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SPECIALIZED RADIO BROADCASTING IN VIETNAM TODAY

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INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale for choosing the research topic

In the context of modern communication, the public no longer exists as a homogeneous mass but has been deeply segmented by age, occupation, geographic location, consumption behavior, and technological platforms used. This fragmentation has led to a fundamental shift in information needs: from general expectations to increasingly clear, specific, and highly personalized demands. Today's audiences not only seek information but also expect media experiences that are “right person – right time – right context,” closely linked to their interests, emotions, and lifestyles.

This shift has driven the strong development trend of specialized media forms — channels designed to serve audience groups with distinct and stable needs. Radio, with its traditional advantages of intimacy, flexible accessibility, low production costs, and wide reach, has been undergoing a profound restructuring toward specialization. Specialized radio has emerged as a strategic solution that combines content specialization with digital technology applications, aiming to better meet the specific needs of each audience segment in the multi-platform communication era.

Globally, the specialized radio model has proven its effectiveness and sustainability. In the United States, the SiriusXM system operates hundreds of specialized channels in areas such as music, sports, healthcare, finance, and religion. In Europe, broadcasters such as the BBC (United Kingdom), Radio France (France), and Sveriges Radio (Sweden) have built multi-channel radio structures clearly divided by topic and audience. In Asia, many countries have developed specialized radio channels that both entertain and serve educational and policy communication purposes. In Africa and Latin America, radio demonstrates its strong community role through stations such as Farm Radio International and Radio Túpac Amaru — where specialized radio is linked with rural development, cultural preservation, and public health. Notably, the emergence of podcasts, online radio, and mobile radio is opening new spaces for specialization in the digital environment.

In Vietnam, channels such as VOV Traffic (VOV Giao thông) and JoyFM have initially established their identities, built loyal listener communities, and demonstrated radio's adaptability in the digital communication era. During their development, specialized radio channels have shown advantages over general-interest channels. However, compared to global trends, specialized radio in Vietnam remains in an early stage of development, lacking foundational theoretical frameworks and in-depth research on organizational models, production methods, audience characteristics, and communication effectiveness.

Alongside this, the development of specialized radio has also evolved in nature and approach across different periods and countries to adapt to changing environments. The dynamic realities of specialized radio raise important research questions: What are the approaches to specialized journalism in general and specialized radio in particular? What are the characteristics of specialized radio in Vietnam? How are Vietnamese audiences engaging with specialized radio?

Currently, domestic scientific studies on specialized radio mainly stop at describing the phenomenon; none have comprehensively analyzed the characteristics, constituent elements, operational mechanisms, and audience behaviors associated with specialized radio. This gap calls for an urgent study that is both theoretical — to supplement and systematize

the concept and structure of specialization in radio — and practical — to identify trends, assess effectiveness, and propose sustainable development models for Vietnamese radio in the digital era.

For these reasons, the researcher has chosen the topic “Specialized Radio Broadcasting in Vietnam Today” in order to contribute to academic knowledge while providing a scientific basis for orienting the development of specialized radio within Vietnam’s modern communication system.

2. Research aims and tasks

2.1. Research aims

Based on theoretical and practical studies and a survey of the current state of specialized radio in Vietnam, the dissertation proposes solutions for developing specialized radio to better meet audience needs.

2.2. Research tasks

To achieve the research aim, the dissertation undertakes three tasks as follows:

- Establish a theoretical and practical foundation for specialized radio.
- Survey and assess the current state of specialized radio in Vietnam through analysis of producers, specialized radio channels, and specialized radio audiences.
- Analyze the issues posed and propose solutions and recommendations for developing specialized radio in Vietnam.

3. Research questions

- How are production units and channel managers in Vietnam organizing, operating, and orienting development to meet the requirements of specialized radio?
- What are the salient characteristics of content and forms of specialized radio programs today, and how well do they fit their target audiences?
- What are the needs and reception behaviors of specialized radio listeners in Vietnam, and how do they evaluate this format?

4. Objects and Scope of study

- *Objects of study*: Specialized radio broadcasting in Vietnam today
- *Scope of study*: VOV Traffic (Hanoi) and VOV Traffic (Ho Chi Minh City) of the Voice of Vietnam, focusing on the program “Rush Hour”; and JoyFM of Hanoi Radio & Television, focusing on the program “FM Health”.

The cases of VOV Traffic and JoyFM are selected for the following reasons: choosing channels at different institutional levels and scales—representing models specialized by content and by audience—allows a comprehensive assessment of the development of specialized radio in Vietnam. The selected channels have large audiences, significant influence and standing in Vietnam’s radio sector, long-running stable operations, comprehensive broadcast data, and clear measurability.

The audience survey is conducted in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City because these two metropolises are not only populous but also diverse in demography, occupations, lifestyles, and media behaviors. Surveys here enable the author to reach distinct audience segments, thereby analyzing differences in reception behaviors and content needs of each group. In particular, both VOV Traffic and JoyFM have their strongest coverage and influence in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Survey period: January 2024 through December 2024.

5. Theoretical foundation and research methods

5.1. Theoretical foundation

The dissertation employs the methodology of Marxism–Leninism, dialectical and historical materialism, the thought of Hồ Chí Minh, and the viewpoints, policies, and laws of the Party and State related to journalism and communication; theories of radio journalism; and theories of journalism–communication in the digital media environment in general and radio in particular.

The dissertation approaches the research aims and contents based on the following main theories:

- *Framing theory*: frames are primarily employed in quantitative content analysis, using a coding scheme focused on identifying the dominant media frames in the programs “Rush Hour” and “FM Health.” Variables measured include: Content frames: which aspects of traffic and health are emphasized? Form frames: do presentation, music, guests, and listener interaction contribute to framing the programs as approachable, direct, vivid, and highly interactive?

- *Uses and gratifications theory*: applied to understand how listeners choose specialized radio programs and why they are satisfied or dissatisfied with them. This theory helps form the theoretical basis for constructing questionnaires and survey instruments.

5.2. Research methods

The dissertation employs the following specific methods:

- *Literature review*: Conducted on theoretical works in journalism in general and radio in particular by domestic and international authors, in order to synthesize a theoretical system on journalism and specialized radio as the theoretical and practical basis—the fulcrum—for surveying, analyzing, evaluating, and proposing scientific solutions to the research problem.

- *Content analysis*: Conducted on 300 broadcasts of three radio programs (100 episodes of “Rush Hour” in Hanoi, 100 episodes of “Rush Hour” in Ho Chi Minh City, and 100 episodes of “FM Health”). The author randomly selects 100 broadcasts of each program—on average two per week and eight per month. This method quantifies and derives indicators on the current state of content and forms of specialized radio in Vietnam.

- *Sociological survey*: Conducted to survey audiences in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to collect information on the current state of reception and the factors influencing audience reception of specialized radio today. Results are collected and analyzed using the SPSS quantitative data processing software.

The questionnaire is distributed online via Google Forms, focusing on three occupational groups: students, drivers, and public servants/office employees. Students represent young, flexible audiences who often access mobile media; professional drivers are loyal radio audiences, especially of VOV Traffic; and public servants/office employees represent a widespread urban intellectual class with the capacity to receive in-depth content and provide feedback and evaluations. These three groups represent three typical forms of radio reception behavior in modern urban society and directly match the service objectives of VOV Traffic and JoyFM.

The total number of survey samples collected is 798, as detailed in the table below:

Characteristics	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
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Location		
Hanoi	489	61,3
Ho Chi Minh City	309	38,7
Gender		
Female	441	55,3
Male	357	44,7
Age		
Under 26	288	36,1
From 26 to 35	201	25,2
From 36 to 45	167	20,9
Over 45	142	17,8
Occupation		
Students	213	26,7
Drivers	204	25,6
Public servants/ office employees	309	38,7
Other	72	9,0
Education		
Primary/ Secondary	33	4,1
High School	201	25,2
Undergraduate	465	58,3
Higher Graduate	99	12,4

- ***In-depth interviews:***

+ First, the author conducted in-depth interviews with 10 cases who are reporters, editors, channel managers of the surveyed specialized radio channels, and experts experienced in specialized radio. This method explores perceptions and views on specialized radio, the current state of specialized radio production, etc., providing a basis for assessing the causes of successes and limitations as well as the issues posed for specialized radio in Vietnam.

+ In addition, the author conducted in-depth interviews with older adults in Hanoi (25 interviews) to explore their attitudes, media habits, and long-term attachment to radio.

The choice to conduct these interviews only in Hanoi is because older adults are considered one of the target audience groups of JoyFM, while the coverage of this channel is mainly limited to the Hanoi area and some northern provinces. The sample of older adults was purposively selected with the following criteria: (1) age from 60 to 85; (2) residing in Hanoi; (3) having experience listening to radio or having been radio audiences.

Focus-group discussion: A focus-group discussion was conducted with visually impaired people in Hanoi to explore their experiences, needs, and evaluations of specialized radio channels. The discussion lasted 90 minutes with seven visually impaired participants (four men and three women)

Among vulnerable groups, visually impaired people are considered a large and loyal audience of radio. However, visual impairments and limited manipulation skills make it difficult for them to access written questionnaires, even with read-out support or assistive technologies. Collecting information via specialized focus-group

discussions helps compensate for the lack of quantitative data from this audience group, while assessing the humanity, fairness, and service capacity for vulnerable communities of specialized radio channels.

6. New contributions of the dissertation

This is the first work to research specialized radio in a systematic and comprehensive manner, with comparisons between two specific models. The author not only analyzes program content and channel organization but also surveys audiences and conducts in-depth interviews with production teams, thereby providing an overall picture of specialized radio operations in Vietnam. The proposed solutions and recommendations are based on scientific evidence and practical bases that can serve as grounds for developing specialized radio in Vietnam.

7. Theoretical and practical significance of the dissertation

7.1. Theoretical significance

The dissertation contributes to systematizing and supplementing the theoretical foundation of specialized radio by providing a definition, analyzing characteristics and roles. It provides a basis for testing, adjusting, and developing communication theories in Vietnam's specific conditions. It also offers reliable references for researchers and serves as a resource for training in radio journalism.

7.2. Practical significance

Through analysis of radio programs and audience surveys, the dissertation identifies the successes and limitations of specialized radio and provides a clearer picture of listening behaviors. The dissertation analyzes the issues posed and proposes solutions for developing specialized radio in Vietnam, offering suggestions to radio stations and journalism–communication regulators. From a journalistic practice perspective, it contributes to raising awareness and capacity among radio journalists. The analyses and recommendations can serve as a foundation for training and capacity-building for reporters and editors.

8. Structure of the dissertation

In addition to the Introduction, Literature Review, Conclusion, References, and Appendices, the dissertation consists of four chapters:

Chapter 1: Theoretical and practical foundations of specialized radio in Vietnam

Chapter 2: The current status of channels, content, and forms of specialized radio in Vietnam today

Chapter 3: The current status of audiences of specialized radio in Vietnam

Chapter 4: Issues posed and solutions for developing specialized radio in Vietnam.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Studies on specialized journalism and audiences of specialized journalism

1.1. Studies on specialized journalism

Domestic and international studies analyze the concept, development trends, characteristics, roles, impacts, influencing factors, and requirements of specialized journalism, affirming its importance in the modern media context.

Specialized journalism is defined as publications aimed at a specific audience group that shares characteristics or common interests, or revolves around a particular field or topic. Jacques Mosseau (2008) divides specialized journalism into two main

branches: by audience and by content. Researchers such as X.A. Mikhailov (2004) and Alvin Toffler note that segmentation and specialization are inevitable trends of modern journalism. In Vietnam, Tạ Ngọc Tấn (2007) and Phạm Thị Lan (2010) also affirm the strong development of specialized media.

YongNian Jiang (2009) compares and indicates that specialized journalism is superior to mass media in reaching specific target groups, delivering higher advertising effectiveness, encouraging active audience reception, and enabling personalized services. John Herbert (1999), Bill Kovach (2001), and Tom Rosenstiel (2001) emphasize the role of specialized journalism in enhancing understanding and countering misinformation. However, it also faces the challenges of audience fragmentation and the risk of social polarization, as warned by N. Ben Fairweather (2005) and Simon Rogerson (2005).

To maximize its role, Merja Koskela (2002), Pavlina Skladana (2023), and Katerina Bucsuhaży (2023) recommend that specialized journalism provide accurate and in-depth information, balance professional accuracy with accessibility, and invest in training specialized journalists.

1.2. Studies on audiences of specialized journalism

Early studies established theoretical foundations for analyzing audience interaction with journalism. Dwight DeWerth-Pallmeyer (1996) introduced concepts such as framing theory and selective attention/interpretation, providing tools to analyze audience reception. The shift from mass journalism to segmented journalism is a prominent trend. Ida Willig (2010) examined this shift, noting that in mass-journalism systems, audiences are seen as citizens with the right to objective information and participation in social issues.

The main purpose of audience segmentation is often financial—maximizing revenue by tailoring content to smaller market segments. Angela M. Lee (2020) emphasizes the balance sought between reaching the largest audience and serving niche interest groups. Robert H. (1989) notes that local TV news was once a public service, but market competition drove stations to invest in news to grow viewership and revenue, leading to program formats tailored to specific audience segments instead of the mass market. Numerous studies also focus on needs, reception behaviors, and benefit-based segmentation. Robert H. introduced the “benefit segmentation” technique, which classifies consumers into groups sharing common interests in product attributes or benefits.

In Vietnam, studies delve into information needs and reception behaviors: Trần Bá Dung (2008) on audiences in Hanoi; Phạm Thị Thanh Tịnh (2013) on the trend of listening to specialized channels for distinct groups, with two types of information—“need to know” (mass media) and “want to know” (specialized media); Đỗ Thị Thu Hằng (2000) on youth/student reception psychology; Lưu Hồng Minh (2009) on access to mass media in Vietnam; Nhạc Phan Linh (2015) on interaction trends (commenting, submitting materials, calling hotlines) and reasons for interaction (frustration, good articles, calls for help); Đỗ Thị Thu Hằng (2015) on developing journalism for specialized audiences such as ethnic minorities, children, LGBTQ+, and people living with HIV/AIDS; and Lê Thu Hà (2020) on the importance of audience research and factors influencing reception.

Overall, studies on audiences of specialized journalism affirm the importance of understanding the needs and desires of each segment to create effective news programs that also meet media organizations' financial goals.

2. Studies on specialized radio and its audiences

2.1. Studies on specialized radio

Research on radio in general provides a solid theoretical foundation on the medium, focusing on core features, social roles, and adaptation in the digital era.

The development of specialized radio is driven by several key factors: (1) audience fragmentation and diversification of media choices—Paul Chantler & Peter Stewart (2003) and Linda K. Fuller (2007) emphasize rising demand for specific, relatable programs for smaller groups; Jonas Andersson Schwarz (2015) highlights pressures from globalization, audience fragmentation, and personalized consumption habits that force stations to adapt; (2) digital transformation and rising listener expectations—Stefan Hirschmeier, Roman Tilly, and Vanessa (2019), along with Tan, Guo & Wang (2019), show how digital technology fuels personalization and specialization as listeners expect on-demand, cross-device access with the ability to interact; Đồng Mạnh Hùng (2020) observes this in Vietnam, where audiences shift from one-way listening to multidirectional interaction; (3) economic drivers and market competition—Nick Irvine (2009) and Zainal Abidin Achmada & Syifa Syarifah Alamiyah (2015) analyze how competition compels commercial stations to position and segment markets by demographics or psychographics to survive and grow, as in JEJE Radio.

In terms of social roles, specialized radio contributes to community-building, enhancing knowledge, and raising awareness. Joanne Norcup (2022) stresses this through podcasts and digital radio. It plays an essential role in health education and science communication: Skuse (2004) explores how radio promotes health for impoverished communities, including people living with HIV; Frontiers Media (2022) studied the “MindTap” program of KISU-FM as an example of elevating mental-health awareness. In Vietnam, Minh Luân (2020) affirms radio's role in disseminating health education.

The current state of specialized radio worldwide is illustrated by Antonio Adami (2022) on Brazil's development of specialized channels from the 1920s–1950s focusing on entertainment and artists to cultivate loyal audiences. In Vietnam, Đinh Thị Thu Hằng and Nguyễn Thị Thu (2021) identify urban livelihood radio as a type of specialized radio.

2.2. Studies on radio audiences and audiences of specialized radio

Research on audiences of specialized radio shows a clear trend in modern radio development, especially in the digital context. Wolfgang Eichhorn and Michael Keller (2014) classify listeners by listening motives and program preferences, highlighting diversity. Phạm Thị Thanh Tịnh (2016) also notes the trend of diversified needs, pushing stations to personalize content and undergo digital transformation to better respond.

Technology has shifted interaction from passive to active participation. Tiziano Bonini and Belén Monclús (2015) analyze radio's shift to a “participatory-based” model, where listeners co-create content and interact via social media, creating a “connected audience.” Đồng Mạnh Hùng and Nguyễn Lan Anh (2020) confirm new audience demands in Vietnam such as interaction, instant news, and listening across multiple platforms.

Research also emphasizes meeting the needs of specialized groups: Simon Order et al. (2020) surveyed visually impaired people, highlighting radio's role while pointing out digital barriers. Vũ Quang Hào (2015, 2017) researched ethnic minority radio, proposing communication focused on emotional dialogue and benefits, as these audiences seek essential content.

3. Research focuses

Existing studies provide deep insights into the development of specialized journalism and specialized radio and consistently point to specialization as an inevitable trend in global communication. Specialized journalism, particularly radio, plays a key role in providing in-depth, accurate information, shaping perceptions, and connecting communities. Radio is shifting to a "participatory-based" model, leveraging technology to serve specific audience groups with better interaction. However, studies on specialized radio in Vietnam mainly focus on general theoretical issues and lack comprehensive, in-depth analysis of aspects such as content, audience, and social impact.

Based on these gaps, the dissertation "Specialized Radio Broadcasting in Vietnam Today" focuses on the following:

- Theoretical aspects: (1) a precise definition of specialized radio; (2) clear identification of roles and characteristics; (3) proposing a set of evaluation criteria for specialized radio.

- Practical aspects: (1) Experiences of specialized radio stations worldwide for Vietnam's references; (2) surveying the current state of specialized radio in Vietnam to identify achievements, limitations, and causes; (3) identifying issues posed and proposing solutions and recommendations for development.

So far, the topic of **Specialized Radio Broadcasting in Vietnam today** is still the first research work to analyze in depth and comprehensively all aspects of specialized radio in Vietnam today.

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SPECIALIZED RADIO IN VIETNAM

1.1. Conceptual system

1.1.1. Specialized journalism

Specialized journalism is journalism products with in-depth content about a field or aimed at a certain public group, with common characteristics and interests.

1.1.2. Specialized radio

Specialized radio is a form of radio that has in-depth content about a certain content area, or is aimed at serving a public group with common characteristics, needs and interests.

1.2. Characteristics and evaluation criteria of specialized radio

1.2.1. Producers have in-depth knowledge in the field of the channel, maintains a network of experts and collaborators, and is able to adapt to technological developments to serve a specialized audience.

To meet this characteristic, producers should ensure the following criteria:

- (1) Reporters and editors with deep foundational knowledge of the specialized domain, trained regularly to update new knowledge.

(2) A council or group of experts as regular partners who provide critique and orient content; experts should come from reputable organizations with credentials or solid practical experience.

(3) Partnerships with regulators, professional organizations, and businesses relevant to the specialized domain.

Some requirements for the level of adaptation to technological developments in the production and distribution of specialized radio include:

(1) The applied technologies must be compatible with the type of in-depth information the channel provides

(2) The technology is optimized according to the context of the audience's use

(3) The technology is exploited to increase public participation

1.2.2. Content focused on a specific domain, ensuring depth, usefulness, and applicability

Criteria to establish this characteristic include:

(1) Consistency of themes, maintaining content centered on the channel's domain.

(2) In-depth analysis with regular use of expert opinions from verified, reputable sources, used consistently and systematically.

(3) Content oriented toward practical needs, with guidance/advisory information of high usefulness and applicability. Such orientation and advice must be accurate and reliable, grounded in solid professional bases and clear scientific/legal grounds or vetted by experts—avoiding turning advice into subjective opinions and respecting diversity of personal choices.

1.2.3. Specialized language and presentation style, optimized for interaction

Criteria for language and style include::

(1) Accuracy of terms;

(2) Concise and comprehensible explanation of technical terms;

(3) Styles aligned with target audience behaviors;

(4) Music must align with the content and communication objectives of the program. Copyright compliance for music must be ensured when broadcasting on digital platforms.

Specialized radio also often features high interactivity to strengthen engagement with target audiences. Requirements include:

(1) The ability to establish two-way channels between producers and listeners, with direct technical support and a dedicated interaction team;

(2) Flexible program structures that allow audience co-creation;

(3) Hosts with flexible on-air situation-handling and interaction-management skills;

(4) Audience response and participation levels, and social effects of interaction—evidenced by changes in awareness, behavior, or emotions.

1.2.4. Clearly segmented audiences with high attachment who actively provide feedback and interact

Criteria for evaluating segmentation include:

(1) Clarity, stability, and consistency in serving target audiences;

(2) Alignment of structure, content, language, and styles with target audience characteristics.

Specialized radio audiences also display distinct traits. Evaluation criteria include:

- (1) Stability of reception habits (listening frequency);
- (2) Depth of information needs;
- (3) Attachment/loyalty to the channel;
- (4) Participation and interaction.

1.3. Roles of specialized radio

1.3.1. For audiences

Specialized radio provides information tailored to specific, in-depth needs, helping audiences update knowledge and adjust behaviors.

Its information integrates orientation, advice, and actionable guidance, supporting decision-making.

It fosters habits of consuming verified, in-depth information, thereby enhancing personal media literacy.

1.3.2. For radio stations

Specialized radio helps stations build content brands and increase competitiveness against new media types.

It enables resource optimization.

It generates revenue by attracting sponsors and advertisers targeting specific customer segments.

Specialized radio opens cooperation opportunities with social organizations, government agencies, enterprises, universities, NGOs, and international organizations.

Organizing specialized programs for the blind, people in remote areas, people with disabilities or disadvantaged groups clearly demonstrates the social responsibility of radio broadcasting stations, maintains a public interest orientation, demonstrates humanity, thereby strengthening the position of radio broadcasting stations.

1.3.3. For society

Specialized radio systematically disseminates knowledge tailored to audiences, helping citizens understand and exercise rights and obligations, improving social governance quality.

It gives distinct communities opportunities to be heard and served according to their needs.

It plays an important role in preserving and promoting the values, languages, and lifestyles of specific communities.

1.4. Political–legal foundations of specialized radio in Vietnam

1.4.1. Political basis:

Politically, the Party defines journalism as a core tool on the ideological and cultural front, a bridge between the Party/State and the people, serving national construction and defense. From the 12th Party Congress, journalism is tasked with developing content suited to specific audience types and ethnic groups. Priority is placed on information for specific audiences/regions such as ethnic minorities, remote areas, and specialized fields such as national defense, anti-corruption, health, and environment. National target programs also provide resources and mechanisms for specialized media products.

Legal instruments concretize these orientations: the National Information Development Strategy to 2025, vision 2030 seeks to reorganize press agencies and raise

content quality tailored to audiences/regions, emphasizing increased radio programs in ethnic minority and foreign languages and developing commune-level radio systems.

The national press planning to 2025 directly encourages specialized types and requires innovating forms and content to meet general information needs and specialized needs of each audience group and region.

1.4.2. Legal basis

The 2013 Constitution (Article 25) affirms freedom of the press and access to information—the highest legal foundation for specialized radio. The 2016 Press Law specifies State policies for commissioning journalism serving special audience groups (remote areas, people with disabilities, children) and sets out authority over types, missions, target audiences, and procedures for launching new radio channels (Articles 15, 17, 30). Article 37 encourages co-production of specialized programs. The 2023 Telecommunications Law and the Radio Frequency Law provide technical foundations on infrastructure, networks, and spectrum. Decree 06/2016/ND-CP encourages diverse, healthy pay-radio services. Circular 07/2011/TT-BTTTT guides licensing and requires clear missions, target audiences, and content for each channel. Circular 06/2023/TT-BTTTT guides the principles of editing, classifying and warning specialized radio and television content on sports, entertainment on demand... This legal system both strictly manages and opens space for specialized radio to develop in the modern media environment.

1.5. History and factors leading to the emergence of specialized radio

Specialized radio emerged from changes in listening habits and TV competition in the late 1950s. The advent of transistor radios enabled more personal listening, prompting stations to specialize. In the UK, from the 1950s, radio shifted from generalist to formatted programming, beginning with Top 40 and spreading across Europe. From the 1990s–2000s, digital technology spurred many specialized channels in news, music, sports, and science. By the late 2000s, podcasts expanded the ability to serve niche audiences. From 2010–2025, Spotify and Apple Podcasts have created strong competitive environments. In Vietnam, before 1975 radio was mostly general-audience; after reunification, specialized programs emerged. From 2003, VOV developed specialized channels such as VOV3, VOV4, VOV5, VOV Traffic. Many local stations created specialized channels or segments, especially on digital platforms. Specialized radio has developed thanks to social needs, technology, legal policies, and media competition.

1.5.2. Some notable specialized radio channels in the world include:

- Traffic-specific radio channels: Advantages of instant updates, quick response, no dependence on the Internet, becoming a companion of the public (WTOP News 103.5 FM in the US, Beijing Traffic Radio in China).
- Health-specific radio channels: Wide coverage, low cost, emergency communication during power outages, creating trust, easy to receive through question-and-answer format (Doctor Radio in the US, Radio Santé in France, Radio Nikkei in Japan).
- Agriculture-specific radio channels: Ideal for rural areas, low cost, easy to access, creating interactive space, providing essential knowledge and timely warnings (Farm Radio International, Radio Kisan Vani in India).

CHAPTER 2: THE CURRENT STATUS OF CHANNELS, CONTENT, AND FORMS OF SPECIALIZED RADIO IN VIETNAM TODAY

2.1. Current status of specialized radio producers in Vietnam

2.1.1. Organization and personnel

The survey shows that specialized radio channels in Vietnam are often organized in a highly specialized manner, different from the traditional general model. Each channel usually has a specialized department responsible for building strategies, producing and managing content suitable for the field and target audience. VOV Traffic has many specialized departments such as Hanoi Traffic, Coastal, Digital Content... to help clearly assign tasks and maintain depth. Meanwhile, JoyFM operates with a lean team of 15-20 people, with leaders directly involved in production, making it convenient to adjust the program but easily overloaded and lacking in voice diversity.

Regarding training and professional development for journalists:: VOV Traffic encourages reporters's self-study and periodic rewards, combining in-house training with external courses. JoyFM focuses on supplementing medical knowledge through specialist advisors and short courses but lacks clear reward mechanisms. Both channels emphasize training—VOV Traffic leans toward journalism and technology skills, while JoyFM emphasizes domain knowledge. This reflects the difference in scale and development orientation between the two models, and shows that the need to improve staff capacity is a key factor to maintain content quality and sustainable development of specialized radio.

2.1.2. Network of experts and partners

In Vietnam, specialized radio channels have developed expert and partner networks to varying degrees. VOV Traffic established a Cooperation & Partnerships Department, showing a long-term strategy to maintain relationships with regulators and enforcement forces such as the National Traffic Safety Committee, Ministry of Transport, and local transport departments. This network provides official, up-to-date sources—averaging over 700 items/week from police and transport inspectors—ensuring timeliness, especially in emergencies.

With support from the Ministry of Health, JoyFM has built a team of leading doctors who are long-term partners, considering them as colleagues instead of guests. The channel maintains a reasonable remuneration policy, gratitude and cooperation with hospitals and professional associations, and at the same time builds a code of conduct between reporters and experts. However, JoyFM lacks an official advisory board, making strategic consultation scattered. The socialized nature of JoyFM also requires it to deal with commercial factors in selecting experts.

2.1.3. Program production processes

The production process of “Rush Hour” at VOV Traffic reflects the characteristics of a traffic-specialized channel with immediacy and high interactivity. Content is based on a framework script; hosts moderate based on real-time conditions. Information is gathered from four main sources: listeners, enforcement authorities, camera systems, and field reporters/collaborators. The editorial team verifies, approves, and forwards items to the studio for broadcast—ensuring speed, accuracy, and quick response to incidents to meet commuters' needs.

JoyFM has a strict process from the idea meeting, outline, inviting medical experts, production, editing to broadcast approval. The outstanding difference is that the "inviting expert guests" step is considered a mandatory step in the process, experts (advisors) appear in many stages, from content preparation to post-production and broadcast. JoyFM builds a multi-level approval process to control risks and ensure ethical and professional standards.

2.1.4. Technology application and transmission platforms

Specialized radio in Vietnam still relies primarily on AM/FM. Over the past decade, channels have accelerated digitization—streaming via websites, apps, and podcasts—to expand reach, especially among youth. VOV Traffic pioneers process digitization, integrating real-time data from maps, cameras, and community feedback and is present on platforms such as VOV Media, Spotify, and YouTube. However, digitization has focused on data collection rather than content personalization or automated audience analytics. JoyFM has digitized production, archiving, and podcast distribution, increasing interaction via call centers, fanpages, YouTube, and the VTVCab ON app. Yet systems remain insufficiently specialized, with limited content categorization, data synchronization, and application of AI/chatbots or audience analytics. In general, both channels have digitized distribution but have yet to build data ecosystems and personalized content—limiting the technological potential to serve modern audiences.

2.2. Current status of specialized radio channels and forms in Vietnam

2.2.1. Targeting and audience segmentation

VOV Traffic serves urban traffic information, targeting commuters such as office workers and drivers of taxis, trucks, and buses. Real-time updates—especially during morning, midday, and afternoon peaks—help listeners make immediate travel decisions. The program combines concise bulletins with live interaction and interspersed segments such as weather, policy, and economy to sustain attention. In Hanoi, VOV Traffic emphasizes information; in Ho Chi Minh City it emphasizes connectivity, entertainment, and inter-regional/logistics information—reflecting differences in urban infrastructure and rhythms.

JoyFM specializes in health and spiritual life, targeting people who are deeply interested in the field of health, especially middle-aged and elderly people and parents with young children. The content revolves around the main areas: health, psychology - society and family education, distributed according to time frames suitable for reception behavior.

2.2.2. Consistent themes and in-depth information

The results of the broadcast data analysis show that VOV Traffic maintains a high consistency in the topic, with the main content axis being urban traffic and related issues such as infrastructure, culture and traffic laws, directly serving the needs of the public when traveling.

“Rush Hour” accounts for over 30% of airtime, with about 88.13% of content directly related to traffic—combining weather updates, congestion situations, policies, and analysis of causes—solutions. Sources are mainly listener reports (44.3%) and live cameras (37.5%), while experts account for only 4.36%—showing a priority on immediacy over in-depth analysis.

In contrast, JoyFM focuses on health and mental well-being with programs such as “FM Health,” “Being a Friend to Your Child,” and “365 Days of Happiness.” It treats medical and psychological experts as central and regular, ensuring scientific information and community engagement.

2.2.3. Orienting, guiding, and advisory information

VOV Traffic devotes around 53% of airtime in Hanoi and 45% in Ho Chi Minh City to guidance/advisory content. Programs like “Rush Hour” and “Forum 91” provide real-time updates while advising on travel behaviors, explaining new regulations, and promoting civilized traffic participation. In “Rush Hour,” about 58.8% of information comprises congestion warnings, alternative-route suggestions, and short-term forecasts—offering concise, friendly advice for immediate behavioral adjustment. Beyond information provision, programs also educate behaviors: maintaining distance, avoiding lane encroachment, and keeping calm in congestion. However, there is a lack of long-term behavioral education systems and personalization.

JoyFM devotes up to 56% of airtime to advisory content spanning physical health (nutrition, prevention) and mental health (marital/family psychology). Medical and psychological experts appear regularly, offering direct consultation via letters, phone calls, and social media—using everyday examples and analogies for clarity. Experts consistently stress the risks of self-treatment and recommend professional diagnosis and adherence to medical advice.

2.2.4. Specialised language use and presentation styles

Specialized radio not only selects content and audience groups but also shapes language and presentation styles suited to the characteristics of each field.

VOV Traffic targets listeners on the move, so it uses concise, direct, easy-to-understand language, without florid wording, focusing on information and guidance. The hosting style is conversational and approachable, creating the sense that the presenter is a companion. The lead-in follows the structure: announce location – describe the current situation – give behavioral guidance. Light, humorous comparisons are also used to reduce stress. The survey indicates approximately 45% of lead-ins are objective in tone, and 32.5% are sharing/encouraging in tone. Regional differences are reflected in the hosting: Hanoi is more decisive; Ho Chi Minh City is softer, with more conjunctions. Music accounts for 16.3% of airtime in Hanoi and 21.1% in Ho Chi Minh City, mainly light music that helps ease tension at peak hours.

Serving the fields of health and psychosocial issues, JoyFM uses therapeutic and emotionally rich language. Medical terminology is explained simply, with easy-to-understand illustrations. Presenters and experts use storytelling and dialogue to create a safe space. Music accounts for 22.92% of airtime on the channel, tied to the brand and to emotional experience.

2.2.5. Interaction and audience engagement

VOV Traffic and JoyFM represent two distinct interaction models. VOV Traffic focuses on real-time interaction, with programs such as “Rush Hour” and “Forum 91” accounting for over 30% of total broadcast time. Listener sources play an important role, accounting for 44.3% of total news sources, with over 3,000 calls and messages per week. The public not only provides on-the-ground information but also participates in policy feedback and builds a loyal listener community.

JoyFM emphasizes in-depth interaction, especially through the “Health FM” program, dedicating 60–80 minutes/issue for personalized advice, while adjusting content based on cumulative feedback. In 2019, each issue received 40–50 calls, down to 15–20 calls in 2021, reflecting changes in reception behavior.

However, both channels have not yet integrated modern technology such as AI, chatbots or customized apps, limiting the ability to personalize and expand interactions.

2.3. General assessment

2.3.1. Success and reasons for success

2.3.1.1. Success

First, specialized radio has clearly positioned its segment and public interest.

Second, specialized radio channels demonstrate consistency in topics and depth in content. Information has high application value and behavioral orientation.

Third, specialized radio designs language and sound appropriate to context, content and audience.

Fourth, specialized radio channels organize specialized production and build a cohesive network of partners.

Fifth, specialized radio effectively interacts with the public.

Sixth, specialized radio has a multi-platform presence.

2.3.1.2. Reasons for success

First, the social context and specific information needs have created a high demand for specialized information.

Second, support in policy and management institutions

Third, developed technology infrastructure helps specialized radio to integrate field data and broadcast on multiple platforms

Fourth, organizational capacity and internal management of specialized radio creative entities

2.3.2. Limitations and causes of limitations

2.3.2.1. Limitations

First, the digitalization process is not yet synchronized.

Second, the ability to rejuvenate and diversify the audience segment is not high.

Third, the capacity of resources and specialized institutions is still limited.

Fourth, the content is not optimized for multiple platforms.

Fifth, the ability to interact is still traditional and lacks personalization.

Sixth, the content and program structure lack innovation and system.

2.3.2.2. Causes of limitations

First, the content production organization model is still administrative - linear.

Second, financial and human resources are still thin and unstable.

Third, there is a lack of regular public research.

Fourth, there is a lack of integrated and personalized data platforms.

CHƯƠNG 3. CURRENT STATUS OF SPECIALIZED RADIO AUDIENCES IN VIETNAM

3.1. Listening habits and current reception of specialized radio by audiences

3.1.1. Current level of listening to specialized

3.1.1.1. Level of reception of specialized radio channels

A survey of 798 people in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City shows that radio still maintains a place in media life: only 20% do not listen. However, the habit of daily listening is under 6%, reflecting strong competition from digital media. Notably, professional drivers are a loyal audience group, whereas students and office workers are less attached. By age, the older the audience, the higher the listening level, indicating that radio's audience is "aging." Hanoi has a higher rate of maintaining listening habits than Ho Chi Minh City.

VOV Traffic stands out with a reach rate of 82.8%. The "frequent" and "very frequent" listening groups total nearly 20%, on par with radio in general. Among professional drivers, 34% listen frequently, and the non-listening rate is only 8.9%. Men and middle-aged people predominate, while the under-25 group reaches only 10.2%. Hanoi is the "listener capital," with 23.7% listening frequently—nearly double Ho Chi Minh City (12.1%). Within the urban traffic-information ecosystem, VOV Traffic leads with 61.1% of audiences choosing it regularly, far ahead of social media (43.6%) and map applications (32.8%), becoming the default channel for urban traffic information.

JoyFM has a more modest reach. The rate of frequent listening is under 10%; its loyal group consists mainly of older adults and professional drivers, while more than 50% of students and young people do not listen. In the field of medical information, JoyFM ranks fourth with 30.8% of selections, after hospitals/medical facilities (38.2%) and specialized online newspapers (32.9%).

3.1.1.2. Level of reception of specialized radio programs

At VOV Traffic: most listened to programs: Entertainment - music (40.8%), news (39.3%), specialized traffic (35.4%).

At JoyFM: most listened to programs: Entertainment - music (37.9%), health - medicine (36.9%), advice - answers (35.0%), news (34.4%).

The common point of both channels is: the public is not only interested in specialized content but also prefers music and news as a "gateway to access".

3.1.1.3. Priority level of choosing specialized radio channels

In the urban traffic information ecosystem, VOV Traffic holds an overwhelming position with 61.1% of the public regularly choosing, far surpassing social networks (43.6%), map applications/websites (32.8%) and functional agencies (32%), becoming the "default channel" for urban traffic information.

In the field of health and healthcare, JoyFM is among the 4 most chosen information sources by the public with 30.8%, after hospitals (38.2%), specialized electronic newspapers on health (32.9%), and health information sites (32.6%).

3.1.2. Contexts of listening to specialized radio

A total of 82.6% of listeners listen in a multitasking state—that is, they listen while doing other things. This confirms radio's advantage of convenience and not occupying vision, enabling it to be present "anytime, anywhere" in urban life.

The travel context predominates, especially for drivers and commuters. For VOV Traffic, 60.4% choose the channel while on the move, far exceeding radio overall. This shows the linkage between real-time traffic content and immediate travel needs. JoyFM has more diverse listening contexts: travel (40.6%), housework (24.6%), and at the workplace (18.2%). This fits content on health and relaxation, which does not require instant updates but benefits from continuous reception and a sense of reassurance.

3.1.3. Common time bands for listening to specialized radio

Listening behavior concentrates in two main “reception peaks”: morning (06:00–09:00) and late afternoon/evening (17:00–22:00), reflecting radio’s role as a companion through the day’s transition periods.

In the morning, 07:00–08:00 has the highest listening rate (10.6%), followed by 06:00–07:00 (9.1%), when audiences need traffic, weather, and news updates before work. In the evening, 17:00–18:00 accounts for 9.0% and 21:00–22:00 for 8.4%, serving needs for traffic orientation at rush hour and relaxation after work. Office hours (09:00–16:00) and late night (after 22:00) are low. Notably, midday (11:00–13:00), once a “golden hour,” has declined significantly due to shifts in habits in the digital environment.

By occupation: professional drivers listen most in the morning (32.4%) and afternoon (19.0%), tied to real-time travel information needs. Students concentrate in the evening (44.3%), treating radio as entertainment and supplementary knowledge. Office workers listen mainly in the evening (29.3%) and in the morning peak (20.0%).

By channel: VOV Traffic’s “golden hours” concentrate at 07:00–08:00 (14.9%) and 17:00–18:00 (16.3%). JoyFM’s listeners are more evenly distributed, peaking at 07:00–08:00 (12.6%) and 09:00–10:00 (8.0%).

3.1.4. Common listening devices

The survey found that smartphones are becoming the most popular radio listening device (43.1%), reflecting the trend towards digitization and personalization, allowing the public to access radio “anytime, anywhere”. Podcasts and audio playback accounted for 35.5%, marking an important turning point as radio moves from live to on-demand.

Car radios in private cars reach 31.5%, showing the strong linkage between radio and travel behavior, especially for real-time traffic information. Traditional radio still retains a role (16.6%), mainly due to habits among older audiences. Platforms such as livestreaming (18.1%), online “listen live” websites (15.3%), and public devices (15.0%) further evidence modern radio’s multi-platform nature.

For VOV Traffic: devices in private cars account for 45.7%, affirming the linkage between real-time traffic content and the travel environment. Smartphones (35.2%) serve those on motorbikes, buses, or on foot; traditional radio (21.3%) and public devices (20.2%) extend coverage across the urban community.

JoyFM shows a more distributed reception model: smartphones 40.6%, traditional radio 27.1% (due to middle-aged and older audiences), website 20.0%, etc. This reflects JoyFM’s suitability for home and relaxation contexts and its weaker linkage to travel contexts.

Today’s three principal device groups correspond to three audience strata: smartphones (youth, digitized), private cars (travelers), and traditional radio (older adults). This indicates that radio is both strongly digitizing and maintaining traditional infrastructure, requiring content to be designed to fit each access channel.

3.1.5. Interaction habits

The survey shows that, overall, interaction levels among radio listeners remain low—not due to indifference but mainly due to a lack of motivation and convenient conditions for frequent interaction. Those who participate in interaction often have three main groups of needs: (1) to discuss the content in more depth, (2) to interact - to connect with the host or the community, and (3) to be entertained.

The most convenient and popular methods are direct phone calls, SMS/Zalo, or feedback via fanpage. This shows the importance of simplicity and familiarity of tools in fostering interaction behavior.

Notably, a low overall interaction rate does not mean a program is dull. In practice, a small core of active listeners—especially “very frequent” participants—can generate a high volume of calls, messages, and comments, maintaining a lively interactive atmosphere on air.

This reflects a principle of mass communication: an active minority can create strong resonance effects. For channels such as VOV Traffic and JoyFM, this is even clearer as daily feedback is still recorded.

3.2. Motivations for receiving and favorite content of specialized radio audiences

3.2.1. Motivations for receiving specialized radio

The survey results show that the public chooses to listen to radio based on three main motivations:

(1) Content orientation: 26.4% of listeners choose because the channel focuses on topics of interest.

(2) Entertainment - emotions: 21.6% listen to relax and entertain.

(3) Information utility: 13.2% value multi-field and 9% prioritize the ability to update quickly.

The survey also shows that the reason for not listening to specialized radio is mainly because the public has found a more suitable alternative channel, or the content does not suit personal needs. This shows that specialization, usefulness and timeliness are decisive factors in retaining the public in the context of multi-platform competition.

3.2.2. Desired radio content

The survey results show that demand for radio content is diverse and clearly stratified by occupation, age, gender and location, reflecting the close relationship between demographic characteristics and reception behavior.

By occupation, students primarily seek music and entertainment. Professional drivers prioritize traffic information and news to serve immediate travel needs. Office workers balance political-social information and entertainment. This indicates that specialized radio needs to combine practicality and entertainment to serve diverse occupational groups.

By age, young people (under 25) remain associated with music/entertainment, while middle-aged and older groups shift toward practical content such as current affairs, traffic, and health—among which health stands out.

Regions also differ: in Hanoi, audiences prioritize current affairs and traffic, fitting an overcrowded urban life; in Ho Chi Minh City, music and entertainment dominate, reflecting a dynamic environment with many options.

By gender: men tend to seek radio for current affairs and traffic updates, while women prioritize music, culture–society, and health.

Listening times also stratify by content: morning and afternoon peaks concentrate demands for current affairs and traffic updates, whereas mid-day and evening favor entertainment and mental well-being content.

Overall, the two main content axes remain Current Affairs–Politics and Music–Entertainment. However, the value of specialized radio lies in meeting segmented needs: traffic for drivers and middle-aged men; health for women and older adults; entertainment for students and youth.

3.3. Public satisfaction and impact of specialized radio

3.3.1. Public satisfaction with specialized radio

The survey results show that at VOV Traffic, two important criteria that shape public satisfaction are the ability to provide useful and practical information (38.3%) and accuracy, reliability, and quick updates (35.4%). On the contrary, formal factors such as presentation style, educational value, or transmission techniques are less highly appreciated, showing that the public prioritizes application value and immediacy over performance factors. The data also confirms that the core values in maintaining public love for JoyFM come from: (1) the ability to provide useful and practical information (37.5%), (2) reliability, accuracy, and updates of information (21.2%).

Regarding the level of satisfaction with the programs:

The survey shows levels of satisfaction and reception for VOV Traffic and JoyFM that clearly reflect the position of specialized radio in today’s media context

For VOV Traffic, the most-listened program groups include entertainment/music (40.8%), news (39.3%), and traffic-specialized content (35.4%). This shows that although it is a traffic-specialized channel, listeners still turn to it for practical updates and entertainment. The two main satisfaction criteria are usefulness (38.3%) and accuracy/fast updates (35.4%).

JoyFM has a similar content structure, with the top three preferred groups being entertainment/music (37.9%), health/medicine (36.9%), and consultation/Q&A (35.0%). Factors retaining listeners are practical information (37.5%) and reliability (21.2%). Both channels show that audiences care not only about core content (traffic, health) but also like news and music as “gateways,” attracting multitasking listeners and leading them to in-depth content.

3.3.2 Impact of VOV Traffic and JoyFM on public awareness and behavior

The survey shows that both VOV Traffic and JoyFM do not only provide information, but also have the ability to shape public awareness and adjust public behavior.

With VOV Traffic, 59.6% of listeners admitted that the channel impacted their awareness, helping them change their views on traffic behavior, while 64.4% said that the channel reinforced their existing knowledge. In particular, over 63% took specific actions such as adjusting their route or complying with traffic laws thanks to information from the channel. This shows that VOV Traffic has the ability to trigger immediate behavior, turning radio into a practical tool for urban traffic participants.

Meanwhile, JoyFM creates long-term impacts in health care and lifestyle adjustment. 53.5% of listeners changed their perception of health care, and 55.4% said that information from the channel reinforced their existing medical knowledge.

Although the level of immediate impact (such as making treatment decisions) was lower than VOV Traffic, JoyFM promoted the formation of a healthy lifestyle and a positive attitude towards physical and mental health. Notably, both channels demonstrated a strong social spillover effect: 60.2% of VOV Traffic listeners and 51% of JoyFM listeners shared information with friends, relatives, and colleagues. At the same time, 52.4% of VOV Traffic listeners and 49.6% of JoyFM actively sought out more information about the issues mentioned, demonstrating the role of radio in stimulating critical thinking and independent learning.

3.4. Identifying loyal and potential

Loyal audiences are those who listen frequently, trust the content, and actively share and give feedback. VOV Traffic: loyal audiences account for 19.9% of listeners, mainly middle-aged men, professional drivers, residing in Hanoi, listening during peak hours via mobile devices. JoyFM: loyal audiences account for 8% of listeners, mostly over 45 years old, with a particular interest in the “FM Health” program.

Potential audiences are those who do not listen frequently. VOV Traffic: includes 23.7% who rarely listen and 39.3% who listen occasionally—many are women, young people, students, and office workers who prioritize entertainment and general news. JoyFM: mainly young people and office workers who need more diverse content such as music, entertainment, news, and modern interaction.

These results show that strategies for developing specialized radio need to both consolidate loyal communities and activate potential groups through content renewal, digital devices, and modes of connection suited to each segment.

CHAPTER 4: ISSUES POSED AND SOLUTIONS FOR DEVELOPING SPECIALIZED RADIO IN VIETNAM

4.1. Issues facing specialized radio in Vietnam today

4.1.1. Issues regarding the specialized-radio producers

First, the survey in Chapter 2 shows that the current organizational structure and resources do not meet the requirements of modern and sustainable development.

Second, the results of in-depth interviews indicate that public research activities have not been organized into a regular and systematic system by specialized radio channels.

Third, specialized radio channels currently still operate in a single direction, lacking connectivity and sharing of data and resources with channels in the same system or related fields

4.1.2. Issues regarding program content and form

First, specialized radio channels are also facing the challenge of balancing between specialization and universality.

Second, the content structure still lacks a systematic nature

Third, the form of expression has not been customized according to the characteristics of each platform.

Fourth, the specialized radio model has not been fully transformed into a digital environment

4.1.3. Issues regarding specialized-radio audiences

First, the strong differentiation of the audience and the asymmetry in the level of engagement, the target audience is still mainly focused on traditional groups such as people on the go or middle-aged and elderly people

Second, the current level of access to specialized radio by the public has not yet translated into regular frequency of use.

Third, the change in the expectations and reception behavior of the public poses a challenge to innovate in both content and methods for specialized radio.

Fourth, the context of multi-tasking radio listening makes the audience mainly listen in a state of “semi-attention”, leading to the risk of missing information.

4.1.4. Other issues

The strong development of digital technology and global communication has profoundly changed the competitive landscape in the radio sector. Radio channels are facing competitive pressure from large digital technology companies such as Spotify, Apple Music, Google Podcasts, YouTube...

The context of the Vietnamese media system being reorganized and streamlined according to state management requirements has a direct impact on the development of specialized radio.

The exploitation of user data to personalize specialized radio products also raises new ethical issues, requiring radio entities to clearly recognize their limits and responsibilities.

The socialization of specialized radio channels, typically JoyFM, opens up many opportunities in exploiting social resources and diversifying content, but at the same time also poses challenges in professional ethics and content management.

4.2. Solutions for developing specialized radio in Vietnam

4.2.1. Re-segment audiences and approach/convert potential listeners

Specialized radio has already identified target groups but needs deeper segmentation by age (young, middle-aged, older), lifestyle (office workers, those who travel frequently, homemakers), media consumption behavior (traditional radio, podcasts, social media), and content needs (information, entertainment, consultation). This segmentation helps personalize content and messages.

Develop a content-production model by target listener clusters, using behavioral and demographic data and multi-platform distribution. At the same time, prioritize cultivating young (under-25) and office audiences, converting them from potential to loyal listeners. International experience shows the BBC, NPR, and ABC combine FM, podcasts, Spotify, YouTube, Instagram, and offline events to build cohesive communities—turning audiences from passive listeners into active channel members.

4.2.2. Leverage cross-disciplinary content and expand the scope of specialization

Apply an “expanded specialization” model that connects core topics with related fields to increase interdisciplinarity and linkage to social life. This strategy requires a multi-disciplinary team or a collaborator network, with program scripts designed along a vertical axis (deepening the topic) and a horizontal axis (expanding into related fields).

In addition, weaving in music and news as “gateways” helps audiences enter easily, leading them to in-depth content and fostering long-term attachment.

4.2.3. Build modular program structures and innovate presentation forms

A modular content model divides programs into small units that can be flexibly arranged and distributed by platform, listening behavior, and communication objectives. Instead of producing fixed programs, short segments are re-used and combined into versions suitable for each audience group—saving costs and time and fitting listening habits.

Radio should also innovate presentation methods—using audio storytelling with expressive delivery and sound design, combining live reporting and knowledge analysis to increase interactive depth. Design “attention anchors” and periodic reiteration of key points to sustain focus and retention, especially for in-depth content such as medical consultation and policy analysis.

4.2.4. Strengthen interaction at multiple levels

Interaction in specialized radio should develop across four levels to expand both breadth and depth: Level 1: simple feedback such as calls, messages, and comments; stations should integrate feedback tools directly into apps and websites to reduce technological barriers. Level 2: cyclical feedback—collect and analyze listener data, then adjust content and announce changes based on feedback. Level 3: co-creation—audiences participate in production and submit stories or ideas, as in NPR’s StoryCorps model. Level 4: community/emotional interaction—form listener clubs, offline events, and online communities with data systems, dedicated managers, and gamified points/rewards to nurture long-term attachment.

Effective interaction requires a combination of technology, open content design, and community care—with particular attention to technological barriers for older adults or people with visual impairments.

4.2.5. Increase application of AI and data in content production and distribution

Using AI to analyze listener behavior—preferred topics, listening duration, location, device, emotion—so as to form “listener profiles” and optimize content and airtimes. Internationally, many models have succeeded: Spotify forecasts listening needs based on historical and contextual data; CBC (Canada) uses NLP to analyze social-media feedback; NPR (USA) applies AI to identify salient topics by region. Use AI to optimize smart distribution—combining linear broadcast (automatically inserting content blocks by region and time) and non-linear distribution (archiving content with metadata). In Vietnam, VOV Traffic can use AI to tailor alert content by route; JoyFM can deploy a health-consultation chatbot and recommend content by age, gender, and occupation.

To implement this, strong digital infrastructure is needed: modern CMS, data-analytics systems, recommendation AI, multi-platform podcasts, and multi-format content such as infographics, short videos, and text transcripts.

4.3. Some recommendations for developing specialized radio in Vietnam

4.3.1. Recommendations to press regulators

First, position specialized radio as an important part of the media ecosystem, with priority budgets and long-term policies.

Second, link specialized radio with the national digital-transformation program.

Third, provide human-resource incentives and flexible organizational mechanisms.

Fourth, orient the construction of an intelligent specialized-radio ecosystem based on four pillars: radio, audience data, digital platforms, and domain experts.

Fifth, strengthen the management of socialization activities of specialized radio channels.

4.3.2. Recommendations to radio channels

4.3.2.1. Recommendations to radio channels in general

First, build audience strategies based on data.

Second, refine content architecture toward a modern, multi-tier structure.

Third, build a synchronized digital ecosystem.

Fourth, strengthen listener-community management.

Fifth, build specialized teams and expert networks.

Sixth, reform production organization toward convergence.

4.3.2.2. Recommendations to VOV Traffic Channel

First, expand the public segment and adjust the content structure according to new demand groups.

Second, strengthen specialized training in traffic and improve team capacity.

Third, apply big data and AI technology in traffic forecasting and information optimization; strengthen cooperation with digital map platforms and urban traffic ecosystems.

4.3.2.3. Recommendations for JoyFM Channel

First, rejuvenate content and innovate public outreach strategies.

Second, improve language and form of expression to increase understanding and appeal.

Third, tighten standards for sponsored content, improve professional depth.

4.3.3. Recommendations to training institutions

First, redesign journalism–communication curricula toward interdisciplinary integration.

Second, build an interdisciplinary competency-standards system for specialized-radio production teams.

Third, develop short certificates and supplementary modules specifically for reporters.

Fourth, develop training linkages among universities, radio stations, and specialized research institutes.

CONCLUSION

Specialized radio, with its distinctive focus on a specific audience group and in-depth content, is becoming an inevitable trend in the development of Vietnam's media system amid digitization. This study affirms that the formation and development of specialized radio directly responds to profound changes in the behavior, habits, and expectations of modern audiences.

Specialized radio in Vietnam today has made initial successes. Channels such as VOV Traffic and JoyFM show clear potential and social roles, yet the specialized-radio ecosystem as a whole remains unsynchronized. The limitations in technology infrastructure, listener data, and specific policy mechanisms—means specialized radio has yet to realize its full value.

The research shows that audience information needs today are fragmented, diverse, and rapidly changing. Segmentation based only on basic demographics is insufficient. Radio stations need to apply big data and AI to build detailed audience profiles in order to personalize content and optimize listening experience, increases listener satisfaction and attachment, helps radio channels increase social effectiveness and competitiveness in a fierce information environment. In this respect, the simultaneous development of “smart linear” distribution and “flexible non-linear” distribution can both maintain traditional audiences and expand into digital groups, particularly youth and office audiences. Moreover, audiences are not only listeners but partners—participating in feedback, contributions, and co-creation. Building loyal listener communities connected both online and offline will help channels maintain vitality and increase social value and cultural influence.

The author of the dissertation also asserts that content is the core factor that determines the success of specialized radio. Specialized radio content needs to be in-depth in knowledge and also organized according to an interdisciplinary model, connecting different fields to create depth of context and social relevance. At the same time, the form of expression must be innovative, diversified, using a modular production model and the art of audio storytelling to enhance the listening experience, build a brand and a unique style for each specialized channel.

The development of specialized radio depends on close linkage among three factors: management policy, technology, and human resources. Policy must clearly position specialized radio as a public-service information offering with mechanisms for spectrum, infrastructure, and content commissioning for essential topics such as health, traffic, education, and environment. Digital technology—especially data platforms and AI—must be treated as the foundation for comprehensive digital transformation across production, distribution, and interaction. Human resources must be trained across disciplines—understanding journalism/communication practice, possessing foundational knowledge of specialized fields, and having digital-technology skills. Only when these three factors are implemented in a synchronized, mutually reinforcing way can specialized radio achieve sustainability and effectiveness.

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