



Media Use in Vietnam 2013

Overview

Vietnam is saturated with lively entertainment media, and well-produced television and Web products are widely popular. However, all Vietnamese media outlets continue to be government owned and run. Any media content calling for greater religious freedom or democratic reforms is censored or subject to official retribution. Other taboo topics include high-level government corruption, human rights, the activities of dissidents, and the government economic policies.

The government frequently sanctions journalists under Article 88 of the criminal code, which bans the distribution of “antigovernment propaganda.” In addition, Decree No. 2, passed in January 2011, penalizes journalists who refuse to reveal their sources. Another law enacted in May 2011 requires all foreign news and information TV programs to be translated into Vietnamese and censored by officials.

International journalists based in Vietnam work on visas that must be renewed every six months, a system that encourages self-censorship lest they be denied permission to remain in the country. Foreign press bureaus are required to hire local assistants, who keep the police apprised of the bureau’s reporting activities. The Vietnamese-language services of foreign radio broadcasters are restricted to broadcasting over AM or shortwave frequencies because the government denies them FM licenses.

Internet penetration has grown rapidly in Vietnam over the past decade. One result of widespread access among young and well-educated Vietnamese is the rise of blogging as an influential means of social dialogue. Many bloggers post anonymously or under pseudonyms, and gain a following by reporting on issues that are censored in the mainstream media.

However, the Vietnamese government is increasingly cracking down on independent journalists and such digital media dissidents. Police have imprisoned numerous bloggers in recent years for writing about sensitive issues such as the country’s policy toward China, state-supported land grabs, and government accountability. The government has increased Internet surveillance and filtering, and applied the same legal restrictions used to

control more traditional media outlets. In a move seen as a further crackdown on online freedom, Vietnam recently introduced a sweeping new Internet law—known as Decree 72—that bans bloggers and social media users from sharing news stories online. The fine for violating the law is \$4,740 in U.S. dollars. To date, at least 61 dissidents have been convicted in 2013, dramatically up from the 40 in 2012.

News consumption

Vietnamese are avid news consumers; nine in 10 (89.8%) say they access news at least daily, while 93.9% do so at least once a week. Weekly access to TV news varies little by gender, education or urban vs. rural residence. This in part reflects the finding that televisions are ubiquitous throughout the country, including in both urban (98.6%) and rural (97.0%) households. Even among Vietnamese with no formal education or those who say they are finding it “very difficult” to get by on their current income, at least nine in 10 have a TV in their homes (96.0% and 90.4%, respectively). By contrast, radio and computer ownership, as well as home Internet access, are more common among Vietnamese at higher socioeconomic levels.

Not only are televisions nearly universal in Vietnamese households; almost all adults (97.1%) say they use TV at least weekly to get news. Word-of-mouth and SMS/text messaging are the next most commonly used means for receiving news, though much of this news is personal in nature. Just over one-quarter of Vietnamese overall use radio, the Internet and print media. Though radio use is comparable in rural areas and cities, urban Vietnamese are more likely to get news weekly online or via newspapers and magazines.

Weekly use of radio for news is equally common among urban (28.0%) and rural (27.7%) areas, but rises to about one-third (34.3%) among Vietnamese with at least a high school education. Not surprisingly, past-week use of the Internet for news is more common in urban (36.1%) than rural (22.3%) areas and trends sharply upward with education. A majority (56.3%) of Vietnamese with a high school education or more have gone online for news in the past week. Among Hanoi residents with at least a high school education, that figure rises to 64.8%; in Ho Chi Minh City, it is 71.3%.

Traditional Media: Television & Radio

Television is the most commonly used medium in Vietnam: 81.8% of the population watched TV the previous day, while 96.9% watched within the past week. Nationwide, about half of Vietnamese (48%) receive a television signal via a terrestrial antenna, while one-third (32.7%) use an individual satellite dish and 17.8% have cable TV.

Slightly more than one in four Vietnamese (27.6%) say they have listened to the radio in the past week. That figure rises to about one-third among Vietnamese with a high school education or more (34.1%) and those aged 15 to 24 (34.0%). Similarly, about one-third of residents in Hanoi (33.1%) and Ho Chi Minh City (33.8%) say they have listened in the past week.

The FM band is used weekly by 22.2% of Vietnamese overall, and the vast majority (80.7%) of past-week radio listeners. AM radio is used weekly by 2.7% of Vietnamese, and shortwave by 0.4%.

New Media: Mobile Phones and Internet

The data indicate that more than three-quarters of adults (77.6%) say they personally own mobile phone. Reflecting broad market growth and infrastructure development, mobile phones have strong penetration in both rural (76.1%) and urban (80.8%) areas.

Despite the government's recent focus on developing the country's mobile broadband infrastructure, just 27.5% of Vietnam's mobile phone owners say their phones have the ability to access the Internet. Internet-capable phones are by far most common among young people; 46.4% of Vietnamese aged 15 to 24 say they have one, versus 13.1% of those 25 and older. Results vary similarly by education. Vietnamese with post-high school education are much more likely than those with a high school education or less to say they have Internet-capable phones — 58.5% vs. 15.0%, respectively.

Reflecting the finding that most Vietnamese mobile phone owners still use low-end phones without Internet capability, SMS-based functions are performed by more than half overall: 67.3% say they have sent or received text message in the past week. All other functions are much less common; close to one in five mobile owners access the Internet (22.4%) and listen to radio (18.8%) on their phones weekly.

Internet: Majority of young adults and best-educated Vietnamese go online weekly

More than one in four Vietnamese (26.3%) say they have used the Internet in the past week. Internet use is more common in Vietnam than in several neighboring countries — including Burma (where 1.4% go online weekly), Cambodia, (4.9%), and Laos (6.1%).

Like the incidence of Internet-capable phones, overall Internet use in Vietnam is strongly related to age and education level. Most 15- to 24-year-olds (58.0%) and college-educated Vietnamese (76.4%) go online weekly.

Virtually all past-week Internet users (99.3%) say they accessed online content in Vietnamese; just 12% used English-language content and 1.3% used content in Chinese.

Past-week Internet users in Vietnam use the Web primarily for news and information gathering; 93.6% say they went online during that time to find out the latest news, easily the most common online activity, while 78.3% did so to find out information about a specific topic. More than seven in 10 past-week users also say they listened to online audio (79.0%) and watched online videos (71.2%), suggesting widespread use of broadband service among the country's regular Internet users. Just 37.5% of weekly Internet users have gone online to use email during that time, though here there is a huge gap between those with post-high school education (58.2%) and less-educated users (22.5%).

The influence of bloggers in Vietnam notwithstanding, just 14.7% of weekly Internet users say they went online to read a blog in the past week — though this number rises to about one in five among the youngest (19.3%) and best-educated (19.4%) groups. In light of recent government efforts to crack down on independent bloggers critical of the state, this measure may be subject to underreporting. Asked more specifically whether or not they have visited any blogs in the past week, 8.6% of weekly Internet users (2.3% of Vietnamese overall) say yes.

Methodology

This data is from a nationally representative, face-to-face survey of 3,018 Vietnamese aged 15 and older. The interviewing field period was Nov. 29, 2012, to Feb. 26, 2013, with all interviews conducted in Vietnamese. Small towns and provinces with minority populations that are not fluent in the main language of Vietnam (Kinh) and those in remote areas that are difficult to access, including some areas considered unsafe, were excluded. The exclusions represent approximately 15% of the total national population. The resulting sample represents about 57,514,000 Vietnamese adults [source: Population Reference Bureau, 2012].

Contact

For any questions or further information on this data, please contact the Broadcasting Board of Governors at publicaffairs@bbg.gov or 202-203-4400. You can follow the BBG on Twitter @BBGgov.