

Integrating online and postal services in Vietnam's public administration

Dr. Duong Quoc Chinh

Academy of Public Administration and Governance

Dr. Nguyen Thi Thu Cuc

Academy of Public Administration and Governance

Abstract: *In the digital era, governments worldwide - including Vietnam - have actively embraced digital technology to enhance the quality and efficiency of public administrative service delivery. Nevertheless, disparities in technology access among regions and social groups remain a significant challenge, particularly in developing countries. To ensure equity and that no one is left behind, Vietnam has implemented a service-delivery model that combines online public services with public postal services. This approach improves service effectiveness while ensuring integration and timely feedback. The article analyzes how Vietnam leverages this hybrid method to overcome access barriers faced by vulnerable groups and offers recommendations for building an efficient, equitable, and inclusive model of public administrative service delivery in the context of digital transformation.*

Keywords: *Public administrative services; public postal services; Vietnam.*

1. Introduction

In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the global digital transformation, applying digital technology to deliver public administrative services in Vietnam has become increasingly important and urgent. Online public administrative services not only reduce the time and costs borne by citizens and businesses when carrying out administrative procedures but also enhance transparency, openness, and efficiency in state management. This method enables citizens to access

administrative information and services swiftly, without being restricted by geographical distance, while easing the burden on public agencies.

However, in practice, access to and use of online public services in Vietnam still encounter many challenges. Technical infrastructure barriers in mountainous, remote, and isolated areas; limited information technology skills among segments of the population - especially vulnerable groups such as the poor, the elderly, and ethnic minorities - together with the

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financial difficulties that prevent many households from acquiring the necessary devices, all hinder the widespread and inclusive uptake of online public services (CECODES, RTA & UNDP, 2025).

Faced with the imperative of equitable development, ensuring that no one is left behind, the State's mission is to guarantee that every citizen - regardless of economic status, place of residence, or social circumstances - has an equal right to access essential services. This requires the Government to continue promoting digital transformation and develop alternative or supplementary service-delivery methods that can adapt flexibly to actual conditions.

One solution now being implemented in Vietnam is the hybrid model, which combines online public administrative services with public postal services to expand service access, particularly in disadvantaged areas. Leveraging the synergy between digital platforms and the public post service network improves service delivery efficiency and ensures inclusiveness and responsiveness - the core elements of a modern, service-oriented administration.

This article examines the hybrid model of online public services and public postal services in delivering public administrative services in Vietnam. Based on surveys, analysis, and secondary-source synthesis, the article seeks to answer three main questions:

(1) What are the current state and the extent of the use of online public services that involve public postal services in Vietnam?

(2) What specific benefits does the hybrid model bring to the Government, citizens, organizations, and businesses?

(3) How can the effectiveness of the hybrid model be boosted in the present context?

By clarifying these issues, the article aims to contribute both practical and theoretical evidence to improve the mechanism for

delivering public administrative services in a modern, equitable, and inclusive manner amid the nation's digital transformation process.

2. Concept of the hybrid of online public services and public postal services

2.1. Online public services

Recent advances in information and communication technology (ICT) allow the public sector to satisfy citizens' diverse demands for administrative services by restructuring and re-engineering service-delivery processes around user needs (European Commission, 2017). The growth of a digital society has raised citizens' and businesses' expectations that state agencies will provide seamless, high-quality, user-centered digital public services. Consequently, governments must innovate in delivering administrative services through digitalization from the design stage onward.

Online public services are administrative and other services that government agencies deliver to organizations and individuals via the Internet (Government, 2022). State bodies offer them at two levels: (1) Fully online services and (2) Partially online services. Fully online services ensure that all information about the administrative procedure, every step in processing it, and the issuance of results are handled online. Results are returned to users either electronically or through the public postal service. Partially online public services are those in which citizens or organizations can complete forms and submit information online but must still visit the competent agency to finish one or more steps, such as lodging paper originals, verifying source documents, paying fees, or collecting results.

2.2. Public postal services

Public postal services are those provided at the request of the State and encompass universal postal services, postal services for national defense and security, and postal

services for other specialized purposes (National Assembly, 2010). Universal postal service refers to postal services delivered regularly to all citizens under volume, quality, and tariff conditions set by the competent state authority.

To guarantee essential postal services of nationally prescribed standards at affordable prices, the State supports the delivery of public postal services through reserved services and other assistance mechanisms. Providers of public postal services are not permitted to refuse service once users comply with the applicable conditions (National Assembly, 2010).

In the digital era, traditional postal activities - especially letter and document delivery - are progressively being supplanted by digital alternatives. Nevertheless, public postal services remain vital for ensuring equitable, universal access, particularly in remote and innermost areas with limited internet connectivity. Beyond transporting mails, public postal services are expanding into digital services that enable governments and businesses to deliver public services securely and efficiently, while helping to maintain social and economic cohesion amid global digitalization. In the digital age, public postal services are indispensable and must be modernized to meet the new demands of a digital society (Falch & Henten, 2018).

2.3. Combination of online public services with public postal services

Online public services have already delivered clear benefits such as saving time, cutting travel costs, and enhancing transparency in the operations of state administrative bodies. In reality, however, not every citizen can access - or is proficient at - digital devices needed to complete online procedures. This challenge is especially acute for those people living in remote and innermost areas where information

technology infrastructure remains limited.

In this context, the public postal network - with its branches spreading from urban centers to rural villages - has become a vital support channel that enables citizens to reach administrative services more conveniently (Mai, 2021). By combining online public services with public postal services, a new, more diverse, and flexible delivery method has emerged, aimed at inclusiveness and ensuring that no one is left behind. Citizens can submit administrative dossiers at post offices while tracking the processing and giving feedback online through the public service portal. This arrangement saves time and money, reducing the workload at one-stop service counters and easing congestion and backlogs.

In Vietnam, merging these two service types is regarded as a sound and necessary approach to improving public service delivery's efficiency, comprehensiveness, and transparency. According to Mai (2021), this combination is currently being rolled out through three main models:

(1) Support model: online administrative procedures are assisted directly at post-office counters, allowing people without digital access to use public services.

(2) Collaboration model: administrative agencies and the Post jointly develop and co-operate the online public-service system.

(3) Integration model: the online public service platform is embedded directly into the Post's service system, creating a seamless, user-friendly supply chain for administrative services.

Consistent, effective implementation of these models not only optimizes existing resources but also plays a key role in raising the quality of public administrative service provision, thereby contributing to the success of the national digital transformation strategy and building a modern, transparent, and inclusive service-oriented administration.

3. Research methodology

This article employs a holistic approach to analyze the hybrid of online public administrative and public postal services in Vietnam's public service delivery. This approach allows the issue to be examined from multiple viewpoints, linking service delivery efficiency, citizens' access, and inclusiveness within the digital transformation process.

Research data were collected mainly from two sources:

Primary data: extracted from the National Public Service Portal and selected provincial/municipal public-service portals, including information on the number of integrated services, utilization rates, citizen satisfaction levels, and administrative-procedure processing time.

Secondary data comprises international indicators (e.g., the E-Government Development Index, EGD), evaluation reports by domestic organizations (the Ministry of Information and Communications, the Ministry of Home Affairs, etc.), statistical data, and official government publications. These sources were chosen for their credibility and timeliness and cross-checked to ensure validity where primary data were absent.

Two analytical methods are applied: (1) Descriptive statistical analysis to present trends, characteristics, and relationships among indicators reflecting the effectiveness of public service delivery; (2) Comparative analysis to compare how the hybrid model is implemented across different localities, thereby identifying factors that influence effectiveness and the potential for scaling up the model.

This approach ensures objectivity, comprehensiveness, and practical relevance in evaluating the combination of online public services with public postal services while providing policy recommendations suited to

Vietnam's context when the country is pushing for a modern, inclusive, service-oriented digital administration.

4. Research findings

4.1. Results of delivering public services via online platforms

National and provincial public service portals have existed since 2019, helping shift public service delivery from primarily in-person to broadly online. These portals provide digital services based on electronic dossiers and transactions, enabling service access regardless of time or administrative boundaries (Prime Minister, 2019). At the same time, the portals promote administrative reform, realize the goal of placing citizens and businesses at the center of service, increase transparency and public participation, reduce administrative procedures, and transform the notion of a "fixed one-stop shop" into "any one-stop-shop" or even "no physical counter."

As early as 2018, the Government designated the National Public Service Portal as the single gateway that aggregates information on online public services, processing status, and outcomes of administrative procedures by connecting to and retrieving data from ministerial and provincial one-stop information systems, as well as related operational and technical solutions. Ministerial and provincial-level public service portals function as integrated platforms for online public service information, reflecting the progress and outcomes of administrative procedures through data integration and sharing with their respective electronic one-stop-shop systems (Government, 2018).

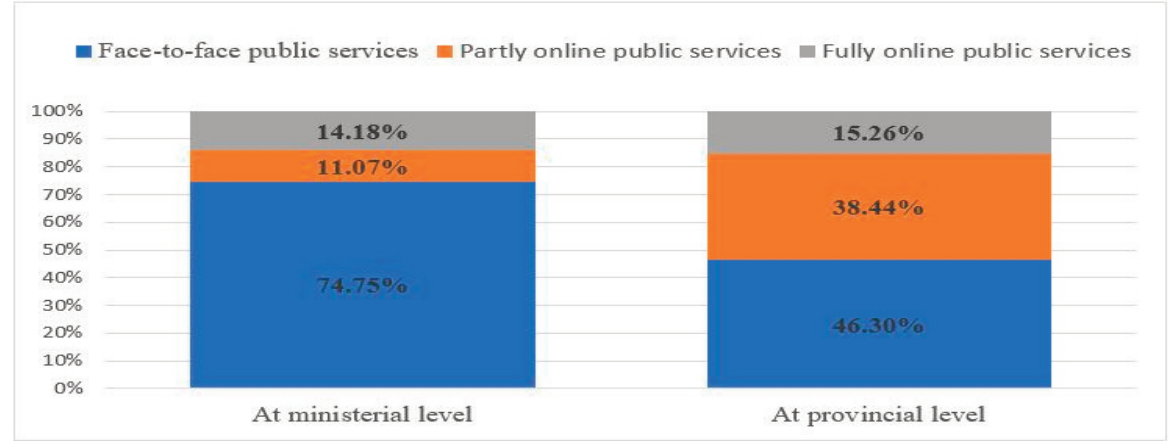
According to data from the Government Office compiled on the National Public Service Portal, by March 2025, the number of fully online public services has continued to rise compared with previous years. However, the 2023 PAPI survey found that only 8.33% of

respondents had ever used the National Public Service Portal, and among those users, up to 30% had used it solely to look up procedural information (CECODES, RTA & UNDP, 2024).

Vietnam has long sought to expand fully online public services, aiming to exceed 80% by 2025. Nevertheless, as of March 2025, fully

online services still accounted for only 14.18% of all services at the ministerial level and 15.26% at the provincial level (see Figure 1). Services provided entirely in person still form the largest share of administrative services - 74.75% at the ministerial level and 46.30% at the provincial level.

Figure 1. Proportion of online public services at ministerial and provincial levels

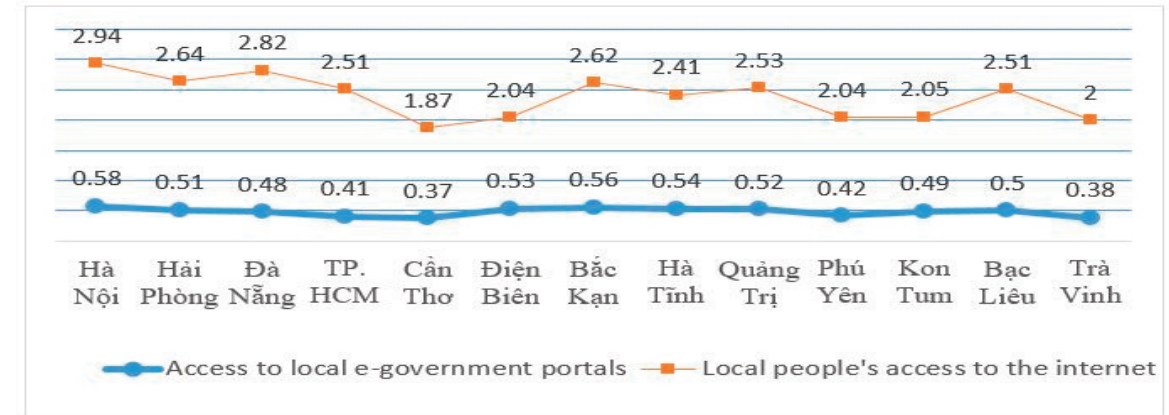


Source: National Public Service Portal (accessed 01 March 2025).

A paradox has emerged: even as more and more Vietnamese citizens use the Internet daily, visits to the Government’s electronic portals - where people can find information on administrative procedures and online services - have not risen and remain consistently low in

numbers. Figure 2 below illustrates internet use rates among residents in several representative localities across Vietnam’s regions and compares them with the corresponding use levels of local government electronic portals.

Figure 2. Comparison between local-government portal use and citizens’use internet-use capability in selected provinces
(Scores represent the average achieved on a scale with a maximum of 3.33.)

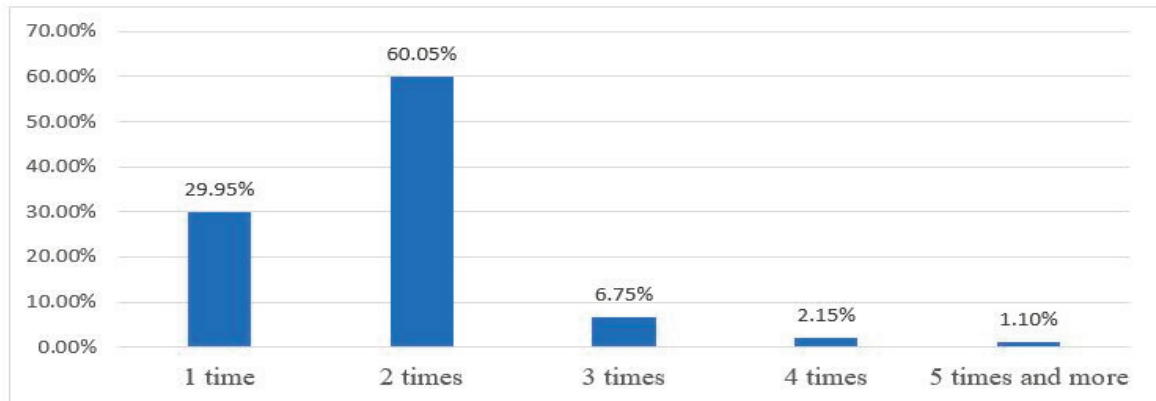


Source: CECODES, RTA & UNDP, PAPI Report (2024).

According to the Government Office, as of December 2023, approximately 70% of citizens still had to complete administrative procedures in person (Government Office, 2023). Data from a 2021 survey by the Ministry

of Home Affairs show that, to complete a single administrative procedure, citizens needed to make at least one trip to a state agency, with 60.65% requiring two trips (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Number of trips citizens make to complete one administrative procedure



Source: Ministry of Home Affairs (2022).

4.2. Use of public postal services in delivering public administrative services

To improve the handling of administrative procedures, reduce compliance costs, and fill the gaps that arise during the expansion of online public services, on 19 October 2016, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 45/2016/QĐ-TTg on receiving dossiers and returning administrative procedure results via public postal services. The Decision allows enterprises that provide such services to perform three forms of support for organizations and individuals: (1) Receive dossiers for administrative procedures; (2) Return results of administrative procedures; and (3) Both receive dossiers and return results as requested (Prime Minister, 2016).

The use of public postal services in delivering administrative services by state agencies has gained attention from citizens and key stakeholders, including the Vietnam Post and administrative bodies at both central and local levels. The primary services

implemented through the public postal network include: (1) Receiving dossiers for administrative procedures: guiding clients, accepting dossiers, and collecting fees at postal counters or clients' premises, then forwarding them to the competent agency; (2) Delivering results of administrative procedures: receiving processed results and relevant papers from the competent agency and forwarding them to clients; (3) End-to-end service: guiding clients, accepting dossiers, collecting fees, forwarding dossiers to the competent agency, receiving the results, and delivering them to clients.

By 2021, public postal service providers were entrusted with several tasks in guiding, receiving, digitizing the dossiers, and returning the results of administrative procedures. This delegation was based on assessing the administrative agency's facilities and workforce and the postal provider's capacity to take on these tasks (Prime Minister, 2021). To harness the effectiveness of public postal services in delivering administrative services -

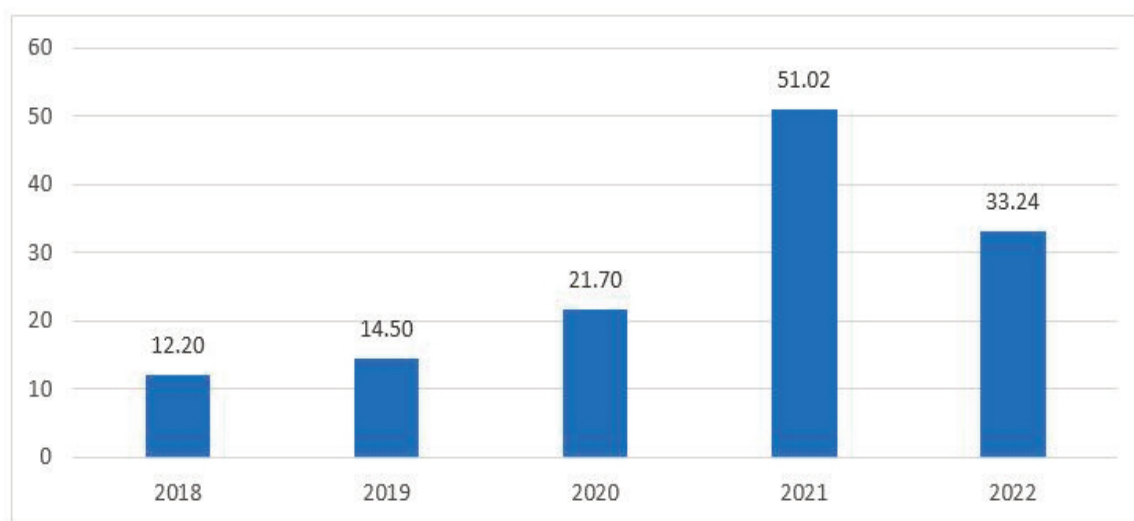
and in alignment with digital transformation goals - the Government amended the one-stop and interconnected one-stop mechanisms. The new rules state that: “Depending on actual conditions and the capacity of the public postal service provider, ministries, ministerial-level agencies, Government-affiliated agencies, and provincial People’s Committees shall decide whether to authorize the public postal service providers to carry out one or more tasks in guiding, receiving, digitizing dossiers, and returning results, by procurement law,” and “The public postal service provider is responsible for assigning staff to work at one-stop shop units to meet task requirements when performing the assigned duties in guiding, receiving, digitizing dossiers, and returning results, by law” (Government, 2021).

To implement these regulations, Vietnam Post has since worked with localities to carry out the following activities: (1) Stationing postal staff to guide, receive, digitize dossiers, and return administrative procedure results in

place of civil servants at the one-stop counters; (2) Locating one-stop counters inside the post-office premises and equip them appropriately; and, (3) Circulating dossiers and results between one-stop shops at different levels.

Citizens and organizations can now send and receive dossiers and results without visiting state offices. Although the number of trips required for each procedure has not fallen, postal staff now make those trips, sparing citizens the time spent waiting at government agencies. In 2021 alone, 51.2 million dossiers and results were handled via the public postal services (Ministry of Information and Communications, 2024) (see *Figure 4*). That year was the time the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted travel, yet essential administrative procedures were still carried out on schedule thanks to the postal network. Vietnam Post’s transaction counters thus became an extended arm of the state administration agencies, bringing public services closer to the people.

Figure 4. Number of dossiers received and results delivered through public postal services
(Unit: million dossiers)



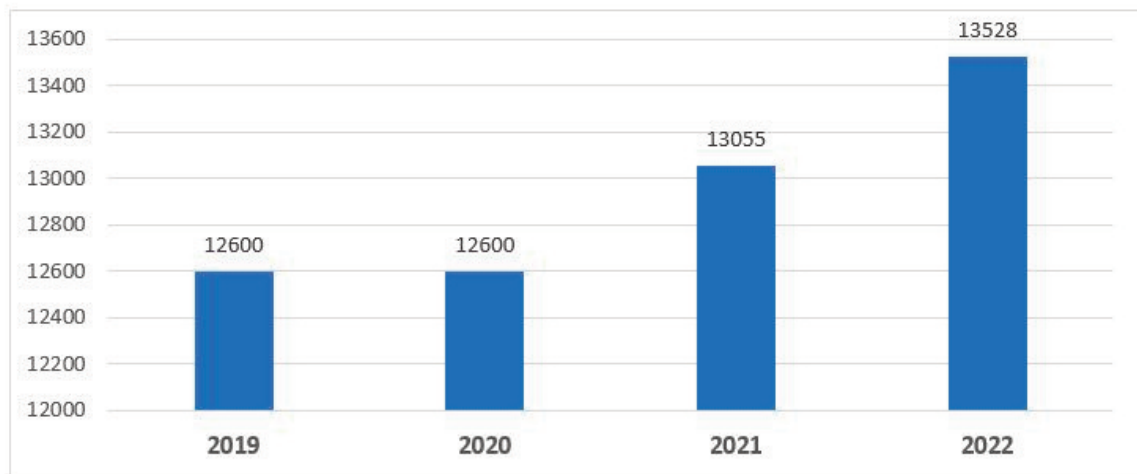
Source: Ministry of Information and Communications (2024).

Across Vietnam, the involvement of public postal services has brought tangible benefits to citizens and organizations when completing administrative procedures. In Kien Giang province, the provincial post reported that in 2023, it received and successfully delivered 225,675 administrative dossiers; handled the receipt and return of results - via the public postal service - for 19 provincial departments and 100% of district and city-level People's Committees, covering 1,855 administrative procedures (Thanh, 2024). In Ha Tinh province, the provincial post recorded a total of 262,725 dossiers processed through the public postal service in 2023, of which 45,757 were received and 216,968 results were delivered (Ha Tinh Provincial Portal, 2023). Likewise, in Thai Nguyen province, nearly 370,200 dossiers were handled in 2023 - an

increase of 120% over that in 2022 - mainly involving essential procedures such as land-use right certificates, driver's licenses, criminal records, national ID cards, and passports (Huyen, 2024).

Regarding citizens' ease of access to public postal services, the Ministry of Information and Communications (2024) notes that the network of postal service counters for receiving and returning administrative dossiers has grown steadily and now covers the entire country. Significantly, by 2023, the commune cultural post office network comprised 8,273 outlets - surpassing Vietnam's total of 8,149 communes - including more than 2,000 outlets in especially disadvantaged, coastal, or island communes (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Number of public postal service points



Source: Ministry of Information and Communications (2024).

4.3. Some assessments

Drawing on the analysis of how online public services are combined with public postal services in Vietnam, the authors highlight three key observations:

First, although the shift from face-to-face to online delivery has progressed, it still faces

significant hurdles. The proportion of citizens using online public services is modest - only 8.33% (CECODES, RTA & UNDP, 2024). Several factors may explain this: limited digital skills, lack of technology devices, or the simple fact that online services do not yet offer clear advantages over in-person transactions. The

online version is often merely a digitized copy of the old paper-based procedures rather than a process redesigned for a digital environment. Moreover, because the share of fully online services remains far below the 80% target set for 2025, citizens still have to visit administrative offices, incurring extra time and travel costs. Another noteworthy point is the gap between high Internet penetration (78.6% in 2022 - Ministry of Information and Communications, 2024) and very low online service portal traffic. This disparity suggests that the problem is related to citizens' digital skills and poor user experience, unfriendly interfaces, and portals that offer too little practical value or convenience.

Second, the hybrid of online public services and public postal services has yielded clear benefits - significantly lower administrative compliance costs and better access for citizens, notably in remote and innermost areas. A nationwide network of public postal outlets, including offices in disadvantaged communes, allows people to access services quickly and from a short distance. Postal staff can even collect dossiers and deliver results to citizens' homes, easing travel burdens. While providing public administrative services, postal workers digitize dossiers and upload them to the online portal, thereby reducing the workload of state agencies and improving data management. Public trust in the hybrid model has risen, reflected in the steadily growing number of dossiers being handled annually.

Third, for the hybrid model to remain effective over the long term, its design and operations must be adjusted to keep users at the center and lighten the burden of the administrative apparatus. Public postal services mainly handle dossier reception,

digitization, and result delivery - tasks "carved out" of the original administrative workflow. However, the absence of uniform technical standards and fully integrated procedures undermines the service's consistency and reliability. This leads to risks of privacy breaches and personal data security issues, as well as the emergence of unnecessary administrative procedures. Without improvements, weaving online public services into the postal network will struggle to deliver the expected convenience, transparency, and comprehensive efficiency in Vietnam's national digital transformation drive.

5. Recommendations and conclusion

Combining online public services with public postal services is an innovative approach that targets citizens and communities who find it challenging to visit state agencies in person or lack the means to use digital technology. The hybrid model helps ensure efficiency, equity, and inclusiveness in delivering public administrative services while reaffirming the principle of putting people at the center of administrative reform. However, to unlock its full potential, strategic adjustments are needed from both government and postal enterprises - especially in service design, legal framework improvement, and expansion of supporting infrastructure.

First, design thinking should be applied in the development and delivery of public administrative services. The combination of postal and online services is mainly mechanical and does not fully meet citizens' needs. Therefore, administrative procedures should be redesigned based on a deep understanding of user experience, clearly identifying which steps can be digitized and which require the involvement of the postal

service. Design ideas should include seamless online submission and receipt of dossiers combined with postal delivery of physical documents; simple, multilingual portal interfaces with clear, visual guidance; and multi-channel support systems, including chatbots, hotlines, and in-person help desks at post offices.

Second, the legal framework should be improved to enable seamless, effective integration of these two services. Reviewing existing legislation is essential to identify and eliminate conflicts or overlaps among rules governing administrative services, public-interest postal services, and online public services. There is a need for explicit provisions on the responsibilities, powers, and coordination mechanisms of all stakeholders, such as state agencies, postal enterprises, and citizens. A comprehensive legal framework will enhance transparency and privacy protection while facilitating complaint resolution and safeguarding users' rights.

Third, expanding the network and strengthening the capacity of public postal service points, especially in remote and disadvantaged areas. This is vital for ensuring inclusive access to public administrative services. Key actions include providing intensive training for postal staff in administrative procedures, communication skills, and digital technology; equipping service points with adequate infrastructure, such as computers, printers, scanners, and high-speed Internet; establishing effective data integration mechanisms between post offices and administrative agencies to shorten processing time and reduce errors; and, allocating budget support for postal service points in difficult areas to maintain sustainable operations.

In conclusion, combining online public services with public postal services is feasible and an inevitable trend in building Vietnam's e-government and digital government. A comprehensive strategy is required to achieve optimal results, including redesigning service processes with a citizen-centered approach, investing in technological infrastructure, and intensifying training to raise digital awareness and skills among users and support personnel at service counters. Once these conditions are met, the vision of a modern, inclusive public administration that leaves no one behind can become a reality.

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