, besides reports, editing, commenting and analysis on the media, through banners, slogans, and banners seen at areas they live in and through text messages sent to each resident's phone number, etc. Each epidemic's slogan is concise, easy to remember. In the first wave, when the situation was not tense, people probably saw and heard the most "staying at home is patriotic", encouraging people to stay at home. But when Vietnam had to go through a much more difficult anti-epidemic period with the rapid and dangerous developments of the new virus strain, the slogan was emphasized as "Stay where you are", meaning that the people are required to stay at home, do not move to other places. And most recently, when the rapid testing and vaccination campaign was issued, the slogan "The best vaccine is the earliest vaccine" appeared everywhere on the mass media to make people easy to remember and turn into action. The most significant difference in political communication in Vietnam is probably the role of local authorities or organizations such as the Women's Union or the residential group. This force does not hesitate to go to each household to help people understand the effects of vaccination or the content of the directives applied in localities. Therefore, information is guaranteed to be disseminated to everyone, even those who cannot receive information via the Internet or newspapers and radio. However, information published in print or online newspapers, through radio and television stations, is still updated faster and accessible to more people.

As the definitions of political communication are listed in the first part of the article, the reality in Vietnam also shows similarities. Policymakers use political communication to create a social consensus to improve the effectiveness of new policies and directives. Meanwhile, the people through the media to give feedback and express their opinions to make the Government has appropriate adjustments

Like the model proposed by Brian McNairs, in the top-down direction, in Vietnam, the communication after receiving information from the Government will transmit it back to the people. For example, when the Government issued a directive on speeding up vaccination and reports on testing the safety of vaccines licensed for circulation in Vietnam, the media is the bridge to bring this information to the people via many forms, but mainly through reports and analyzes from prestigious scientific organizations both in the country and in the world.

As for the bottom-up dimension, Vietnam is not outside the model described by Brian McNairs. Newspapers and radio stations in this country also synthesize people's opinions, provide analysis and expert comments, and report on the situation when implementing new directives or policies to help policymakers make appropriate adjustments. For example, on issues related to social distancing, people give feedback through their representatives, who are experts, and through face-to-face interviews with communication agencies that is another form of passing referendums or petitions, as McNairs suggested in his model

However, political communication in Vietnam, besides the participation of mass media and the Government, also includes the participation of local authorities and organizations.

In summary, political media plays a vital role in the fight against COVID-19 in Vietnam. The primary purpose and basic model of this activity here also reveal similarities with many scholars' comments around the world.

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