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The Situation of Mass Communication Activities on Food Safety and Social Effects Regarding Food Safety in Hanoi, Vietnam in the Current Period

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Abstract

Food safety has been a matter of concern to Vietnamese society, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is essential for people to choose safe ingredients, which help build the body's resilience. Therefore, the responsibility of mass communication to the community is to raise awareness and shift the behavior of the public towards observance of food safety regulations. This study points out the contributions of mass communication to detecting food safety violations, providing information on handling food safety violations, motivating people to comply with regulations through advisory, guiding, and orientation information. At the same time, the study includes an analysis of mass communication's influence on shifting the public's cognition and behavior. Plus, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the quality of communication on food safety such as publishing timely and accurate information; improving guiding information; expanding the network of collaborators, hotlines to report violations; coordinating with the authorities to build programs and categories of communication on food safety. Research findings are based on the survey data involving 300 residents in Hoan Kiem District and Van Dinh town, Ung Hoa District, Hanoi in August 2020.

Keywords: mass communication, sociology of mass communication, food safety.

Introduction

According to statistics from the Vietnam Food Administration of the Ministry of Health, from January 1 to May 31, 2020, 48 incidents of food poisoning were recorded nationwide, causing more than 870 cases, 824 hospitalizations, and 22 deaths. Compared to the same period in 2019, the number of food poisoning incidents rose by 11 (29.7%), and there was an increase of 18 cases and 17 deaths. The above figure indicates an upward trend in the number of food poisoning incidents and cases, especially foodborne illnesses. The current situation of food poisoning is complicated, many deaths stem from eating unsafe foods (Minh Duc, 2020). Information on food safety is still controversial, the confusion of consumers is exploited by some news agencies, which negatively affects the production and business of enterprises. This proves the great responsibility of mass communication to report accurate information that can influence public opinion, at the same time identify and refute false information on food safety. In addition, promoting communication activities is an approach to develop law enforcement and contribute to disseminating accurate information, so that people's awareness can be raised and more appropriate consumer behavior can be achieved.

It can be seen that communication is of great influence in regulating and controlling people's behavior towards using safe food. The role of media institutions is to focus on communication, dissemination and education to elevate awareness and knowledge of human rights by Party

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entities, authorities, and social organizations. Based on the scope of participation and influence, communication is divided into individual communication, group communication and mass communication.

Mass communication consists of television stations, printed newspapers, online newspapers, etc. With its rapid, widespread and immediate impact, communication plays a significant role in shaping and influencing public opinion, by educating and persuading them to participate in solving socio-economic problems. Mass communication on food safety has the potential to make an impact on people to change their awareness and behavior towards safe food use.

For the aforementioned reasons, this research aims at evaluating the current situation of mass communication activities on food safety issues, thereby analyzing the influence of communication activities on public awareness and behavior on food safety in Hanoi in the current period.

Background

Law on Food Safety No. 55/2010/QH12 dated June 17, 2010 of the National Assembly as amended and supplemented by the National Assembly's Law No. 28/2018/QH14 dated June 15, 2018, took effect on January 1, 2019. This Law involves rights and obligations of organizations and individuals in assuring food safety: conditions for assuring safety of foods and food production, trading, import and export; food advertisement and labeling; food testing; food safety risk analysis; prevention, settlement and remedies of food safety incidents; food safety information, education and communication; and state management responsibilities related to food safety. This Law also presents explicit regulations of communication on food safety in Chapter IX with specific purposes and requirements such as:

1. Information, education and communication on food safety aims to raise public awareness about food safety, and change backward behaviors, customs and practices in production, trading and lifestyles which cause unsafe food consumption, contributing to protecting human health and life; and business ethics and responsibility of food producers and traders towards consumer health and life.
2. Information, education and communication on food safety must be:
 - a) Accurate, prompt, explicit, simple and practical;
 - b) Suitable to national traditions, culture and identity, religions, social ethics, beliefs, customs and practices;
 - c) Suitable to each category of targeted subjects.

In addition to common factors such as information content, targeted subjects, and form of information, the information responsibility of the mass media is specified as follows: "Mass media agencies shall prioritize in terms of schedule and duration of broadcasts to provide information, education and communication on food safety on radios and televisions: and reserve appropriate spaces for articles and broadcasts on food safety in printed newspapers, televisions or online newspapers under regulations of the Minister of Information and Communications. Information, education and communication on food safety in the mass media are free of charge, unless they are provided under separate contracts with programs or projects or financed by domestic or foreign organizations or individuals." (Law on Food Safety, 2018).

Regarded as one of the effective solutions to provide information and distribute knowledge about food safety to the public, in fact, communication faces numerous obstacles and difficulties: “The communication on food safety have not been able to connect safe food/ “green” addresses with consumers, and have not fully informed the public about food providers who violate food safety. Meanwhile, the direct information and advice from medical and agriculture officers have been largely ignored, and people’s knowledge and understanding of food safety remain very poor” (Mr. T.N.T, Vice President of Vietnam Organic Agriculture Association). The representative of the Ministry of Health, Ms. N.T.Y, Deputy Head of the Communication Department of the Vietnam Food Administration, acknowledged that although the communication and dissemination of knowledge, policies, and laws on food safety have been promoted, its results remain limited. Inaccurate or unverified, unscientific information still exists, affecting production, business and people’s trust in food safety management. This problem was mentioned at the conference on “Communication Cooperation on Food Safety” co-organized by the Institute for Research on Development Communication under the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA) along with the Vietnam Food Administration (Ministry of Health) in Hanoi (Nguyen Khang, 2018)²

Several important studies on mass communication on food safety include the food safety investigations conducted by the FDA and the US Department of Agriculture in 1988, 1993, 2001, 2006, and 2010 in America. It is concluded that the change in actions and awareness about food safety during the survey years corresponded to the change in the amount of information about food safety appearing in the mass media in the phases between investigations. This finding suggests that the increasing media coverage of food safety may raise awareness of food safety hazards and increase consumer vigilance in handling food (FDA, 2010).

There is a compilation of studies and 24 articles with a focus on social media communication on food safety and infectious diseases. The great accessibility, immediacy, and crawlability of social networks are undoubted. Recommendations on how to use social media in communication and access to information on food safety (Katie N Overbey, Lee-Ann Jaykus, Benjamin J Chapman, 2017).

Another research in Vietnam on the responsibility of the press regarding the communication on food safety (2016). Thanks to timely and comprehensive information, the press has been providing consumers with knowledge about growing manifestations of food safety violations, including increasingly sophisticated and alarming violations. Newspapers on food safety played a part in “warning” consumers, helping them to be careful in their food choices (Le Thuy Hang, 2016).

The research on “Consumer concerns about food safety in Hanoi, Vietnam” demonstrated the long-term impact of community-based information, education and communication activities on food hygiene and safety behaviors in Vietnam. Diarrhea in children in developing countries is mainly caused by the ingestion of contaminated water or food. In Vietnam, the use of community-based information, education and communication (IEC) can be a sustainable

² Nguyen Khang, *Downsides of communication on food safety*, Online Van hoa Newspaper, 2018 <http://baovanhoa.vn/van-hoa/artmid/428/articleid/5453/b%E1%BA%A5t-c%E1%BA%ADp-truy%E1%BB%81n-th244ng-v%E1%BB%81-an-to224n-v%E1%BB%87-sinh-th%E1%BB%B1c-ph%E1%BA%A9m>, April 9, 2018, retrieved on July 15, 2021.

strategy to improve food hygiene and food safety behavior (Thanh Mai Ha, Shamim Shakur, Kim Hang Pham Do, 2019).

Food safety has been widely studied, but there have not been a large number of studies related to communication on this issue, especially in terms of how mass communication affects people's awareness and behavior about food safety. Therefore, this research aims to address those research gaps and proposes feasible solutions to heighten the quality of communication and ensure access to safe food for people. Within the scope of this writing, we seek the answer to the following research questions:

1. What is the reality of mass communication on food safety in Hanoi?
2. How does mass communication on food safety affect people in Hanoi?
3. What is the solution to enhance the effectiveness of mass communication, thereby improving awareness and behavior about safe food consumption among Hanoi residents?

Theoretical foundation

Theory of Priming Effects

The priming effect theory describes the process of mass media information affecting and controlling the recipient's mind. The activation of the priming effect is founded on 4 fundamental elements: the freshness of the information; the frequent exposure to the information; the applicability of the information and its relevance to the subject. First, the brain's ability to receive "primed" information declines over time. Therefore, the priming effect can be maintained only when a person is exposed to the latest information regularly. Next, the "primed" information must be practical and consistent with the recipient's standards. More specifically, the "primed" information must be closely related to specific situations and criteria by which the recipients make judgments. If the recipients find the information unrealistic and inconsistent with their standards, they will not accept it (Patricia Moy, David Tewksbury, Eike Mark Rinke, 2016). The study applies the priming effect theory to analyze the impact of mass communication on consumers in Hoan Kiem District and Van Dinh Town. Specifically, the information about food poisoning and foodborne diseases in the media has continuously "primed" and triggered the fear of poisoning and illness among consumers, thereby building their self-defense mechanism by altering their consumption behavior such as: choosing food cautiously; processing and preserving food more carefully, regularly reminding surrounding people about their eating habits – that is when the mass media's priming effect works. This research thereby suggests communication solutions to raise consumers' alertness of food safety, because communication can change consumers' perception and behavior as long as there is proper communication orientation.

Method

Ethical Consideration

This mixed methods study was part of the 2020-2021 core research program at the university which the research team is affiliated with. The university's Institutional Review Board approved the study protocol. At the beginning of either survey or semi-structured interview, a trained research assistant explain the study aims and procedure, as well as rights and benefits of the participant. Individuals who agree to participate in the study signe the informed consent, and

they would receive an incentive of VND 30,000 (\$1,2) for a completed questionnaire and VND 50,000 (\$2) for a complete semi-structured interview. Research assistants made inputs of the data and saved them in a password-protected computer, which only the research team have access to. Respondents' information is kept anonymous and encrypted for all questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Setting and Sample

The research was carried out in Hoan Kiem District and Van Dinh Town in August 2020. Qualitative and quantitative data are the findings of the Science and Technology project at Vietnam National University, Hanoi in 2020 "*Mass communication and social behavior on food safety in Hanoi in the current period*", coded QG.20.34, by the author as the project leader. These two localities represent two different areas, urban and rural, but they both have a high concentration of food services. Hoan Kiem District is located at the center of Hanoi with the Old Quarter in Hoan Kiem District being recognized as the historical and cultural heritage of the capital. Hoan Kiem District marks its name in the culinary history with such specialties as "cha ca La Vong", "pho Bat Dan", "bun cha", dumplings. Tong Duy Tan Street was selected as the first Vietnamese food street. (People's Committee of Hoan Kiem District, 2020). Van Dinh is a town in Ung Hoa District, Hanoi, with a total population of 14,338 people, including 4 villages and 5 streets. Van Dinh Town's trading and services have prospered for the past few years. Foodservice restaurants thrive in both scale and quantity. With the specialty "Van Dinh grass duck", the number of local business households gradually went up, with an average increase of 110 households per year. (People's Committee of Van Dinh Town, 2019).

In this study, we adopt the systematic sampling method (Black, 2014) to recruit interviewees for the survey. First, we contact the People's Committees to explain the sampling procedure.

For the quantitative component of the study, we survey 140 people in Hoan Kiem District and 364 people in Van Dinh Town (Table 1). Quantitative data is organized by study sites (Hoan Kiem district as site 1, Van Dinh town as site 2). In addition, we conduct semi-structured interviews with 40 respondents including 2 officers of Vietnam Television, 2 printed newspapers reporters, 2 online newspaper reporters, 2 district leaders: 2 in-depth interviews, 2 commune and ward officials, 15 residents in Hoan Kiem District and Thanh Tri District each.

Table 1. Structure of questionnaire survey sample in Van Dinh town, Ung Hoa district and Hoan Kiem district

	Criteria		Van Dinh Town		Hoan Kiem District	
			Quantit y	Percent(%)	Quantit y	Percent(%)
1 .	Sex	Male	137	37,6	58	41,4
		Female	227	62,4	82	58,6
2 .	Education level	Not in school	9	2,5	2	1,4
		Primary	19	5,2	5	3,6
		Middle school	70	19,2	16	11,4
		High school	133	36,6	52	37,1

		College/University Postgraduate	69 64	19,0 17,6	35 30	25,0 21,4		
3 .	Careē field	Agriculture/forestry/fis hery	36 123	9,9 33,8	0 53	0,0 37,9		
		Trade, services	38	10,4	9	6,4		
		Workers	11	3,0	2	1,4		
		Small craftsmen	47	12,9	31	22,1		
		State officials, civil servants	5	1,4	3	2,2		
		Armed forces	7	1,9	4	2,9		
		Students	37	10,2	17	12,1		
		Retired/old and infirm	24	6,6	11	7,9		
		Housewives	32	8,8	10	7,1		
		Manual self-employed	3	0,8	0	0,0		
		Others						
		4 .	Income	Under 1 million/person/month				
				From 1 to under 3 million/person/month	11	3,0	4	2,9
From 3 to under 5 million/person/month	58			15,9	10	7,1		
From 5 to under 7 million/person/month	120			33,0	27	19,3		
From 7 to under 9 million/person/month	102			28,0	36	25,7		
From 9 million/person/month	47			12,9	23	16,4		
From 9 million/person/month or more	26			7,1	40	28,6		
Total			364	100,0	140	100,0		

According to the demographic data of the interviewees with a questionnaire, the ratio between male and female subjects was quite equal in the two areas (male accounts for 40% and female 60%). There is a disparity in educational attainment between the two areas, in Hoan Kiem District, 46.4% of the respondents own a degree of “intermediate school or college” or higher, this figure in Van Dinh Town is 36.6%. In addition, the occupation indicator is different when Hoan Kiem has no “agriculture/forestry/fishery” labor, while in Van Dinh, this sector accounts for 9.9%. The “public officials” in Hoan Kiem constitute 22.1% and 12.9% in Van Dinh. The proportion of such occupations as “handicrafts” or “freelance manual laborers” in Van Dinh is larger than in Hoan Kiem District. The income indicator records a big difference with the income level of “from 7 million or more”, which accounts for 45% in Hoan Kiem and only 20% in Van Dinh; the “from 5 million or less” segment makes up 29.3% in Hoan Kiem and 51.9% in Van Dinh.

Data collection and analysis

This study consisted of both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) components. The survey was administrated by trained research assistants using a questionnaire. The questionnaire included different sections. The first one is the perception of assessment of

food safety with questions about shopping venues, food origin, how to select, store and process, etc. Part 2 concerns food safety communication with questions about media, information and usage, etc. The final one focuses on social control on food safety with questions about the assessment of current regulations, laws on food safety, the inspection and assessment of food safety and sanctions for food safety violations... Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 21.0.

In the qualitative component of the study, we developed an interview guide based on the key content of the questionnaire. The key questions in the interview guide covered main topics, including open-ended questions such as “Which types of media do you currently use the most? Do you often update food safety information on that type of media?” “Does the information on food safety in the media have much influence on your awareness of food safety? If yes, please share the reason”. These questions are designed to find out how people perceive and evaluate food safety issues through the mass media. The interviewers followed the interview guide to probe the key questions and followed up with interviewees’ responses. All the semi-structured interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for analysis using protocol coding (Saldana, 2015) using Excel.

Results

The actual situation of using mass media to update food safety news

In order to ensure food safety, in 2020, Hanoi organized 900 inspection teams of food safety. The inspection of 107,020 establishments discovered 6,154 violations, destroyed 173 poultry, 177 kg of meat, 142 kg of pork, 1,049 kg of poultry meat and 177 kg of other animal products for food of unknown origin; 1.3 tons of fake MSG, 2 tons of dietary supplements³

In 2020, Hanoi directs all levels of authorities to diversify timely communication activities on the status of food safety, encouraging manufacturers and traders of safe food, publicizing violating establishments in the mass media. Strengthen communication on safe food choices, improve body resistance amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research results show that 74.3% of people in Hoan Kiem District and 70.3% in Van Dinh Town find accessing information about food safety via mass media extremely important.

“In my opinion, mass media plays a crucial role in providing food safety information to people. It has a tremendous impact which can decide the life of a food product or even a food production and business enterprise (when those food products are not safe)”. (Female, 32 years old, officer of Hang Bo Ward, university, Hoan Kiem District).

Mass media plays a prominent role in providing information to people about food safety because the media is enabling people to access information faster than before, when it was quite difficult to search for certain information. “Freshness of information” and “Frequent exposure to information” are two key factors attracting attention of not only the public but also policy agencies and media agencies.

³ (Hanoi: publicizing food safety violations in the media, [ict.vietnam.vn](https://ictvietnam.vn/ha-noi-cong-khai-co-so-vi-pham-an-toan-thuc-pham-tren-phuong-tien-truyen-thong-20210323154645066.htm), retrieved on March 24, 2021). <https://ictvietnam.vn/ha-noi-cong-khai-co-so-vi-pham-an-toan-thuc-pham-tren-phuong-tien-truyen-thong-20210323154645066.htm>

Table 2. Sources of food safety knowledge for the public

	Hoan Kiem District		Van Dinh Town	
	Quantity	Percent (%)	Quantity	Percent (%)
Television	109	77,9	333	91,5
Internet	135	96,4	269	73,9
Radio	65	46,4	144	39,6
Print media	37	26,4	81	22,3
Relatives	113	80,7	291	79,9
Friends	86	61,4	215	59,1
Neighbors	83	59,3	218	59,9
Banners, posters	16	11,4	29	8,0
Salespeople	15	10,7	39	10,7
Producers	11	7,9	32	8,8
Meetings, training	21	15,0	48	13,2

The percentage of people learning about food safety through television, on the internet and from relatives, friends and neighbors is remarkable in both areas (over 50%). Meanwhile, knowledge about food safety on posters, from sellers, manufacturers and training courses accounts for less than 20% in both Hoan Kiem District and Van Dinh Town.

In Van Dinh Town, television was the most chosen means by the public, with 91.5%. Most of them are housewives and services providers who have more time to watch TV.

“I learn about information on food safety mainly on television. On television, there are many programs about food safety such as those of VTC14 and VTV1 which are very convenient to follow. In the evening, I often watch the news program with my family. In general, I trust official and popular channels.” (Female, 65 years old, primary school, Van Dinh Town).

It can be seen that the influence of television has always been at the forefront of conveying information to all people. Moreover, the level of "great trust" in food safety information on television in Van Dinh Town accounts for a high percentage of 67.1%. For example, “Say no to dirty food” is one of the programs broadcast on VTV1 at 7:30 am from Monday to Friday. With 4-minute episodes, the show has reflected the issues related to food safety according to research and investigation by reporters of VTV24 News Center; the information provided by the audience via the hotline or on the Fanpage (selected and verified by the production team) about businesses and manufacturers that violate the regulations.

In the meantime, in Hoan Kiem District, the internet is a highly accessible type of mass media (91.5%). Hoan Kiem District residents are mostly cadres and workers who have little time to stay home and watch television. Characterized as the central district with highly educated people, so its residents access technology and update news via the internet more easily and faster.

“I learn about food safety issues mainly on the internet, online newspapers and reputable social networking sites. I'm very busy at work, so I don't have much time to watch TV” (Female, reporter, 25 years old, university degree, Hoan Kiem District)

Besides the basic difference in the use of mass media to update information on food safety between urban and rural areas, age is another factor to distinguish different groups of the public.

Table 3: Correlation between age and assessment of food safety news content on mass media (unit %)

Age	Van Dinh Town								Hoan Kiem District							
	Internet				Television				Internet				Television			
	Easy to understand, easy to follow	Normal	Difficult to understand, difficult to follow	Don't know	Easy to understand, easy to follow	Normal	Difficult to understand, difficult to follow	Don't know	Easy to understand, easy to follow	Normal	Difficult to understand, difficult to follow	Don't know	Easy to understand, easy to follow	Normal	Difficult to understand, difficult to follow	Don't know
18-45	62,6	32,1	1,6	3,7	93,7	6,3	0	0	63,1	29,7	3,6	3,6	97,6	2,4	0	0
46-60	50,8	33,3	3,4	12,5	95,8	4,2	0	0	54,3	28,6	5,7	11,4	97,1	2,9	0	0
Trend	9,3	11,1	33,3	46,3	88,9	11,1	0	0	9,52	14,2	33,5	42,8	95,2	4,8	0	0

The content of news on food safety on the internet that was rated “easy to understand and follow” by the groups aged 18-45 and 46-60 accounts for more than 50.0% in both Hoan Kiem District and Van Dinh Town. Meanwhile, the group of 60 year-olds or above rated 30% content of the internet as confusing and difficult to follow. As for television, all 3 ranges of age in the 2 areas found over 85% of the content easy to understand and follow.

“The types of mass media I usually use are TVs and phones. News, Facebook are channels through which I update information about food safety the most. I think information on food safety on television or the internet are all understandable, in particular, it's very convenient to update news on the internet, whenever I want to search for anything about food, I can find it.” (Female, 30 years old, university, consumer in Hoan Kiem District)

It can be explained that people aged 18-45 find the internet an easy way to update information because they are young and tech-savvy.

In contrast, the over-60-year-old group is confusing about the internet and even have no idea about it because devices such as phones, laptops, and tablets are hard to use. If they want to go online to look up something, they need the help of relatives. Therefore, television will become popular and easy to use with older people.

“I only update news about food safety by watching TV, some news programs like 'Chuyen dong 24h'. I have no idea about the internet. My daughter bought me a mobile phone, but I only know how to make calls, I don't know how to go online. If I want to watch something, I have to ask her to click.” (Female, 65 years old, primary school, Van Dinh Town)

During the regression testing, the independent variable and the dependent variable influence each other. Specifically, here it is the age and assessment of the content of food safety news in the mass media.

Table 4: Regression of the relationship between age and assessment of food safety news content on social media

	Van Dinh Town			Hoan Kiem District		
	Sig		VIF	Sig		VIF
	Coefficients	Anova		Coefficients	Anova	
Television	0,008	0.013	1,422	0,002	0,023	1,089

Internet	0,000	0,000	1,422	0,001	0,000	1,089
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Here, the sig.Cofficients < 0.05 in Van Dinh Town and Hoan Kiem District proves that age will affect the assessment of food safety news content in the media today. In addition, the variance-inflating factor $VIF < 2$, ie, there is no multicollinearity, which means the influence of the two variables on each other. Besides, sig Anova < 0.05 infers that this is a linear regression model that can be generalized and applied overall. Thus, each range of age has different evaluations of news content on television and the internet. This affirms the “relevance to the recipients of information” of the priming effect theory as the age of the public reflects the use of mass media.

Impact of mass media on food safety on the public

The information “boom” significantly impacts the consumer behavior because they are citizens who have more access to information, have more opportunities to understand, learn more about food safety issues, have more awareness of ensuring food hygiene and safety. Mass media is the bridge between the market and consumers, if the mass media spread positive information about a product, consumers will certainly be impressed and decide to buy it. On the other hand, if a product comes with negative information in the mass media, consumers will certainly be skeptical about that product, or furthermore, boycott.

It is extremely important for people to understand the concept of safe food so that they can choose and consider the safeness of specific types of food.

“First, safe food is clear-origin food. When we know the origin, we can check the materials and processes at the manufacturing place, thereby getting information about the output of the materials. In addition, the amount of banned substances must not exceed the permitted level. By regularly watching food safety news on television, I have collected traditional experiences from self-studying and from my parents on how to choose ingredients and check food properly. For example, good pork must be fresh, not be dull and smelly, and must be firm to the touch.” (male, 35 years old, high school, a restaurant owner in Hoan Kiem District)

Being restaurant owners who often buy food in large quantities to serve customers, they view the clear origin of the food as the most important criterion.

“In my opinion, safe food is food that does not contain dirt and harmful substances; has a clear origin; is processed hygienically and meets the quality standards.” (female, 25 years old, university, newspaper reporter, Hoan Kiem District)

Respondents added two more criteria when assessing the safety of food which are food must not contain harmful substances and must be processed hygienically. Besides, the criterion of how to prepare food cannot be ignored, because safe food can become unsafe if it is improperly or unhygienically processed. Food processing area must be free of standing water, far from smoke, dust, toilets, or livestock farming areas, trash places that cause environmental pollution.

“By updating news in the mass media, especially television, I think safe food is healthy food that is hygienically produced and raised, preserved, delivered, and distributed. Clean food is food that does not contain dirt, is safe and good for health, for example, Food that does not contain residues of pesticides; has a clear-origin; does not contain impurities (metal, glass, hard objects,

etc.)” (Female, 32 years old, university, consumer in Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi)

It can be inferred that the highly educated public acquires a good understanding of signs of safe food.

However, not everyone has such great knowledge about food safety

“I mainly look at the labels and certificates, but I can't really judge whether the food is safe because each product requires different ways of evaluating and selecting. When it comes to vegetables, I just rely on my feeling, picking clean and fresh bunches. For other types of food, besides looking at the label, I consider the packaging and ingredients of the product as well, in general, it's complicated.” (Female, 32 years old, high school, Van Dinh Town)

People believe that evaluating clean food is highly complicated and hard to fully understand. Many residents in Van Dinh Town are still confused and yet to grasp the evaluation standards of food certifications.

The role of mass communication in improving people's understanding of food safety took the highest proportion (87.9% and 85.2%) in the 2 areas.

Table 5: Benefits of food safety news on social media for people

	Hoan Kiem district		Van Dinh town	
	Quantity	Percent (%)	Quantity	Percent (%)
Improve knowledge about food safety and hygiene	123	87,9	310	85,2
Guide people's attitudes and behaviors correctly when using, processing and preserving food	106	75,7	260	71,4
Raise people's awareness in using safe food	107	76,4	255	70,1

“After watching the information about food safety in the mass media, my family and I have made big changes, especially after the news about food poisoning. When selecting food, we have to pay attention to freshness, deliciousness (fresh food), nutrition (processed food), and also safety,

Help people know what to avoid when buying, using, preserving and processing food	112	80,0	278	76,4
Help people know about the current food safety situation	102	72,9	258	70,8

which means no chemical contaminants, and few preservatives. When buying food from transparent origins, as ready-to-eat foods, we look carefully at the food packaging and especially the expiry date." (Female, 42 years old, high school, Van Dinh Town).

Through the answers of the people, the priming effect theory is further confirmed when the information about foodborne poisoning and illness has repeatedly "primed" and triggered the fear of poisoning and diseases of consumers, thereby enabling them to form self-protection mechanism by changing their consumption behavior - that's when the mass media have brought into play their priming effect.

"Information on food safety on the press and the internet has a certain impact on me. More specifically, when buying things, I will notice the origin of the food (if it is at the market, I consider the sellers); avoiding unknown-origin food and drinks; paying attention to food quality when buying food (color, smell, freshness, etc.). I also try to cook at home, refrain from eating at roadside shops in particular and eating out in general. Finally, to protect the health of people around me, I often share and remind my family about eating habits." (Female, 30 years old, university, consumer, Hoan Kiem District)

Besides, there are still opposing opinions.

"In my opinion, mass communication is just gradually emphasizing the importance of paying attention to food safety, but has not really played its role well in raising consumers' awareness of food safety, because information on food safety now is still very confusing. For example, mass media often says "Be a smart consumer", but it doesn't clarify how to be smart". (Female, 19 years old, university, Van Dinh Town)

The above opinion indicates that the media is currently still vague, not specific and concise enough for the audience. This requires reporters to have in-depth understandings of many fields including health, law, food habits, etc. and quickly update information to convey to the public.

We get to know the correlation between education level and access to current regulations, policies and laws on food safety through mass media

Table 6. Correlation between education level and access to current regulations, policies and laws on Food Safety through mass media (unit %)

	Van Dinh town			Hoan Kiem District		
	Full, clear access	Preliminary approach	Not accessible	Full, clear access	Preliminary approach	Not accessible
Not attend school	11,2	23,3	65,5	0	0	100
Primary school	5,3	26,9	67,8	0	20,0	80,0
Secondary school	14,2	35,8	50,0	12,5	31,3	56,2
Highschool	18,2	67,6	14,2	13,4	69,3	17,3
College	34,5	55,4	10,1	25,7	62,8	11,5
Graduate, post graduate	39,0	53,1	7,9	30	60,0	10,0

In the group of people who did not attend school, or stopped at the level of primary and secondary schools, the rate of “no access” to current regulations, policies and laws on food safety through mass media is high, constituting more than 50% in both locations. On the contrary, in the group of people at the levels of high school, intermediate/college and university/postgraduate, this figure is less than 15%, and the rate of “partly access” to regulations and laws is more than 50%.

“Actually, I usually watch the news about food poisoning, how to choose food, but I can't reach current regulations, policies and laws on food safety. Those regulations are a matter of business people, not mine. If they do something wrong, they will be punished. There used to be a household growing water spinach, they spared a self-supply furrow whose vegetables were stunted without pesticides, and they used pesticides for furrows for sale so that it could be lush green and they can make a lot of money. (Female, 65 years old, primary school, Van Dinh Town)

Poorly educated group of people think that regulations, policies and laws on food safety only apply to producers and traders. Even if they watch television, they cannot access those policies.

This demonstrates the “information applicability” of the priming effect theory, however the disparity lies at differences in the educational attainment of the public.

People also expressed dissatisfaction with the current legislation system, regulations and sanctions on food safety in Vietnam.

“I briefly learnt about the policies and laws on food safety through the internet. I think our legislation system does set up forms and sanctions to punish those who violate food safety. But I think the implementation is not good enough, the authorities are not strict, so there are still many existing cases such as warehouses storing frozen food which is rotten for a long time.” (Female, 25 years old, university, Van Dinh Town)

This comment is contrary to the opinion of consumers in Hoan Kiem District. She said basically, the law has provided appropriate sanctions for violations of food safety. But the law enforcement of the authorities is not serious, leading to a number of violations being omitted, such as the case of hoarding rotten products mentioned by the people.

Recommendations and suggestions of the people to improve the quality of propaganda on food hygiene and safety in the media

The most proposed (91,6%) recommendation in improving the quality of communication of Hoan Kiem District residents is to report adequate, honest and accurate information. In Van Dinh Town, people suggested criticizing violations of food safety more strongly, accounting for 85.5%. Besides, both localities proposed other measures such as: News must be concise and easy to understand, and focus on introducing regulations on food safety.

“In order to better the communication on food safety in the media, from the perspective of a food service provider, I have a few specific suggestions as follows. The press should take the most appropriate approach regarding this issue, report accurately and honestly. Nowadays, there are too much unverified news on the internet, numerous posts with false and inaccurate headlines, which greatly affect the readers.” (Male, restaurant owner, 35 years old, high school, Hoan Kiem District)

Working in food business, they pay close attention to the accuracy, transparency of each piece of news in the mass media. It's because mass media serve as the bridge between the market and consumers. Besides, people expect the media to report more on food safety sanctions to deter violators as well as raise awareness for consumers.

“I think that mass media need to report really accurate, concise and understandable information; be more drastic and creative about food safety so that this information can implant to the people's heart. Particularly, they should criticize violations of food safety more sharply and disseminate models of safe food production and trading.” (Female, 25 years old, university, Van Dinh Town)

In addition to the accuracy, conciseness, understandable, objective and multidimensional reflection on issues, well updated hot news on food safety, consumers believe that to improve the communication on food safety, it's necessary to disseminate the information about production and business models of safe products; publicize establishments and individuals fined for violations of food safety in order to warn, deter and prevent illegal acts of food production and business.

Discussion

From the above research results, conclusions can be drawn about the role of mass communication in food safety as follows:

First of all, there are myriad sources of knowledge about food safety such as: television, newspapers, internet. Out of them, television and internet are the two most common means for the people to update news about food safety. The use of various types of mass media depends on the region, educational attainment, occupation and range of age.

The most trusted channel is the news program for it is the most popular means of national propaganda in the mass, an official state channel whose news is accurate and reliable. In terms of news about food safety on the internet, people only rate it as normal, most people have the habit of verifying the source, because of large quantities of fake and unverified news on the internet, especially the social networking site Facebook.

Regular update of news on food safety affects consumers' perception of the concept of safe food. People develop quite strong awareness of safe food. Urban residents have a better and more detailed understanding of the regulations on the use of pesticides, chemicals, and antibiotics in food and their effects on human health. Meanwhile, rural residents are still confused and have not yet grasped the specific evaluation criteria of safe food certifications and still make purchases based on feelings.

Most people get preliminary access to food safety regulations, policies and laws through mass media. However, people in Hoan Kiem District believe that the legal provisions and sanctions have not been completely proper, because there have been only administrative sanctions so far, not yet criminal penalties, which is inadequately deterrent. Meanwhile, people in Van Dinh Town thought that the legal system and regulations on food safety are relatively complete, but the room for improvement lies in the implementation, and the sanctioning of food safety lacks transparency.

Nevertheless, at present, the communication is still vague, unspecified, fails to convey necessary and concise information to the people. Both areas share the same proposal that news on mass media should be concise, easy to understand, and focus on food safety regulations. In addition, people in Hoan Kiem District recommended the requirements of accuracy, uniformity and clarity of information to reach the maximum effect, because currently, the internet is bombarded with fake news, seriously affecting consumer perception. In Van Dinh Town which has numerous restaurants, businesses, and food markets, people focus on proposals of criticizing violations of food safety more drastically for the people to be vigilant.

Limitations

Although this study provides insights into mass communication on food safety and its effects on public awareness and behavior, it still reveals limitations. First, the sample size is small. In the survey participants, a total of 504 respondents were selected in two locations in Hanoi, which limits the generalization of the research findings. Second, during the sampling, it applied the systematic sampling method (Den, 2014), leading to several shortcomings in selecting respondents to the questionnaire. Most of the research sample was selected by convenience, random and snowball methods, so it can hardly guarantee representativeness.

Recommendations

- For authorities:

+ The State should continue to develop documents guiding the media agencies, the Department of Culture and Information, radio and television stations to promote education and communication on food safety.

+ It is necessary to diversify forms of mass communication to raise awareness of food safety. Not only writing articles, conducting reports on food safety or hanging large billboards in crowded places, the media can create food safety-related applications that help check the origin, nutrition of food or look up the essential food safety knowledge.

- For local governance:

+ Focus on communication on food safety-related contents to all officials.

+ Regularly monitor and update accurate information to promptly notify the people.

- For the people:

+ Proactively look up and verify information on food safety, and at the same time avoiding creating social opinions from inaccurate sources.

+ Refer to more information about providers of food with clear origin, information, and expiration date for appropriate consumption.

+ Moderately and properly use communication devices to build awareness and behavior of effectively consuming safe food.

Implications

The research findings affirm the significance of mass communication in disseminating information to heighten awareness about food safety. In particular, the approach, communication content and channels should be suitable to the public. The survey's respondents preferred multiple channels such as television, newspapers, social networks, like Facebook, Zalo and face-to-face conversation at conferences and consultations. The content of legal documents, decrees and guidelines should be more accessible to the public in different regions, education levels, occupations, and ages. The results therefore call for future studies on the evaluation of new media on food safety and their relationship with public perception and behavior.

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