Public Trust in Government and Compliance with Policy during COVID-19 Pandemic: Empirical Evidence from Vietnam

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Abstract

This study explores how much the Vietnamese public trust their government during the COVID-19 pandemic and how public trust in government translates into support and compliance with government's policy and regulation. The findings of the study show that there is a significant positive correlation between accessible, trustworthy communication and public trust in government. The findings also demonstrate a significantly moderate positive correlation between public trust in government and policy compliance. The more the public trust the government, the more likely they comply with government's policy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords Public trust in government · Government communication · The COVID-19 pandemic · Policy compliance · Vietnam

Introduction

The main objective of this study is to explore public trust in government in Vietnam. For several political and social reasons, the study to measure public trust in government in Vietnam has neither been empirically conducted nor the findings of such study, if any, have been released. General statements of public trust in government are more common than specific measurements. Thus, it is an opportunity for this study to fill in the blank, especially when public trust in government turns crucial to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The topic of public trust in government has become increasingly important as the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged many countries in the world, including Vietnam. Until and unless the public trust the way their governments tackle the pandemic, the infections and deaths will stay high and continue to increase. If the public trust

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their governments, they will be more willing to support and comply with government's policy and regulation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Otherwise, noncompliance could result in serious consequences for the society such as the collapse of the healthcare system and social security.

Vietnam has gone through four waves of infections with the first from 23rd January to 16th April 2020, the second from 25th July to 1st December 2020, the third from 28th January to 25th March 2021 and the ongoing fourth from 27th April 2021. By early August 2021, 22 out of 63 provinces and central cities in Vietnam enforced lockdown to break the chain of infections (MOH, 2021a, b). As of 2nd August 2021, there were 157,507 coronavirus infected cases in Vietnam in which 113,040 are currently treated in hospitals; 43,157 had already recovered and 1306 died (MOH, 2021a, b). This is alarming as the number of coronavirus cases is over 42 times higher than that of 13th May 2021 when this manuscript was first drafted.

The fourth wave of infections is much more prolonged and complicated than the first three because of the multiple untraced sources of infections in the community and the surge of highly contagious Delta B.1.617.2. variant. The fourth outbreak of the pandemic is a challenge to both public healthcare capacity and trust in government. It is, therefore, extremely important to explore public trust in Vietnam's government during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study aims to answer the following questions: Do the Vietnamese public trust their government during the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, how much? How is public trust translated into support and compliance with government's policy and regulation?

Literature review

Trust is a multidimensional concept, which is approached from different disciplines and perspectives (Cook, 2001; Smith et al., 2013; Stern & Coleman, 2015). Trust is considered as a facilitating factor for economic and social transactions (Fukuyama, 1995; Resnik, 2011; Rothstein, 2011). Trust is also viewed as social capital, which is crucial in personal, occupational, and social domains (Szkudlarek & Biglieri, 2016; Six, Zimmeren, Popa, & Frison, 2015). Trust is associated with distrust, risks, and vulnerabilities. Hawley (2012) argued that trust is closely related to "reliability, predictability, expectation, cooperation, goodwill" and at the same time "distrust, insincerity, conspiracy, betrayal, and incompetence."

Building trust is essential to effective governance, especially in complicated systems because it is regarded as "a means of reducing the complexity and risks that come from the autonomy and freedom of others" (Cerna, 2014). Blinde (2007) pinpointed the causal links between trust and governance that trust feeds into good governance, and vice-versa. Walle and Migchelbrink (2020) argued that both outcomes and processes of public policy wield significant influence on public trust in government. If people trust their government, it will be less likely for government to resort to coercion, forcing people to follow the policies (Cairney & Wellstead, 2021; OECD, 2013).

However, several scholars argued that trust is an ambiguous concept (Hooghe et al., 2017; Walle & Bouckaert, 2001). Trust can be approached on personal,

interpersonal, organizational, and social dimensions. It can be viewed differently in economic, political, and social settings. The concept of trust also varies from culture to culture. Kumagai and Iorio (2020) attributed the ambiguity of trust to the various approaches by scholars, who used “relational and situational elements and a combination of them.”

Trust in government, particularly public trust in government during crisis has been a popular topic for theoretical and empirical research in public administration and communication. Several researches noted that public trust in government has steadily declined since 1960s (Edelman Hosking, 2019; Intelligence, 2018; PEW, 2019). The declining trust in government is detrimental to public policy implementation as pointed out by OECD (2021a, b, c) that the absence of trust reduces the willingness of citizens and enterprises to comply with policies.

Public trust in government during the COVID-19 pandemic has been a burning topic since 2020. Different dimensions of public trust in government during the pandemic have been explored. Trust in government is important to the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic because it enhances public cooperation with government's measures (Condon & Sinha, 2010; Siegrist & Zingg, 2014). Based on the “Swedish experiment” with COVID-19, Esaiasson et al. (2021) pointed out that during crisis such as war and pandemic, trust and support for government increase as the result of the rally-around-the-flag effects.

Trust in government is pivotal to the implementation of policies against the COVID-19 pandemic. Bavel et al. (2020) stated that higher level of trust in government results in more compliance with health policies such as ban on gatherings. Gozgor (2021) stated that public trust in government during the COVID-19 pandemic is required for “obtaining successful results of economic and social stimulus policies and providing full effect to slow down the rate of outbreaks.” It is, therefore, worthwhile to explore how much the public trust the government and whether public trust is translated into support and compliance with government's policy and regulation with empirical evidence from Vietnam.

Within this study, public trust in government is people's confidence in government communication, policy, and regulation. A variety of factors affects public trust in government either in positive or negative direction. Trust in government can be attributed to demographics (Algan et al., 2016; Christensen & Lægreid, 2005), satisfaction with public services and policies (Walle & Bouckaert, 2001; Gustavsen, Pierre, & Røiseland, 2017; Li, 2016) and media (Gordon, 2000; Moy & Scheufele, 2000). Weible et al. (2020) stated that public trust in government depends on how government communicates technical and scientific information about the pandemic, which rationalizes government's policy choices.

Conceptualization and development of hypothesis

In this study, the correlation between government communication, public trust in government and policy compliance is examined as in Fig. 1. Effective government communication can explain the complicated pathogenesis of the COVID-19 pandemic and yield more confidence in government (Hood, 2006; OECD, 2020;

Fig. 1 Theoretical model of the study

Hyland-Wood, Gardner, Leask, & Ecker, 2021). Only when people believe in government communication, will they trust government's intervention measures (Kim & Shim, 2020; Newton, 2020). In Vietnam, mainstream media is legally set as the essential means of communication for the society and serves as the “voice of the Party and State organizations”, and “forum of the people” (Legal Normative Documents, 2017). Due to this unique function, media occupies an important position in the society. By considering communication as a factor that influences public trust in government, the following hypothesis was developed.

Hypothesis 1 If people find government communication accessible and trustworthy, they will be more likely to trust the government (H1).

The complicated and dangerous course of the COVID-19 pandemic requires governments to take radical intervention measures such as social distancing and lockdown. Public trust in government can influence people's willingness to support these measures to lower the rate of infection and fatality (Balog-Way & McComas, 2020; Enria, et al., 2021). Without public support for government's preventive measures and anti-epidemic solutions, governments must resort to coercion and enforcement (Schmelz, 2021). By considering trust in government as the driver of public support for government's measures and solutions, the following hypothesis was developed.

Hypothesis 2 If people trust the government, they will be more likely to support government's measures and solutions (H2).

H2a If people trust the government, they will be more likely to support government's preventive measures.

H2b If people trust the government, they will be more likely to support government's financial relief and economic stimulus.

H2c If people trust the government, they will be more likely to support government's anti-epidemic solutions.

Successful control of past pandemics such as SARS, H1N1 influenza and the ongoing the COVID-19 pandemic has been attributed to public cooperation with government's anti-epidemic policies and regulations (Abdullah & Kim, 2020; Deurenberg-Yap, et al., 2005; Prati et al., 2011). Saechang, et al. (2021) pointed out that public trust is positively correlated to people's compliance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Previous research proposed governments to build trust as a way to promote policy compliance from their citizens. Considering public trust in government as a factor that influences policy compliance, the following hypothesis was developed

Hypothesis 3 If people trust the government, they will be more likely to comply with government's policy and regulation (H3).

Methodology and data

To test the hypotheses, the survey includes mostly 5-point Likert scale questions, which require respondents to identify either their level of trust from "very low" to "very high" or their support for government's policy and regulation from "totally disagree" to "totally agree". The survey was constructed by analysing government's decrees, reports, resolutions, press releases and other documents about communication, policy, and regulation, which were retrieved from Government's portal (<https://chinhphu.vn>) and Ministry of Health's (MOH) portal (<https://moh.gov.vn>). The indicators of independent and dependent variables used in the survey are provided in Table 1.

The survey was conducted online on Survey Monkey from 27th March to 19th July 2021 when the coronavirus had infected 58 out of 63 provinces and central cities in Vietnam. The online survey is the suitable method to get a big number of responses across the country when travelling is restricted amid rising infections. The survey was released to public via peers, email, Facebook, and other social media to get responses from people in the North, the Middle and the South of Vietnam. To protect the identities of the respondents, the "anonymous responses" setting in Survey Monkey was turned on. Respondents need to agree with informed consent on the front page before starting the survey. The data collected in Survey Monkey was then imported into SPSS 26 for analysis.

Invitation emails were also sent to private enterprises and non-governmental organizations (NGO). Mail list of private enterprises was created with yellow corporate directory. Mail list of NGOs was created from the directory of Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (<http://vusta.vn>) and NGO Resource Centre (<https://www.ngocentre.org.vn>). Specifically, over 1,200 emails were sent to NGOs and 104 responses were received. Hundreds of emails from both private enterprises and NGOs were bounced back. According to official statistics, in the first 6 months

Table 1 Indicators of independent and dependent variables

Variables	Indicators
Accessible and trustworthy communication	<p>Accessing information about the COVID-19 situation and government's responses</p> <p>Accessing information about government's support for the people</p> <p>Evaluating the trustworthiness of information from mainstream media</p> <p>Evaluating the trustworthiness of information from social media</p> <p>Understanding government's warning against the COVID-19 pandemic</p> <p>Understanding scientific information about the COVID-19 pandemic</p> <p>Providing the authorities with information about the COVID-19 pandemic</p>
Trust in government's statements about the pandemic	<p>The priority of the government is to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic to protect people's life and health</p> <p>The consistent direction to all the ministries, agencies and provinces is to fight the pandemic strongly, effectively with the slogan "to fight the pandemic is like to fight against foreign invaders."</p> <p>We must make sure that infected patients, including foreign ones are not left unattended and are quickly cured</p> <p>The government is consistent with the "dual objectives", that is to promote production, boost economic growth at the same time to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, and prevent potential outbreaks</p> <p>Vietnam practised transparency and accountability from the beginning of the pandemic without lying to the people and the world</p> <p>Vietnam has the capacity, resources, spirits, and experiences to control the pandemic</p>
Support for preventive measures	<p>Mandating facemask in public spaces</p> <p>Requiring health declaration and installation of contact-tracing apps</p> <p>Cancelling inbound tourism</p> <p>Isolating and quarantining high-risk and infected areas</p> <p>Testing and tracing infection extensively</p>
Support for financial relief and economic stimulus	<p>Providing financial allowance to affected citizens</p> <p>Reducing electricity bills for citizens and enterprises twice in 2020</p> <p>Supporting enterprises by extending VAT and corporate income tax deadline</p> <p>Promoting cashless payment solutions</p> <p>Promoting foreign direct investment to attract quality, high-tech and large-scale projects in the new context</p>

Table 1 (continued)

Variables	Indicators
Support for anti-epidemic solutions	Issuing regulation to punish violations of pandemic prevention (spread of fake news, runaway from quarantine areas, dishonest health declaration, etc.)
	Punishing violators of pandemic prevention
	Closing non-essential places in high-risk areas
	Limiting crowded public events in time of imminent outbreak
	Increasing border control to prevent foreign sources of infections
Compliance with policy and regulation	Declaring health condition
	Keeping safe distance from others
	Installing contact-tracing apps on smartphone
	Wearing facemask in public spaces
	Refraining from going to crowded places
	Washing hands regularly with soap or antibacterial gel
	Contacting the authority if developing COVID-19 related symptoms such as cough, fever, aches, and pains, etc
	Taking COVID-19 test to diagnose health condition
	Providing information about personal itinerary if tested positive with COVID-19
	Staying in quarantine if required by health authority

of 2021, about 70,000 enterprises went out of business or suspended their operation (General Statistics Office, 2021).

The average duration to complete the survey is 7 min. 1260 responses were accepted for analysis after removing 430 responses, which were completed in less than 7 min. The sample includes mainly respondents from the public sector and the private sector, accounting for 35.7 and 30.1% respectively; the rest includes staff from NGOs, workers in industrial parks, freelancers, retired and unemployed respondents. 41.5% of respondents are male, and 58.5% are female. Out of 1,260 respondents, 129 reported having background diseases. The youngest respondent is 18 years old and the oldest is 71. The demographic details of respondents are provided in Table 2.

In the survey, the respondents were requested to identify their main sources of information about the COVID-19 pandemic. The respondents' most common source of information is television (76.3%), closely followed by social media (76%). The two popular social media in Vietnam are Facebook and Zalo with the latter as the Vietnamese-made platform. MOH created their official account on Zalo, which sent out about 3.5 billion messages about the COVID-19 pandemic to people in 2020 (Yen, 2020a, 2020b). This official account also provides updates of pandemic developments, prevention guidelines, and patient support. As in Table 3, the respondents get information about the COVID-19 pandemic mostly from mainstream media such as television, online newspapers, national portals and text messages, which are coordinated by the government.

Table 2 Demographic details of respondents

Workplaces	The North	The Middle	The South	Total
Public sector	110	177	163	450
Private sector	180	66	133	379
Third sector (NGOs)	69	6	29	104
Workers in industrial parks	101	3	1	105
Freelancers	40	25	16	81
Others (unemployed and retired)	53	31	57	141
Total	553	308	399	1260

Public trust in government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

The respondents were requested to identify their level of trust in government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 as "very low" and 5 as "very high". Table 4 shows the percentage of respondents by their levels of trust in government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings show that more people trust government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic than those who don't. 50.5% and 37.1% of respondents reported having very high and high level of trust in government respectively. 0.3 and 7.3% reported having low and very low level of trust in the government respectively while 4.8% stayed neutral. Overall, the Vietnamese public trust in government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic is higher than high ($M=4.23$, $SD=1.08$).

The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run to examine whether there are any statistically significant differences between the means of independent groups. Table 5 summarizes the results of the one-way ANOVA and shows that there were no statistically significant differences between group means of different residence region, different gender, different age, different education, and different health condition ($p>.05$).

Table 3 Main sources of information during the COVID-19 pandemic

Sources of information	Frequency	Percent
Television	962	76.3
Social media	958	76.0
Online newspapers	947	75.2
National portals (Government and MOH)	838	66.5
Government text message	724	57.5
Radio	286	22.7
Word of mouth	236	18.7
Print newspapers	123	9.8
Key opinion leaders	68	5.4
Others	23	1.8

Table 4 Respondents' trust in government's response to COVID-19

Trust in government's response to COVID-19	Frequency	Percent
Very low	92	7.3
Low	4	.3
Neutral	60	4.8
High	468	37.1
Very high	636	50.5
N	1260	100.0

However, the one-way ANOVA determined a statistically significant difference in the mean trust in government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic by respondents of different workplaces ($F(5,1254)=2.666$, $p=.021$). Respondents from the public sector have the highest trust in government ($M=4.35$, $SD=1.11$), followed by workers in industrial parks ($M=4.34$, $SD=.85$), freelancers ($M=4.24$, $SD=.95$), and the

Table 5 Respondents' trust in government's response to COVID-19 by demographics

Variable	Respondents' demographics	N	M	SD	p-value
Residence region	The North	553	4.2061	1.09055	.578
	The Middle	308	4.2175	1.14207	
	The South	399	4.2782	1.02005	
Workplace	Public sector	450	4.3533	1.11561	.021
	Private sector	379	4.1266	1.11498	
	Third sector	104	4.0865	1.02503	
	Freelancers	81	4.2469	.95565	
	Workers in industrial parks	105	4.3429	.85292	
	Others	141	4.1418	1.10571	
Gender	Male	523	4.2925	1.04519	.093
	Female	737	4.1886	1.10507	
Age	< 20	52	4.1346	1.04841	.508
	21–30	346	4.1763	1.09047	
	31–40	515	4.2951	1.07060	
	41–50	256	4.1797	1.12674	
	51–60	75	4.2533	.98767	
	> 61	16	4.4375	1.03078	
Education	Not finishing high school	48	4.4167	.87113	.405
	High school graduate	77	4.2078	.96433	
	Undergraduate	674	4.2329	1.08236	
	Postgraduate	439	4.2118	1.11783	
	Others	22	4.2727	1.16217	
Background disease	Yes	129	4.2946	.96342	.486
	No	1131	4.2246	1.09422	

retired and the unemployed ($M=4.14$, $SD=1.10$) while those from the third sector have the lowest trust in government ($M=4.08$, $SD=1.02$). Figure 2 shows the mean levels of trust in government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic by respondents of different workplaces.

Statistical analysis and hypothesis testing

The Cronbach's alpha and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were run to examine the reliability of the following variables: accessible and trustworthy communication; trust in government's statements about the pandemic; support for preventive measures; support for financial relief and economic stimulus; support for anti-epidemic solutions and compliance with anti-epidemic policy and regulation. Table 6 summarizes the results of the Cronbach's alpha and EFA. All of them were found reliable as their Cronbach's alpha is above 0.6; the smallest corrected item-total correlation is over 0.3; the average variance extracted (AVE) is over 50% and similar items correspond with one another.

The mean and standard deviation of these variables were computed for further correlation test as in Table 7. The variable of public trust in government is computed by taking the average of trust in government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and trust in government's statements. The "Bivariate" function in SPSS was run to test the correlation between independent variables and dependent variable. If the correlation is significant ($p < .05$), we can further determine if it is positive or negative with the correlation coefficient. The correlations less than 0.3 are considered weak; greater than 0.7 are considered strong while anything between 0.3 and 0.7 are considered moderate (Cohen, 1988).

It was predicted that if people find government communication accessible and trustworthy, they will be more likely to trust the government. A product-moment Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to evaluate the relationship between

Fig. 2 Trust in government's response to COVID-19 by workplaces

Table 6 Cronbach's alpha and exploratory factor analysis of variables

Variables	Items	Smallest corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha	AVE
Accessible and trustworthy communication	7	.489	.883	60.254
Trust in government's statements about the pandemic	6	.802	.943	77.854
Support for preventive measures	5	.583	.873	68.116
Support for financial relief and economic stimulus	5	.679	.882	68.321
Support for anti-epidemic solutions	5	.686	.913	75.164
Compliance with anti-epidemic policy and regulation	10	.641	.946	69.325

accessible, trustworthy communication and trust in government. There was a moderate, positive correlation between the two variables ($r = .370$, $N = 1260$) and the relationship was significant ($p < .001$). The easier people find to access and evaluate government communication, the more likely they trust the government. Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported.

It was also predicted that if people trust the government, they will be more likely to support government's preventive measures, financial relief and economic stimulus, and anti-epidemic solutions. A product-moment Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between trust in government and support for these measures and solutions. There was a moderate, positive correlation between trust in government and support for preventive measures ($r = .443$, $N = 1260$); trust in government and support for financial relief and economic stimulus ($r = .358$, $N = 1260$); and trust in government and support for anti-epidemic solutions ($r = .404$, $N = 1260$). All these relationships were significant ($p < .001$). Thus, hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c are supported.

In addition, it was predicted that if people trust the government, they will be more likely to comply with government's policy and regulation. A product-moment Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between public

Table 7 Mean and standard deviation of variables

Variables	N	M	SD
Accessible and trustworthy communication	1260	4.0675	.62736
Support for preventive measures	1260	4.5222	.61440
Support for financial relief and economic stimulus	1260	4.3984	.61472
Support for anti-epidemic solutions	1260	4.5570	.57864
Compliance with anti-epidemic policy and regulation	1260	4.5871	.48995
Public trust in government	1260	4.2468	.72892

trust in government and their policy compliance. There was a moderate, positive relationship between these two variables ($r = .367$, $N = 1260$) and the relationship was significant ($p = .001$). Thus, hypothesis 3 is supported. Table 8 summarizes the results of the hypotheses test, which correspond to the theoretical model of the study.

Discussion

Trust in government has become increasingly important in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic as countries around the world continue to witness the widespread of the Delta variant, which requires governments to take unconventional and unprecedented measures. Several researches and policy briefs pointed out that building trust is essential to manage health crisis as the more people trust the government, the more willingly they comply with government's policy and regulation. Public trust in government enhances the effectiveness of pandemic management and effective pandemic management increases trust in government (Goldfinch et al., 2021).

Government communication

The coronavirus is an invisible enemy that must be conquered with transparent communication and scientific knowledge. Due to inadequate scientific knowledge of the coronavirus, several countries have taken trial and error responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Scientific information is essential to defeat misinformation, disinformation and mal-information. Deslatte (2020) reasoned that as citizens are overwhelmed with information, they find it difficult to distinguish "facts from fallacy." Therefore, government communication about the pandemic should be as accessible, trustworthy, transparent and consistent as possible.

In this study, it was hypothesized that if people find government communication accessible and trustworthy, they will be more likely to trust the government. The findings of the study show that there was a significant, positive correlation between accessible and trustworthy communication and public trust in government ($r = .370$, $p < .001$). The easier people find to approach and evaluate government communication, the more likely they trust the government. Effective government

Table 8 Hypotheses testing results

Hypotheses	r	p-value	Supported
H1: Accessible, trustworthy communication → Trust in government	.370	$p < .001$	Yes
H2a: Trust in government → Support for preventive measures	.443	$p < .001$	Yes
H2b: Trust in government → Support for financial relief	.358	$p < .001$	Yes
H2c: Trust in government → Support for anti-epidemic solutions	.404	$p < .001$	Yes
H3: Trust in government → Policy compliance	.367	$p < .001$	Yes

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

communication clarifies the complicated course of how coronavirus debuted, mutated, attacked human body, and transmitted from one to another.

As all the media organizations in Vietnam are under the leadership of the government while misinformation and disinformation on social media are strictly regulated by the Cybersecurity Law, communication about the COVID-19 pandemic was coordinated by the government. While mainstream media is the official source of information, social media acts as an open forum for public debate about policies. As pointed out in Table 3, the respondents relied on mainstream media for authoritative information about the pandemic. This is Vietnam's unique difference and advantage in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic compared to other countries, who have only private media.

Trust in government

Trust in government is people's confidence in what the government says and does or in how the government delivers on their promises. Communication can cause public trust in government either flourish or diminish, depending on the harmony of government's words and actions. Therefore, it is important to nurture public trust in government with not only accessible and trustworthy communication but also effective policy implementation. Trust increases when the government says and does the right thing at the right time. Easton (1965) regarded public trust in government as the confidence in the government's capacity "to do what is right and perceived fair."

The findings of this study show that 87.6% of respondents trust the government, compared to 7.6% of those who don't and trust in government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic is high ($M=4.23$, $SD=1.08$). This study found that the workplace of the respondents influenced how much they trust the government. As determined by the one-way ANOVA, there was a statistically significant difference between respondents of different workplaces ($F(5,1254)=2.666$, $p=.021$). Respondents from the public sector trust the government the most while those from the third sector trust the government the least. The more independent the respondents are from the government, the less they trust the government.

Other demographic characteristics such as residence region, gender, age, health condition and education did not make any difference to respondents' trust in government. It is a limitation of this study not to include income as a factor that might influence respondents' trust in government. It would have been interesting to explore if and how respondents' income change during the COVID-19 pandemic influences their trust in government.

This study was implemented when the first three outbreaks in Vietnam were successfully controlled and the fourth started to ravage the country. Therefore, its findings should be attributed to the outcome of the first three waves, rather than the fourth. The Delta variant of the coronavirus has caused the fourth much worse with escalating infections and mortality. Public trust in government during the COVID-19 pandemic is not static and can be challenged by the severity of the pandemic and the competence of government to protect people's life, ensure social security, and maintain economic growth.

Policy support and compliance

Public support for and compliance with government's policy are both means and ends to pandemic management. Governments around the world took different strategies to achieve public cooperation with preventive measures and anti-epidemic policies. Successful pandemic management requires mass support and compliance from each citizen as the COVID-19 is a communicable disease, which can easily and quickly spread from one to others. Pak et al. (2021) pointed out that the effectiveness of pandemic management depends on how much people follow public health policies and regulations, which is influenced by their weight of costs and benefits.

This study hypothesized that if people trust the government, they will be more likely to support government's measures and solutions, which include preventive measures, financial relief and economic stimulus, and anti-epidemic solutions. The findings of the study demonstrate that there was a significant and positive correlation between public trust in government and support for preventive measures ($r = .443$, $p < .001$); public trust in government and support for financial relief and economic stimulus ($r = .358$, $p < .001$), and public trust in government and support for anti-epidemic solutions ($r = .404$, $p < .001$).

It was further hypothesized that if people trust the government, they will be more likely to comply with government's policy and regulation. The findings of the study demonstrate that there was a significant and positive correlation between public trust in government and policy compliance ($r = .367$, $p < .001$). The more people trust the government, the more likely they comply with government's policy and regulation. Even though significant, the correlation between public trust in government and public support for and compliance with policies are found to be moderate, rather than strong.

Conclusion

Public trust in government is important in time of crisis, especially in the current COVID-19 pandemic the worst health crisis in the twenty-first century. Trust in government is the driver for public support and compliance with government's policy and regulation, which is essential for successful pandemic management. Effective policy communication and implementation lead to public trust in government meanwhile trust in government results in citizens' support for and compliance with government's policy. The public trust in Vietnam's government during the COVID-19 pandemic is a good showcase for this relationship.

Vietnam has been considered as one of the successful countries in the world to deal with the pandemic with low infection, high recovery, and limited mortality during the first three outbreaks from early 2020 to March 2021. As of 9th January 2021, Vietnam was ranked second after New Zealand by the Lowy Institute (2021) with regards to performance in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the escalating fourth outbreak can be another difficult test for Vietnam's government to maintain public trust, which demands further study.

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Declarations

Ethical Standard I confirm that this work is original and has not been published elsewhere nor is it currently being considered for publication anywhere else. The manuscript has been prepared by the author, who hereby declares no conflicts of interest.

Informed consent Informed consent is obtained from all the respondents of the survey. A written consent statement is presented to the respondents right from the beginning of the survey to inform them about the research objectives, data privacy, voluntary participation of the survey and contact information of the researcher. After reading the statement, respondents need to click on “OK” to proceed to the questions. As the respondents are Vietnamese, the statement is written in Vietnamese language. The translated text of the consent statement is printed below. *Research into “Public trust in Vietnam’s government during COVID-19”. This research aims to explore public trust in government during the battle against COVID-19. The research is conducted by Dr. Vu Thanh Van, senior lecturer at the Academy of Journalism and Communication. ALL THE INFORMATION THAT YOU PROVIDE ARE TREATED CONFIDENTIAL. WE WILL PROCESS YOUR PERSONAL DATA IN A WAY THAT ENSURES YOUR ANONYMITY. The participation in this research is completely voluntary. Your participation can provide valuable information, which may be helpful for more effective management of the pandemic. It will take about 10 min to complete the survey. You will be requested to offer your evaluation and opinion about the measures and policies against COVID-19 pandemic. Please pass this survey to your relatives, friends and colleagues so they may want to do it. Each respondent can do the survey only once. If you have any questions or need any support, please contact Dr. Vu Thanh Van at his email vanvuajc@gmail.com. Thank you for your valuable support.*

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