

The role of Facebook in the image management of Vietnamese celebrities

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Abstract

The development of Facebook is one of the most interesting trends in the growth of Internet usage. In Vietnam, the popularity of Facebook means that it has played a significant role in human interaction and strongly influenced the development of celebrities' careers. However, there is a lack of literature on Vietnamese celebrities and their Facebook usage. Therefore, this research aimed at exploring how Vietnamese celebrities use Facebook as a significant and effective tool in managing and promoting their images. Key concepts of celebrity culture and the rise of social media, especially Facebook, are discussed in this research. In researching in the context of Vietnamese celebrities, this paper discovered the media, cultural, and social contexts in which Vietnamese celebrities form their images. The benefits and drawbacks of Vietnamese celebrities' use of Facebook are also pointed out in this study. Recommendations are made concerning celebrities' use of this social network in managing and enhancing their names.

The major findings that emerged were as follows. Vietnamese people, especially the youth, are now more proactive and have more freedom and opportunities to express their thoughts and opinions. In addition, with the globalization and the popularity of social media, especially Facebook, celebrities as well as the youth of Vietnam have embraced global trends, including the different cultural values and lifestyles of other countries, notably the US, Europe, and Korea. In general, in western societies as well as Korea, people are more individualistic; that is, they emphasize their own identities, talents, and ideas and conduct their own ways of life. Many Vietnamese celebrities and "would be" celebrities are now following the Western model whereby they have become obsessed with fame and the need to stand out from the general public. Celebrities are aware that Facebook provides an ideal vehicle through which to develop their images and they post carefully polished photos to attract fans as well as information about their private lives. However, Vietnamese celebrities have not yet taken full advantage of their Facebook pages to promote their images/personae and interaction with fans on Facebook is still limited. Therefore, in order to grow sustainably, Vietnamese celebrities should have their own social media managers who can help them create strategic plans to minimize the negative effects of Facebook use, control online scandals, as well as manage and promote their names online.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Intellectual Property Rights

All images used in this study are under the fair use agreement that allows the use of images for non-commercial educational purposes. Ethics approval is not required for this research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background

In this globalized and interactive world, the Internet and social media have had a huge influence – both positive and negative – on human lives in general and the lives of celebrities in particular. Celebrities are individuals who have achieved a high level of social visibility in the media, the modern version of fame. In order to gain and retain fame, not only do celebrities have to work hard, but they also need to ensure that their images have a remarkable impact when they reach the public's attention (Rein et al., 2006). Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have played a huge role in assisting celebrities to build and promote their images to audiences, while also reinforcing their interaction with fans. Facebook in particular, with its variety of functions and its increasing popularity, has considerably impacted the image management strategies of celebrities. According to Statista, Facebook has 1.55 billion users worldwide and is ranked as the world's number one social networking site. (Leading social networks worldwide as of November 2015, ranked by number of active users [in millions], 2015)¹. Besides updating information and marketing their images and activities, celebrities use Facebook as a place for communicating with fans in order to develop relationships with them (Miller, 2011). Although there has been extensive research on social media and celebrities, very little research has been carried out on the role of Facebook in the image management of Vietnamese celebrities. Therefore, this research will explore the use of Facebook by Vietnamese celebrities in managing and promoting their names and personae.

1.2. Literature review

Celebrities have commanded the attention not only of fans, but also of the general public, the media, and academic researchers. According to Till and Shimp (1998), celebrity news has had a considerable impact on the media and accounts for a high proportion of news coverage. In addition, there are a number of academic researchers who recognize the power of celebrity and are focusing on the use of celebrities as endorsements in advertising (Zipporah & Mberia, 2014; Rein et al., 2006; Shuker, 2013; Roy, 2006; Doss, 2011; Redmond & Holmes, 2007). Obviously, fame can offer celebrities a wide range of benefits. However, it is not an easy task to attain and sustain

¹ <http://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

the level of media exposure that commands the highest levels of earning. Because of the competition with other celebrities and the paparazzi, maintaining an image portfolio is an extremely difficult process which requires patience, calculation, strategic vision, and the cooperation of a team that includes celebrities, managers, public relations practitioners, and image developers. Together this team is responsible for finding and analyzing both good and bad information in the external environment that impacts the image of a celebrity in order to protect this image as an asset (Horton, 2011). According to Curtis (2012), it is essential that celebrities themselves acknowledge their reputation as a strategic asset and invest in managing their image. In addition, celebrities must be aware that their public appearances and the high frequency of media coverage play an important part in maintaining their fame (Turner, 2014). This due to the fact that mass media, especially major media channels such as TV or magazines have a big influence on the formation of public opinion. Both traditional and modern media channels earn substantial income from celebrity journalism and gossip so long as the audience trust the media as a resource for useful information, entertainment, news, or education (Curtis, 2012).

Celebrities and their managers, therefore, aim to control the positive effectiveness of celebrity images whenever and wherever they appear. Bad behaviour and appearance, whilst seemingly a trivial personal matter, can damage a celebrity's image in the eyes of his/her audience, with serious economic consequences. For this reason, celebrity image management is regarded as a continuous and relentless process both for the celebrity and his/her image management team throughout the celebrity's' career. (Rein et al., 2006). Every appearance is calculated carefully, for instance, where and when a celebrity should be present, which activities he/she needs to participate in, which clothes are suitable, and importantly, which media forms he/she should cover. Should unexpected situations arise the celebrity's personal management team is ready to launch a positive spin (Colapinto & Benecchi, 2014).

In terms of celebrity endorsement earnings, according to Till and Shimp (1998), negative information about celebrity endorsers also affects the product or services they are employed to endorse. Because of the halo effect, audiences are likely to react badly toward branded products when brand endorsers are involved in big scandals. Knittel and Stango (2013) offer an example of Tiger Wood since whose personal scandal not only affected his audience's attitude to him but also resulted in a substantial loss to sponsor firms such as Nike Electronic Arts and PepsiCo (Altman, 2005).

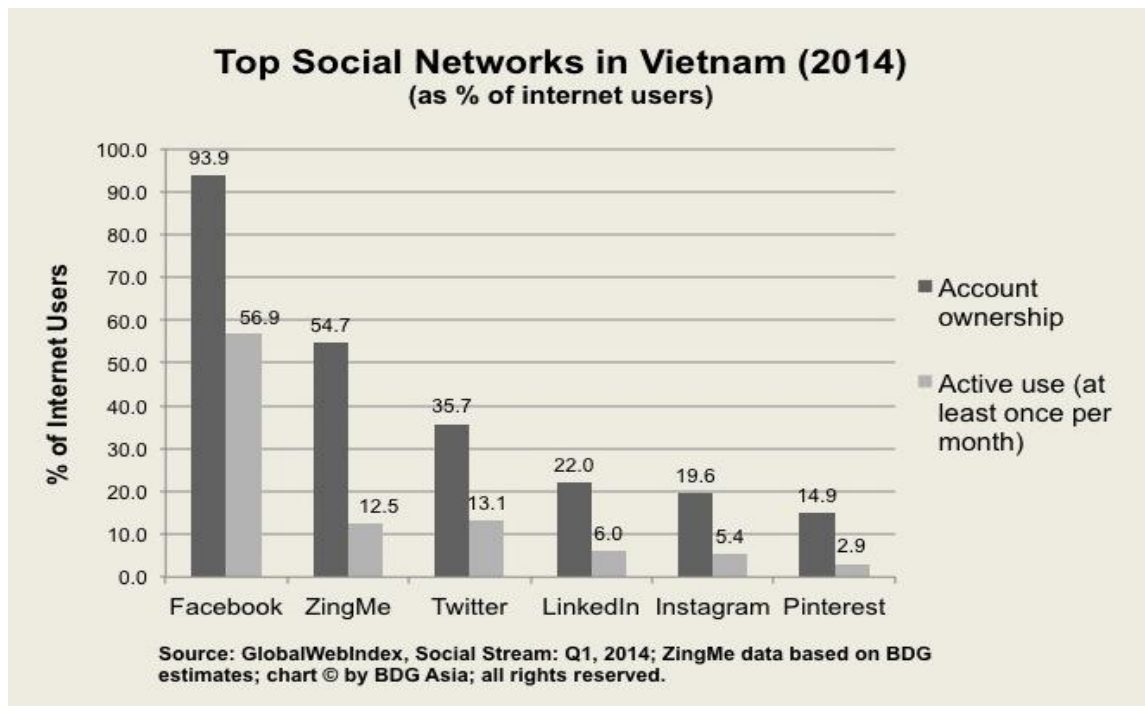
Previously, star marketers and celebrity managers promoted celebrities' images through coverage in newspapers, magazines, journal articles, and television. These outlets continue to be important, but in recent years, the popularity of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube has prompted fundamental changes in the image management of public figures all over the world (Netchitailova, 2014; Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Margiotta, 2012). Celebrities can take advantage of the viral nature of media channels to create a positive impression on audiences in an effort to counter negative reporting in the mainstream media. In this way the explosion of social media, especially Facebook, has provided a strategic management resource that celebrities are able to use to increase the coverage of their image and connect more closely with audiences (Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2010). Researchers argue that social media has created a breakthrough in the way that people communicate with each other; for example, more than 80% of Internet users have social networks accounts such as Facebook or YouTube (Margiotta, 2012). The capacity for information sharing through social media creates a greater opportunity for celebrity publicity. At the same time, however, image management on social media has become more complicated since managers must manage and develop a social media community, a role once undertaken by the traditional media. Similarly, Paolo Balboni (n.d.) concludes that although the power of the Internet has provided celebrities with a large number of opportunities to promote their images through online advertising and broadcasting, these opportunities are always associated with potential unexpected risks in terms of regulations or private information leaks.

As pointed out, with the development of the Internet and the numerous technological advances, social media has had both positive and negative impacts on human social life. Not only does it help users in updating and sharing ideas, information, and stories, but social media also influences public awareness and thinking (Castells, 2000; Miller, 2011). Celebrities, especially Western celebrities have embraced social media as a useful and efficient toolkit for self-promotion. Famous individuals take advantage of its connectivity and interactivity in order to circulate their information and schedules and to establish a sense of intimacy with their audiences (Wright, 2015). For example, Baym (2012) found that a one-to-one relationship is established between musicians and fans through the use of social media which, if used rightly, can enhance the celebrity-audience relationship, gain social support through positive feedback, and improve the interaction with fans. With its popularity and fast speed of transfer, using

social media as promotion channels is cheap and achieves high efficiency in building, spreading, and maintaining fame.

Most Vietnamese celebrities utilize social media to communicate and build intimate relationships with their audiences (Earl, 2013). The majority have established their own Facebook fan page in order to engage with online fans and build up a strong online community. Vietnamese celebrities have a large number of local fans with the top 10 celebrities attracting between 4 to 6 million people respectively. Facebook is the most popular and most widely used social media platform with 93.9% of Internet users in Vietnam possessing a Facebook account and half of this number accessing Facebook at least once a month. In second rank is Zing Me with 54.7% of Internet users owning a Zing account (see Figure 1.1). However, despite the wide range of advantages Vietnamese celebrities gain from these social networking sites, there are many kinds of problems that emerge such as privacy violation, identity theft or defamation.

Figure 1.1. Top social networks in Vietnam (2014)



Source: BDG Asia (2014)

Most of the research literature on celebrities has focused on celebrities and entertainment industries in developed countries such as those in America, Britain, China, Japan, and Korea (Holmes & Redmond, 2006; Rojek, 2001, 2012; Aoyagi, 2005; Fitzsimmons & Lent, 2013; Paek, 2005; Oh & Lee, 2013; Dal, 2012; PWC, 2015; Yusuf & Nabeshima, 2005). There is very little research that has examined the growing

Vietnamese entertainment industry and Vietnamese celebrities who are gradually expanding their career to other nations. The characteristics of Vietnamese celebrities and how they use social networks as PR tools differs from the practice of celebrities from developed countries, particularly in the West. Accordingly, this dissertation will examine Vietnamese celebrities and the influence and importance of social media, especially Facebook, on their image management.

1.3. Aim

The purpose of this study is to explore the use of Facebook by Vietnamese celebrities who wish to enhance their images and interact with their fans. Facebook is currently the most popular of the social networks in Vietnam, with 30 million monthly active users in a total population of approximately 90 million (Tuoi Tre News, 2015). This fact strongly implies the potential of Facebook for the career development of celebrities in Vietnam. Thus, in this study, Vietnamese celebrities and the remarkable impacts of Facebook on their social profile will be examined. Importantly, the author is Vietnamese and wishes to undertake a study that will provide Vietnamese, foreigners, and academic researchers with knowledge about Vietnamese celebrities and how they manage their fame in Vietnam. In undertaking this research, issues of cultural identity in a comparative setting will be highlighted. This thesis aims not only to provide Vietnamese celebrities and their managers with useful information that will help them to improve their image management, but also to become a valuable source for further research by other authors in the future.

The research questions are: How do Vietnamese celebrities use Facebook as a significant tool for their image management? How does this usage reflect the Vietnamese context of their celebrity?

1.4. Hypotheses

In this thesis, two hypotheses are suggested. Firstly, it is hypothesized that on the Facebook pages of four chosen celebrities, the number of posts relating to their cultural products or work is more than the posts relating to their private lives. Secondly, it is hypothesized that fans respond with a higher number of “Likes” or “Comments” to a celebrity’s posting of images or details about their private issues than they do in response to posts about work.

1.5. Organization

This study is separated into the following parts: methodology, five chapters, findings (data), discussion and recommendations, and conclusion. The methodology section will demonstrate the approaches utilized in collecting data. In the five chapters, the author will discuss five topics including the rise of social media (especially Facebook issues), the main aspects of celebrity culture, the role of social media in the image management of celebrities, the Vietnamese context of celebrity, and Vietnamese identity – particularly in the case of celebrities and young people. Data collected from the official Facebook pages of four Vietnamese celebrities will be shown in the findings section. Following that, the author will discuss the Facebook usage of Vietnamese celebrities and make some recommendations. Finally, the conclusion will sum up the critical content and provide suggestions for future research.

1.6. Methodology

This research will focus on Vietnamese celebrities and how they use Facebook as their significant tool to promote and manage their images. It will also examine Vietnam's press, social and cultural values, and the contexts which have impacted the career of Vietnamese celebrities. A key methodological framing will draw on the process of agenda setting (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). This tradition of media analysis looks at how cultural practices are framed by the media, what importance is attached to some processes over others and how the structure of media content primes audiences and readers to respond to issues and media representations. The fundamental point of application to celebrity culture is to map how the celebrity system in Vietnam is represented in the social media, especially Facebook, as prioritizing individualism in what traditionally has been a collectivist culture.

To provide an indicative study of these processes study, the qualitative method will be applied because through an inductive approach, this method not only concentrates on gaining information about the personal attitudes, ideas, perspectives, values, behaviours, interactions, and social contexts of a specific population, but also indicates trends in the subjective notion of social reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Additionally, the qualitative method provides deep and detailed research data, which offers researchers a deeper understanding of the research subject than the quantitative method can give (Biggam, 2008).

The study will draw on secondary data for two reasons: Firstly, secondary data is available and easily accessible to authors (Stewart & Kamins, 1993), and most

secondary data is provided by experts and professionals (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Secondly, Srivastava and Rego (2011) state that not only does the collection of secondary data avoid geographical and temporal problems, but it is also considered to be time and money saving.

Therefore, critical analysis of theoretical texts, concepts, arguments, statistics, and case studies in both English and Vietnamese will be carried out in order to answer the research questions. A review of previous literature concerning the main concepts of celebrity culture and the role of social media in the image management of celebrities will be implemented so as to produce a basic understanding of the field. Additionally, features of Vietnamese celebrity shaped by the press and social and cultural contexts will be explored. Importantly, the Facebook usage of celebrities in Vietnam as well as Facebook's positive and negative impacts on celebrities will be examined in detail. At the same time, a virtual observation will be conducted on Facebook. This will reveal the method by which Vietnamese celebrities manage their image through communicating with their audiences and thereby strengthening the celebrity/audience relationship. Data from four chosen celebrities will be collected from 01/03/2015 to 01/09/2015 and then discussed. Based on the discussion, the author will offer recommendations concerning Vietnamese celebrities and their online image management.

Chapter 2: Social media

The development of information technology and the demand for social interaction have led to the invention and dissemination of social media which have significant impacts on human lives. Social networking sites with their functions have created certain positive and negative influences (Papacharissi, 2009). This chapter will explore the rise of social networking sites in a global world and identify their main characteristics. Especially, the dominance of Facebook, its functions, and the key issues relating to this popular site will be analyzed.

2.1. The rise of social media

Social media are playing an increasingly important role in modern communications and social relationships (Castells, 2000). Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn have reduced barriers to ordinary users, allowing them to contribute information freely and in a sense become producers of the content. This is because in contrast to most of the traditional media which operate on a broadcast model, social media facilitate two-way communication between users. In this respect, the simulation tools of some social media can be seen as reviving the old patterns of face-to-face interaction that existed before the appearance of audio-visual media, including conversation and the exchange of ideas between members of families, friends, and neighbours (Miller, 2001).

As a digital version of word-of-mouth, social networking sites provide a platform for the delivery of speech online. Currently, products and business services are restructuring their Internet marketing strategies based on the collection of both voluntary and involuntary information provided to them by consumers, both online and offline (Cassidy, 2006). This information allows corporations and service providers to identify and evaluate their efforts to position their products and services competitively. Furthermore, the development of Internet technology, especially social networking sites, has reduced barriers to the spread of information and thereby enhanced the quality of online users' experience, and, hopefully, extended the possibilities for a richer flow of communication and in some measure a greater opportunity for user-created content. However, Boyd and Ellison (2007) state that ensuring and managing the accuracy and reliability of the information spread among Internet users is demanding. The onus is also on users to be conscious in identifying and verifying received information. At the same time, the actual expansion in content has, among other issues, created the

phenomenon of clutter: “Internet users are influenced daily by blogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds and myriad forms of content sharing” (Curtis, 2012, p.3).

Facebook was created by Harvard undergraduate students based on the desire to connect students together (Mezrich & Chamberlain, 2009). According to a study of social media platforms conducted by Pew Research Center (2013), the engagement (and numbers) of Facebook users continues to grow, while daily use on other platforms shows little change. Pew Research Center also reported that 52% of online adults use multiple social media sites with Facebook as “home base”, with significant overlaps with other platforms. However, although Facebook is the most widely used social networking site on the Internet, there has been a recent generational shift in Facebook users. According to the 2014 Facebook Demographic Report, 3.3 million Americans aged 13-17 had left Facebook over the prior three years. By contrast, within the 55+ year-old population, Facebook had its biggest growth of 12.4 million new users in the same time period.

Another popular social networking site is Pinterest which is a content-sharing service that allows members to pin or post photos and videos to their pinboards. Pinterest users are heavily skewed by gender, with a female to male ratio of 68%, and users generally have a high household income level. Instagram, which was acquired by Facebook since 2012, is an online mobile photo and video sharing service. Photos can also be shared through Instagram on several other networking platforms such as Facebook, Tumblr and Flickr. The 18-29 year-old age group is the main market for Instagram. It is also the only platform that has a strong skew towards urban dwellers and the non-white population of the US. Another of the well-known social network sites used in Western society is Twitter, through which users can send and read maximum 140-character messages called tweets. Anyone can read tweets but users must be registered to send them. While only about 7% of Americans use Twitter, those who do are likely to follow people, brands, or companies and check their Twitter feed frequently during the day. Besides these informal networks, it is important to mention professional networks such as LinkedIn, a business-oriented social network service which is used to build connections and professional relationships. Because of the professional nature of the site, LinkedIn is especially popular among college graduates and employed people. The effort needed to maintain a presence on LinkedIn is less than other platforms. Meanwhile, celebrities or royalty are members of ASmallWorld – a site only operated in the community of prominent and affluent people (Papacharissi, 2009).

Virtually, anyone with Internet access tool can easily write a blog, review, comment, post pictures, and update their status online. This communication potential has created new forms of demand and new communication tools to meet this demand. According to Alexa (a company providing commercial web traffic data and analytics), in December 2015, Facebook was ranked as number two in the top 500 most-visited sites on the web (number 1 was Google), and YouTube was ranked as third (The top 500 sites on the web, 2015). In the online world today, a great deal of data on the behaviour of social media users can be captured and analyzed immediately and new ideas can be easily controlled via social media services with different associations.

2.2 Characteristics of social media

2.2.1. Advantages

Typical social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube provide users with free website space to upload their contents and give them a unique website address for posting and sharing these contents. For example, Twitter users have their own website addresses where they can upload contents, or in other words, make tweets. Another characteristic of social media is that various content formats are adopted from photographs, texts, and video. Furthermore, social media allow users to fill in their personal details such as name, date of birth, address, and phone number online (Castells, 2000). This personal information is then used to build users' profile and analyzed to connect them with other users with whom they may want to be friends, for example, people who study in the same university. Importantly, social networking sites create a range of conversational modes in the form of one-to-one, one-to-many or many-to-many. So when Lionel Messi – a world-famous footballer – tweets about his upcoming match, it would be one-to-many communication since he is a celebrity. However, when he finds an interesting response by a follower, he may tweet back personally, which creates a one-to-one communication. Should other followers include themselves in the conversation with their tweets, many-to-many communication is established. One of outstanding features of social network sites is real-time conversation, which enhances not only the speed but also the breadth of information dissemination (Baym, 2012). A tweet by Justin Bieber asking which photo he should use for his album cover will receive numerous replies by fans in just a few hours (Johnson, 2012). Social networks such as Facebook and Twitter are used as the brand driven tools to promote the individual identity of the celebrities. These performances are launched online within the social circles. In addition, social media applications provide flexible and

personalized modes of sociability, which allows individuals to sustain their social ties (weak and strong) through a variety of online tools and strategies (Lampe, Ellison & Steinfield, 2006). Hence, users can engage in social behaviours through variable levels of involvement and activity thanks to these customized expressions of online sociability.

The Global Web Index (2009), which monitors the phenomenon of social media, reported that the use of social media can be divided into four main groups of users. These are:

- (1) Watchers (79.8% of Americans who use social media) who consume content only to help decision making and are informed
- (2) Sharers (61.2%) who download and pass on information to help others and demonstrate knowledge;
- (3) Commenters (36.2%) who account for all of the products and pricing, evaluating employee participation and contribution.
- (4) The creators (24.2%), who generate their own content in an effort to express their identity.

Besides, business users derive several advantages through social media marketing, including cost saving since most social media sites are free for accessing, building profiles and posting information. Those people who are interested in the information, the products, and the services of the company or business can follow them online. However, Lampe et al. (2006) offer a different interpretation of the cost-saving aspect of social media marketing. They state that the use of social media requires businesses to spend a lot of time and effort on building strategies, managing contents, and evaluating results – and throughout this, time is money. However, compared to traditional media like television and newspapers, social media provide an option that requires significantly lesser costs. Moreover, business commentators all agree that social media have a viral multiplier effect, as people who read a business's information can also recommend it to other people, so large numbers of the public are reached. For example, a video series called *Will it blend* that displays hi-tech devices like an Iphone or Ipad being chewed into pieces by a Blentec Blender has gone viral, receiving recognition nationwide (Borges, 2008). With the real-time facilitation of communications, organizations can develop their relationship with potential customers and build strong ties with a customer base.

2.2.2. Disadvantages

Nevertheless, negative news or bad rumors about an organization can be spread widely, which might heavily damage the reputation of the organization. For example, Facebook as the most powerful social network receives many complaints about companies' performance and quality of service. There is also an issue of commercial confidentiality with "hacktivism", for example, attacks on Sony. Although social media offer opportunities to expand one's personal network alongside maintaining existing relationships, thereby facilitating social interaction and self-expression, they also extend the potential for abuse and deception. Netizens (Internet users) can use social media for negative purposes such as cyber-bullying, stalking, or privacy violation. According to Brunty and Helenek (2012), cyber-bullying is the repetition of harmful behaviours expressed via electronic media. Since expressing opinions is much easier online, a number of people ('keyboard heroes') have attacked their targets through social media sites, using the "screen" guard to protect themselves. These attacks show hatred, dislike, and jealousy through impolite and harsh comments (or symbolic responses like dislikes). According to the 2011 Pew Internet report, 88% of teenagers have witnessed other people being cruel or mean through social networking sites, while 15% of teenagers admit that they have been the targets of cyber-bullying (Brunty & Helenek, 2012). Privacy can also be threatened by social media sites. Madden (2012) points out that Internet users value their privacy and personal information being accessed, tracked, used and shared. However, as Laurie Thomas Lee (2013) points out, user information can be easily acquired without permission. It takes people just a few minutes to search on social media sites to find out lots of things about others. For example, a person can be searched based on a photo in which other people in the photo are known. It is then just a matter of checking their Facebook friends' lists.

The development of social media has raised concerns with people all over the world. In sum, there are different types of social media applications with different usage and purposes and each one is accompanied by a wide range of positive and negative consequences. Not only do they expand personal networks, facilitate interpersonal interactions in which users can share experiences, exchange ideas, raise voices, and access information, but they also generate controversy and detrimental effects. In spite of these negative aspects, in recent years, social media continue to be used worldwide.

2.3. The dominance of Facebook

The increasing popularity of Facebook with different age groups and different social classes has been observed all over the world. “From a site largely dominated by student use, and youth in general, Facebook is becoming an instrument available to people of all ages” (Miller, 2011, p.169). One of the main reasons for its current popularity is that it provides users with a place for making their own profiles, displaying their pictures, connecting to their friends, and viewing others’ profiles (Papacharissi, 2009). Mark Zuckerberg – the founder of this social media who was honoured as Man of the Year for 2010 by *Time* magazine - states that Facebook creates “a social utility connecting you with the people around you” (cited in Reagan, 2009, para. 9). There were more than 47,000 college, high school, employee, and regional networks use Facebook and there are over 600 searches and over 30 billion page views per month (Papacharissi, 2009). As mentioned in the chapter one, Facebook was the most popular social networks worldwide in November 2015 with 1,55 billion active users. Such statistics prove its importance and utility. New Media Observatory (2009) shows that users join Facebook because they want to try a new web service and fascination with a new technology is a part of the rapid take-up.

2.3.1. The impact of Facebook as a communication resource

Using Facebook is part of the daily routine of many Internet users. On average, a Facebook user posted photos, links, videos, and other contents approximately 30 times per month (Shuker, 2013). Photo, status and information sharing abilities attracted online users and created Facebook’s popularity, and for some it was addictive (Papacharissi, 2009). New information technology such as Facebook has created changes in the usage of earlier forms of information technology such as e-mail and text. Many use Facebook regularly to communicate with friends, although this is a very fundamental usage. However, such usage provides economic benefits since it is cheaper than texting or calling via a mobile phone. Many people also use Facebook for various other functions, such as organizing meetings with people or to perform tasks. Facebook has certain advantages, in communication, it is faster, quicker, and it will be read and responded to sooner. Many users say that they chose Facebook to organize their activities since it is more efficient. Furthermore, unlike offline face-to-face group meetings, Facebook users can have private conversations with many friends at the same time through a private messaging (PM) setting without having the feeling of shyness, awkwardness, or embarrassment. A key feature of Facebook, then, is being “private” in

“public”. Also, according to Boyd (2006), “personal things, more reflective things, deeper things about themselves are easily expressed on Facebook than in everyday life” (p.215). One of the interesting features of the current trend in Facebook usage is that many young individuals consider it as their friend who can always be there, right beside them whenever they need someone to help them cope with stress, depression, sadness, or the perennial problem of boredom. Especially, for people studying or migrating to other countries, the effects of geographical separation are alleviated since users can keep in touch with significant others frequently and with the sense of closeness and intimacy. Facebook functions as a site for intimate transnational communication, allowing friends and family to sustain intense interaction in place of a face-to-face meeting. International students felt that Facebook helped to maintain ties with their homeland and their families as well as to conform to the social life on campus (Patrick, 2010). As Miller (2011) concludes, “Facebook becomes a part of users’ social life” (p.43); however, he added that Facebook is not an actual friend as many believe, but a means for a person to tell their existing friends that they need company, attention, and supports.

Facebook is also applied as a useful vehicle for a wide range of commercial pursuits, an effective promotional channel, and a convenient place for shopping activities. With its social interaction and many approved applications, many users of Facebook successfully run their own business in a variety of fields, especially fashion, food, and cosmetics. Additionally, Facebook can bring comfort, support, and solidarity to the community through charity activities and humanitarian work. “The mobilization of aid from ordinary people which might not otherwise have been possible is enabled by Facebook” (Miller, 2011, p.183). Victims of Haiti earthquakes, Thai and Japanese tsunamis or Vietnamese floods have received financial, medical, and spiritual support from people all over the world thanks to posts calling for charity aid on Facebook. Also, there are many campaigns established on this site for humanitarian purposes such as cancer treatment, animal or environment protection, or anti drug trafficking. In terms of politics, Facebook can facilitate political discussion and messaging which can lead to revolutionary political consequences. The Arab Spring is one typical example of this argument. There are lots of posts and shares calling for support for or against certain issues every hour.

2.3.2. Facebook and personal networks

In terms of individual communicative networking, Castells (2000) points out that the Facebook infrastructure facilitates communication. Therefore, it is perceived as an effective tool for sustaining existing relationships. It helps users to keep in touch with distant friends and establish contact as a routine event. These features play a significant role of filling a void, providing users with a service to help maintain relationships with people with whom they do not have a desire for immediate contact but want to maintain a link (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Even more common is the tendency to use Facebook to connect with old friends from the past. Facebook is regarded as a place for resurrecting the connections with many people from the early parts of users' lives (Miller, 2011). Importantly, Facebook helps users to expand their personal network through starting new relationships. "It help us to find out a considerable amount about potential friends, without requiring any awkward face-to-face interaction" (Miller, 2011, p. 165). Users like how easy it is to find someone on Facebook through its open connectivity in contrast with the limitations of MSN Messenger or MySpace, for example, where it is necessary to know the e-mail address or alias of a person. Nevertheless, one question remains as to whether a friend on Facebook is a real friend or not. Often a brief exchange of information occurs with strangers, but it usually only lasts a few weeks, and does not lead to lasting friendships. Also, sometimes the only reason for sending or accepting a friend request is to increase the total number of friends (Miller, 2011). Thus, Facebook can be seen as place of superficial relationships and it has received criticism for this. In a study by Muise, Christofides and Desmarais (2009), the authors added to this argument by stating that "almost all young people in the research reported that they are somewhat likely to have Facebook friends who they do not know" (p.442). Many comments, messages, support, or likes on Facebook are produced by protocols and are not genuine expressions of users' interests.

However, it must be admitted that online relationships develop their own reality. Therefore, in some cases, users trust and feel a greater sense of intimacy with Facebook friends than they do with their offline friends, which perhaps explains why they share private information with online friends more easily. Furthermore, many can enlarge their relationship network or seek for new friendships in a safe, comfortable, and convenient way through this popular connection site. Facebookers can also explore and observe someone else on Facebook confidentially and quietly before deciding to start a relationship with them.

At the same time, checking someone out can cross the line into stalking behaviour and over involvement in online relationships can lead to jealousy which may jeopardize established relationships. The New Media Observatory (2009) found that personal ego expression and "curiosity of the masses" are the main gratifications derived from Facebook use and these account for Facebook's success as well as its limitation. Therefore, while users acknowledge the positive aspects of Facebook in helping them to communicate and keep in touch with friends, they criticize the use of personal exposure and the general curiosity it brings. The information accessibility and openness of Facebook has increased the tendency to pry and intrude into the private lives of others. Users can be curious and want to know more about what others, especially their partner and his or her friends, do, say, and have, which can easily create jealousy. Holding a similar point of view, Persch (2009) maintains that the open, public nature of Facebook means that it is responsible for producing suspicion and jealousy in romantic bonds. Users become "nosey parkers" which creates a vicious cycle in which individuals are exposed to "potentially jealousy-provoking information about their partner, which creates a feedback loop whereby heightened jealousy leads to increased surveillance and persistent surveillance would give them more information" (Muise et al., 2009, p. 443).

2.3.3. Self-representation and the question of authenticity

Authenticity is broadly defined as the quality or condition of being real, authentic, legitimate, trustworthy or genuine (Oxford English Dictionary, 2002). It refers to the truthfulness of attributes, origins, sincerity, devotion and commitments. It is believed that authenticity is vital for something whose value depends on its origins and its process of production. According to Jones (2010), there are two approaches to authenticity: materialist and constructive. The materialist approach is widely applied to heritage conservation in which authenticity is a "dimension of nature" with identifiable and measurable characteristics. The constructive approach refers to authenticity as a "product of culture" which is constructed through many different cultures (Jones, 2010, p. 182). However, the modern notion of authenticity also looks beyond the surface to discover the true nature of objects. The experience and negotiation of authenticity are not actually about the origins, designs or fabric of objects; rather, they deal with the networks of relationships between objects, places and individuals – authenticity is a "product of the relationships between people and things" (Jones, 2010, p. 200). Peterson (2005) considers authenticity as something which is socially constructed while Lindholm (2007) believes that authenticity is what others perceive, thus, it is thought to

be pursued through conformity. Guignon (2004) concludes that in order to become authentic, a person has to be in touch with his/her real self that lies within, something that can only be gained through meditation, introspection or self-reflection. Once in touch with his/her real self, the person is required to express fully and honestly his/her inner traits through actions relationships and activities in the external world. In this research, the term “authenticity” refers the aspect of being real, genuine and sincere in whatever way individuals behave, perform, present or act; there is no pretense or mask covering who an individual really is. Authenticity is expressing the true “self” of a person, connecting, contacting and interacting with others with the true emotions and real personalities without a mask (Rafferty, 2010). This study is taking a constructivist approach, especially in relation to how celebrities create a persona that fans can believe is a true expression of the celebrities inner self.

Facebook is perceived as a good place for individual self-representation and personal expression. The posts, comments, and especially the picture profile can effectively represent the user’s need for a personal identity (Ellis, 2010). Users can show how they want to be seen by others, not revealing their real selves, but the selves they want to be. Vishala strongly believes that “the online person is a truer reflection than the person we meet”, and “you find out who you are on Facebook” (cited in Miller, 2011, p.178) since users can easily express their true feelings without confronting the boundaries, barriers, or social pressures found in the offline world. Nevertheless, whether online or offline, individuals are still under the influence of external social norms and expectations which may inhibit their behaviours on Facebook. So many people present an ideal self, one that is more fit or sexy online than the person is offline – and some of course do this to deceive. As Miller (2011) points out, “all versions of the self are to some degree performative and based on certain frames of expectation” (p.177).

As a result, the self expressed on Facebook is not the true or authentic self; rather, it is the person the user wants to be perceived as by others. Especially in the area of consumption and leisure oriented culture, most young individuals put a lot of effort into masking themselves with a cool, fashionable, wealthy, and luxury appearance – something they are also urged to do by advertisers etc. For these reasons it is difficult to differentiate between self-representation and reality, and consequently measure the percentage of authenticity of self-representation on Facebook (Ellis, 2010). Another negative aspect relating to self-expression on Facebook, and on social media in general, relates to the excessive disclosure of personal information about the daily life of users.

The habit by some users of updating their information and activities frequently in order to declare their social superiority, beauty, or wealth can be annoying to other users – especially those trying to do the same thing. The question of authenticity concerning what is performed or disclosed on Facebook is also raised when the construction and expression of personal profiles and images online, in whatever way desired by the user, becomes much easier than ever before. Since one person can possess many Facebook accounts with various personalities built, polished, and exposed on each, it is such a challenge for others to identify which is the true self of that person. Furthermore, Facebookers usually have a tendency in trying to burnish their images or performances on their own Facebook pages as sparkling as possible or in the way they want to be seen by others regardless of whether it is true personality or not (Ross et al., 2009). Recently, there have been many users, especially young individuals, who have put a lot of effort into creating “fake” personal online images with the help of technology such as photo editing software in order to gain the admiration of others. They can look pretty, sexy (matching other sexy bodies with their faces), wealthy (check-in in luxury places), and emotional or scholarly (posting a status with the beautiful words of authors, sometimes without citing them). There are also many cases when Facebookers have to make corrections and report to the Facebook company because their names and images have been used on accounts or pages created by someone else without their permission. Often, false information has been created about them and posted and shared widely with the Facebook community, which is difficult to verify and also contributes to the doubt of “authenticity” in performances, posts, and sharings on this social networking site. Therefore, it can be said that in the virtual world, its residents seem to live virtually and the word “authenticity” is something hard to determine and measured correctly.

2.3.4. The question of privacy and its contradiction on Facebook

Facebook seems to be a public aggregation of private spheres. Once having used Facebook, users want to be noticed, well-known, and enjoy self-expression, thus, privacy seems not to be an important issue to them. They make public their private life intentionally and deliberately on Facebook. Miller (2011) points out “how little regard people may have for this site’s potential to destroy privacy” (p.172). One of the main reasons for this fact is that Facebook gives people options such as whether to be listed on Google public searches or not, or to determine what is made public and what is kept private, or to classify friends into various categories (Papacharissi, 2009). Nevertheless, it is a common response that users do not want to share personal issues, even on their

social networks since personal information can be leaked and spiral out of control at a dizzying speed. For instance, it is dangerous when users do not know that someone else is taking photos of them and posting them on Facebook. The New Media Research Observatory (2009) reported that most people feel inadequate when describing their feelings and are not comfortable with sharing information with others on a social media site such as Facebook – especially when these others are strangers – fearing harassment and shaming. These feelings of users can be classified on a personality continuum ranging from exclusive and discreet to open and indiscreet. Others have expressed concern about the fact that Facebook is collecting and storing their personal data, such as pictures or information. In addition, personal data can be used as sources for cyber-bullying, which is most common amongst teenage groups. As mentioned above, these repeated harmful behaviours and words through comments or responses on social networking sites can cause users stress, depression, or even lead them to suicide (Brunty & Helenek, 2012; Madden, 2012). There is one famous case in Vietnam which can illustrate this argument, in which a Vietnamese girl posted some pictures of herself on Facebook, and her “not good-looking” face was made fun of by many young teenagers. They posted lots of cruel and harsh words and shared her pictures widely in cyberspace, which left her feeling too humiliated to go to school and she attempted to take her own life.

In spite of the fear of privacy violation and the concern over private information protection, it is obvious that users come to Facebook as they want to be noticed and want to express themselves in public in front of many other users. Thus, they have to balance their desire to be present on social networks and their desire to protect their personal life and operations. With all the doubts concerning privacy on Facebook, what is the user's best strategy to deal with this problem? Instead of using the privacy settings or categorizing different lists of friends, most users prefer a different solution: be careful and do not share personal problems.

Facebook is also a form of entertainment with many activities and functions that facilitate communication between individuals. However, it contains many risks harmful to users' life both online and offline. Users need to take into careful consideration the information they post on Facebook, given its potential for unchecked mass distribution. Certainly, since information online has become omnipresent and overwhelming, posts are seen as less “natural” and less “healthy” than in the past. Overall, the dominant news on Facebook relates to celebrities, shopping, gossip, and urban legends, much of which is unproved rumor. Although “this virtual site works best for compensating for

deficiencies of other forms of communication” (Miller, 2011, p.184), individuals should spend more time in their offline life and be careful with what they publicize on their sites. Facebook can only facilitate the establishment and maintenance of a personal network, and it is not a substitute for offline face-to-face relationships.

In conclusion, while representing a breakthrough in Internet technology this century, the invention of social media in general has brought many advantages and disadvantages to human life, and also controversial issues that need to be studied by researchers. As one of the most used social networking sites, Facebook is often portrayed negatively through the media and research. In fact, the use of this social networking site is widely criticized. The most controversial issues relate to online content, frivolous, superficial relationships and issues of privacy. Actually, “every coin has two sides”, and Facebook is no exception. Besides the obvious advantages of communication, social interaction, and personal identity, this social network site possesses drawbacks requiring users to be vigilant and fully aware in order to avoid them.

Chapter 3: Main concepts of celebrity culture

With the rise of social media, particularly Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc., there have been significant changes in how celebrities connect to their fans and control their public images. This chapter will examine the academic background relating to social media and address the research question of how Facebook may be used as a significant tool in managing Vietnamese celebrities' images. The chapter will examine (1) the definition of fame and celebrities; (2) parasocial relationships between celebrities and audiences; and (3) the nature and variety of fan cultures. Finally, a conceptual framework will be developed to examine the empirical findings.

3.1. Definitions of fame and celebrity

3.1.1. Fame and its definitions

The desire for fame has never been as strong as it is now. This is especially the case amongst the young. Recently it was found that 16% of 16-19-year-old adolescents believe that they will be famous when they grow up and 11% are willing to drop out of school to prepare for their objective of achieving celebrity (UK Learning and Skills Council, 2006). Therefore, it is easy to understand why reality television shows are increasingly popular amongst the young (Maltby et al., 2008). Around the world, there is an increasing number of people who are utilizing media tools with the ambition of being 'online' famous – the bridge to bring their fame to real life.

When looking at the preferences for celebrity, the psychology of fame needs to be considered (Evans & Wilson, 1999; Giles, 2000; Young & Pinsky, 2006). Fame can be defined as the social contribution of a name. There are many issues for which people become famous such as artistic accomplishments, great exploits, achievements or the wisdom. Fame is considered as “a very big and visible professional success; a key to the good side of life's velvet ropes” and famous people gain social advantages in “wealth, power, access, recognition, and to other means to live an extraordinary life” (Jessup, n.d, p.9). Based on this definition, fame obviously not only creates the psychological satisfaction of being well-known but also the economic and material benefits of a better life with higher recognition, privilege, and respect. The ease in making more and more money is one of the important underlying meanings of being famous. As such, fame should be considered from the two sides of spiritual and material wealth.

The concept of fame is complex. There are multiple perspectives about the nature of fame and its benefits to the famous and society in general. Accordingly, it is quite

difficult to present a unique definition of fame. Braudy (1997) states that on one hand, many think fame is “something earned or merited through exceptional deeds”, but on the other hand, fame is believed as “a result of socially unacceptable or immoral behaviour” (cited in Maltby et al., 2008, p.280). Accordingly, fame does not always represent the “good” face of a person; that is, the reason why a person is famous should be taken into account. In many cases, people are famous because they are gifted in art or sports, etc. However, others are famous for their misbehaviours or for sensational scandals. Fame is often the result of exceptional deeds which if viewed positively are called “talents”, or if negatively, as “vices”. Despite the uncertainty of the value of fame, the common belief is that talent-based fame is based on a sustainable competitive advantage which ensures a career path as a famous person.

3.1.2. Celebrity and its definitions

For many researchers, the psychology of fame is central to the explanation of celebrity as a phenomenon. The underlying psychological features are argued to be related to three issues: self-esteem, narcissism, and altruism (Maltby et al., 2008). The interest in celebrity is linked to the worship of personality and mental health (McCutcheon, Lange & Houran, 2002). The distinction between fame and celebrity is drawn by Giles (2000). Fame can refer to a good reputation, a position of public prominence, or a strongly recognized talent. People who gain fame can be those who are admired, respected, and honoured for their achievements or contributions in specific fields such as art, music, science and technology. Thus, fame can have a positive meaning and refer to notable deeds. Meanwhile, a celebrity is a person who is regarded as an outstanding individual with an exceptionally high media profile. Famous people become celebrities only when they are frequently exposed to media and receive a great deal of attention from the public. For example, a scientist working in a laboratory who has an outstanding scientific achievement becomes a celebrity when he receives a high level of media and public exposure. This means that celebrity comes about not only through exceptional deeds, but with the zealous support of technological development in the media; that is, celebrity is increasingly obtainable in the modern era. Fame, on the other hand, is constructed over a long-standing historical period (Braudy, 1997). However, today, the line between fame and celebrity is thin due to the growth of social media where interactive and direct communication is borderless and non-stop.

So, what is celebrity? The official definition of celebrity is hard to find, other than that of Boorstin (1962) in his book *The Image: Or, what happened to the American*

dream”: celebrity is “a person who is known for his well-knownness” (i.e., not for accomplishments) which means that celebrity is created largely by the media and the public interest. Without the public or the media, fame is limited to within one’s social network. The public contributes by endorsing the deeds of “positive” famous people thereby making them celebrities; or from another perspective, celebrities must have “something” to catch public interest or draw the attention of the media. Boorstin (1962) is the first to have made a distinction between a hero and a celebrity. According to him, celebrities are made “on purpose to satisfy our exaggerated expectations of human greatness”, whereas, heroes are “admired for their courage, nobility and achieved greatness” (cited in Turner, 2014, p.5). A hero – a big person – becomes a hero through their achievements; whereas, the the celebrity – a big name – is produced by the media and distinguished by images and trademarks. Turner (2014) maintains that a celebrity “is fabricated for the media and evaluated in terms of the scale and effectiveness of their media visibility”. Due to the cumulation or aggregation of social and cultural circumstances or factors, noticeably the explosion of technology, the celebrity model has replaced the hero model. Nowadays, in many cases, marketing or image PR identify talents through competitions, thus, winning media and public attention is considered as an achievement. The more frequent the appearances at events, on TV shows, in newspapers, and in other media channels, the greater the fame individuals can achieve.

3.1.3. Celebrities and stars – what are the differences?

The book *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies – The Key Concepts of John Hartley* distinguishes between celebrities and stars. One key distinction is that a “star” is a product of a specific means – for example, the Hollywood movie industry; whereas a “celebrity” appears in post-modern circumstances with the exaggerated production of images, leading to the instant recognition of their faces. Therefore, “celebrities” are those people who are well-known (known widely) through mass media, but they are not “stars” – for example, actors or actresses. Those individuals who gain fame through media fabrication, such as Paris Hilton, are categorized into the “celebrity” group. The construction of a “celebrity” begins when the media turns their concern from a person’s career or achievements to their private life. An actor or actress (movie stars) becomes a celebrity only when his/her real life is considered much more interesting than his/her movie roles in the public eye. Gradually, their fabricated fame lives longer than the memories of their career.

In addition, there is a useful classification of celebrity developed by Rojek (2001). He refers to ascribed celebrity, achieved celebrity, attributed celebrity, celetoid and celeactors. According to Rojek, ascribed celebrity is acquired through the blood or inheritance, it can be royal or the consequence of business or political links. Meanwhile, individuals with talents or gifted skills, for example, sports stars, writers, artists or composers are categorized as achieved celebrities or meritocratic celebrities. People such as newsreaders or MCs are classified as attributed celebrities with their “repeated media exposure”. Rojek defines “celetoids” as “accessories of cultures organized around mass communications and staged authenticity” such as whistle-blowers, have-a-go-heroes, on-hit wonders, lottery winners (pp.20-21), they are people attracting extensive media attention because of their “scandal, pseudo-events or participation in reality TV shows” such as *Big Brother*, *Masterchef* or *American Idol*. In other words, they are made famous by the entertainment industry. Thanks to these kinds of events and shows, they become house-hold names. Lastly, “celeactor” is described by Rojek as fictional characters gaining media attention and then being “cultural reference points”, for instance, Iron Man, Shrek or Bat Man. In addition to Rojek’s observations, L’Etang (2008) states that through notoriety or scandal, ascribed and achieved celebrities can become celetoids and attributed ones.

3.1.4. The advantages and disadvantages of being a celebrity

Fame is the threshold for being a celebrity involving strategic promotion strategies and tactics, ascribed fame and beyond-talent features. For instance, Paris Hilton – the grand-daughter that has inherited the Hilton Group – has built up her fame based on being a family descendent. With a series of shock-making plots, Paris is now a celebrity with a large income; yet her reputation is gained from side tactics as well. It is important to be reminded that celebrity is a product of technology that includes newspapers, magazines, television, the Internet (Gamson, 1994). Therefore, from the initial start of media-based fame, famous people can gain and lose a definite “something” in becoming celebrities. Public exposure through modern media means celebrities must accept definite gains and losses. The biggest gain of being a celebrity is the chance of making a large income and being offered special preferences; however, celebrities are forced to put up with public harassment and media intrusion.

The top five advantages of being a celebrity are (1) receiving special treatment, priority and access; (2) being richer, that is, wealthier; (3) being recognized everywhere with adoration; (4) have many fans and a symbolic immortality; and (5) the chance to

capture many new opportunities. Celebrities are always indulged and their unreasonable demands are met. It is often seen that Jennifer Lopez, Beyoncé or Selena Gomez get preferential treatment over other customers if they go to restaurants, clubs and other exclusive locations. They also receive better offers and compensations if joining a show or event. Seldom are celebrities found not to own luxurious houses with a series of branded items. With the wide use of social media, the life of celebrities may become busier through connecting with global fans; that is there is a higher frequency of sharing with their fans. This increased sharing means that they create a greater level of impact on public. Celebrity does not simply bring social and psychological benefits; also, celebrities receive a substantial income flow from non-professional aspects such as endorsements. For instance, a large part of the income structure of David Beckham – a big name in football sports – has come from advertising. A very typical case is Kim Kardashian. With the advantageous feature of her body shape, she can earn up to \$8,000 per tweet from an endorsement.

The key limitation of celebrity is the sacrifice of privacy. Typically, celebrities suffer a range of psychological symptoms such as self doubt, mistrust of others, emotional isolation, high demands from the public, privacy violation, and so on. Consequently, they are unable to do things as freely as they would want. They frequently deal with paparazzi or stalkers, they cannot form true friend-relationships, and they suffer from negative value judgments. Let's imagine that Paris Hilton could freely shop at Wal-Mart. Of course, she is unable to since there are always many paparazzi around watching even her tiniest actions. It means celebrities have to abandon normal activities such as playing football in a public playground, going to the supermarket, riding bikes, going to the beach, reading books at parks, or simply having dinner with family at a small restaurant on the corner. Should celebrities become involved in public issues, their attitude or response to such issues is sure to make headlines. This means that there extra demands of accountability on celebrities and public intellectuals (Ross, 1989). The biggest issue for celebrities is the fake intimacy. They are forced to be suspicious concerning people's motives and their honesty, even among their own peer groups. In other words, celebrities have to accept short-term relationships and/or relationships that lack authenticity as a natural part of being publicly famous.

3.2. Parasocial relationship between celebrities and audiences

3.2.1. What is a parasocial relationship?

According to Horton and Wohl (1956), a parasocial relationship reflects the interaction between celebrities and their audiences under the support of media. Through parasocial relationships, celebrities can develop an intimate relationship with large audiences in the form of well-controlled personal messages. This kind of relationship is continuously strengthened through repeated appearances and the sharing of intimacies and personal details. Parasocial interaction (PSI), therefore, is a process of casual interpersonal interaction through which the construction of “a mental representation of relationships with the persona” is created (Klimmt, Hartmann, & Schramm, 2006, p.303). In this conceptualization, a parasocial relationship is a process of one-sided interactions which are constructed via audience engagement with personae (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Social networking sites (SNS) are the popular and effective method by which celebrities blur the lines with audiences including fans and viewers by stepping away from the stage or clip to be among the audience.

Importantly, for celebrities’ messages to gain mass circulation they must be based on audiences’ responses to their performances. Horton and Wohl (1956) argue that “most characteristic is the attempt of the persona to duplicate the gestures, conversational style, and milieu of an information face-to-face gathering” (p.38). The route is similar to that of building up relationships with friends within one’s own social circles (Eyal & Fox, 2007). It means that becoming a celebrity is synonymous with the publicization of private lives. In this process, private lives become public performances that are carefully monitored and chosen. The powerful effect of a parasocial relationship is that audiences feel that they know everything about celebrities’ personal lives. However, the limitation of Horton and Wohl’s (1956) account of parasocial relationships is that audiences have no chance to engage in the mutual give-and-take interaction with celebrities – leading to non-dialectical and fictional messages from senders (Auer, 1992). Ordinary people are never involved in the private lives of celebrities (Alperstein, 1991).

Rubin and McHugh (1987) confirm that the rationale of parasocial relationships rests on the apparent sharing of celebrities’ private lives with their audiences. They emphasize that the more common the interactions between celebrities and audiences appear, the closer is the formation of parasocial relationships. Horton and Wohl (1956) believe that the frequent appearance of celebrities reinforces parasocial relationships.

Rubin and McHugh (1987) add that the exposure of celebrities as attractive figures is the key element in building a rewarding and positive interaction for audiences. Unlike friendships in real life, parasocial relationships demand little from audiences other than their attention. Moreover, audiences have a chance to explore relationships that in real life, they may be reluctant to approach but remain quite curious about (Theran, Newberg & Gleason, 2010). As internet and online communication began to develop, online space was considered a chance to build up parasocial relationships by reinforcing the personal brands of celebrities (Ballantine & Martin, 2005). This makes online spaces especially suitable settings for developing strong parasocial bonds with celebrities. Because of sustainable social relationships, parasocial relationships involve key features – (1) uncertainty reduction; (2) personal construct; and (3) social exchange theory. When interpersonal constructs are included attractively and predictably in suitable parasocial circumstances, the formation of parasocial relationships is caused by evoking the connecting intimacy with celebrities at low cost (Ballantine & Martin, 2005, p. 199).

Parasocial responses depend on cognitive, affective and behavioural psychological features (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). This means that based on their cognition, audiences evaluate celebrities' actions and seek for similarities between celebrities' personae and themselves (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). For instance, in reality shows, if the appearance of celebrities or stars are seen as authentic, audiences are more inclined to identify with them regardless of the awareness of possible contrivance. Behaviour-based parasocial responses are more active in the Internet and social media era. These tools mean the one-sided interaction between audience and the celebrity develop into a more communicative relationship (Eyal & Fox, 2007). Audiences now have a space to show both negative and positive feelings about celebrities or stars. They are now in a more active position and with a greater choice of engaging with the famous people they feel interested in (Brown, Basil & Bocarnea, 2003; Cohen, 2004).

Another aspect of a parasocial relationship to be considered is life-stage theories. These theories give a clear explanation of the process of one-sided interaction. Erikson (1959, 1968) states that a parasocial attachment to famous individuals could be interpreted differently depending on the position of audiences on the various stages of development and maturation. According to this theory, there are three main stages in human life relating to a parasocial relationship: adolescence, young adulthood and middle age. People in the stage of adolescence are involved in forming their own

identity and self-image, thus, they seek figures to idealize (Theran et al., 2010). Adolescents may consider celebrities as their ideal and anticipated role models that satisfy their need for identity formation. The typical conflict between intimacy and isolation leads individuals in the young adult stage to look for and establish “fake” intimate relationship with celebrities. While they can be aware of the artificiality and inappropriate closeness of this interaction, they may prefer it to the feeling of isolation and “no romantic attachment at all” (Stever, 2011, p.2). These young adults who are in “dysfunctional and damaging relationships” may seek for this one-sided relationship since it gives them a sense of comfort and safeness. In other words, it is regarded to be “complementary to normal social life” (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p.45). Meanwhile, parasocial attachments with famous figures can help middle-aged adults gain feelings of generativity and recapturing their lost youth. In critical life transitions, this kind of relationship is preferred as people can find solace in the milieu of a fan community (Stever, 2011). In general, life stage theories bring out a positive view of parasocial relationships.

The ethological theory of Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1978) is also worth considering. They conclude that the establishment of parasocial attachment is due to frequent exposure to celebrities’ faces, voices, and actions. Familiarity with celebrities builds up empathy, care, and attraction which is reinforced through repeated exposure to celebrities through pictures, voice recordings, and performances. Especially, with the current development and popularity of the Internet, more and more information and images of famous individuals are accessed and consumed by audiences, which enables attachments to intensify. Nevertheless, this theory also predicts that celebrity worship will lead to negative consequences as audiences attempt to seek proximity with celebrities.

The social cognitive theory of Bandura (1986) offers a more interactive and reciprocal interpretation of a parasocial relationship. Based on this theory, celebrity representations are consumed and enjoyed by fans, which encourages fans to seek more contact with celebrities. Seeking, enjoying, and falling in love with celebrities can create a vicious circle in a parasocial relationship. Similar to this view, when discussing the importance of the attention celebrities offer audiences, Stever (2011) states that “the actual attention received is a powerful reinforcer that rewards the attraction and intensifies it” (p.5). Currently, the Internet and especially social networking sites with online instant interaction contribute to the “fake” feeling of intimacy between fans and celebrities and facilitate this one-sided relationship.

Although there is a wide range of theories concerning parasocial attachment, in general, parasocial relationships have the following characteristics. Firstly, there are always mediations in a parasocial interaction, for instance social media, television, magazines, newspapers, etc. Secondly, a parasocial interaction is always a one-sided relationship. This relationship is generated by audiences since they have good knowledge about their idols but they may be more dependent on the source for that knowledge. With the advance of technology and social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, pictures and videos may slightly change the one-sided relationship with celebrities, who attempt to get closer to some audience groups; however, here is a relationship of unequal power to define the meaning of the fan-celebrity interaction. Thirdly, there is a persistent perception by audiences in this relationship that celebrities should be dealt with as their real friends – real-life relationships.

3.2.2. Symmetrical relationship between celebrities and audience

The support of social media and other forms of new technology has had a definite impact on how interactions are conducted, but not on the social nature of interaction. The mutuality of the influence between celebrity and audiences is still recognized; but celebrities have the more powerful influence on the lifestyle of audiences. Celebrity endorsement has an enormous influence on norms and ideals of beauty. Celebrities are market movers and opinion leaders when, with the support of social media, they post or tweet their pictures about new fashion styles or entertainment locations (McClelland, 2011). Kim Kardashian is the outstanding example of reality-show stars becoming successful entrepreneur-brand names and then, celebrities. Kim artfully markets herself as the representative of a fashionable lifestyle and pushes audiences into her “real” life with the *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* show. The show attracts mostly 18-34-year-old women who are susceptible to changes and trends in workout exercises, fragrance lines, shoes, clothing, diet products, skin care, etc. (Gourdreau, 2010). By using a high-level celebrity such as Kim, the diet product Quicktrim earned about \$45 million in 2010 (Pathak, 2011). On Facebook, the fanpage of Kim, feature “real-life-friend” questions from her to audiences, encouraging them to think that she really needs and respects her fans’ opinions as a friend-like connection. For instance, a picture of her new hair colour is not simply to lure audiences but also and (probably) more importantly, etches the new colour style in her fans leading to changes in personal styling etc. As this example shows, celebrities can have a powerful influence on the

lifestyles and affections of audiences as a tactic to build up their social visibility and public personae.

In distinction to the vertical relationship with stars and celebrities, social media has connected fans horizontally. The personal brands of celebrities are thus influenced and supported by the expectations of club members. For instance, the online music model is the new business model of music stars who encourage listeners to join fan clubs with benefits of concert ticket pre-sales, chances to meet idols or access to exclusive collections (Garrity, 2002). The responses of audiences, in this case, may lead to the development of new directions in music style or the appearance of music stars – celebrities (Whitfield, 2012). Also, through social media and online magazines, fans have huge opportunities to examine stars' styles – all aspects of their look and persona are investigated, commented on and criticized. This puts pressure on celebrities to look beautiful in the eyes of the public and Photoshop and image-editing software are powerful supporting tools. Furthermore, social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook facilitate instant and continuous interaction between celebrities and fans where fans not only can access and share much more information about celebrities through their posts (status or tweets), but to some degree they can also develop intimate connections or communications with celebrities through comments, tweets or even private messages (inbox messages). Celebrities indulge their fans in this way (and, implicitly, maintain their profits and public value). This is the reason why curiosity about the real life of celebrities is still alive with the ballooning of paparazzi teams.

Historically, a mass mediated parasocial relationship has been a one-sided interaction with the active role of the relationship resting with the celebrity and his or her management. However, with the development of the Internet, fans have been offered chances to talk actively and express their thoughts directly as well as to connect with others to publicize shared ideas. Different elements of two way-interactive communication evolve; however, the responses of celebrities are often not aimed at a specific fan but a group and/or a whole team. Thus, the “truthfulness” in this relationship is deemed to be fundamentally one-way (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

3.2.3. Unilateral relationship of fans to celebrities

In parasocial relationships between fans and celebrities, fans are often inclined to perceive intimacy and thereby become attached to a specific celebrity physically and socially (Hoffner, 1996; Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Normally, thousands of fans across the world know stars only through media. For instance, many people who knew of

Princess Diana and Jill Dando did not actually know them, even if they thought or felt that they did (Arnot, 2001). In parasocial relationships, social attraction to a celebrity provides a link to values and beliefs accordingly audiences often seek for similar attitudes, appearances, and backgrounds in order to form a strong sense of intimacy toward a specific celebrity (Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Turner, 1993). Depending on the view taken of social norms and standards in social relationships, audiences will make their own choices in forming parasocial relationships with a specific star or celebrity. Due to their attachment to a specific celebrity, many fans develop strong affective responses to every mention of their favourite celebrity, whether these are positive or negative. For instance, when their idols make mistakes and/or experience sorrow or disappointment, fans also express their embarrassment, sadness and/or mixed feelings that replicate the experiences found in an actual social relationship (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009).

One of the important purposes of interacting with fans, especially in the case of music or movie stars, is to attract them to “intimacy-like” relationships and then enjoy the benefits of being famous. Famous individuals such singers or actors make great efforts to appear on shows, such a Reality Television and talk shows, that blur the lines between them and audiences and effect changes in their persona (Auter, 1992). Therefore, it is common for celebrities and stars to use the technology of image-making with professional teams of make-up artists, PR practitioners, and fashion stylists to construct manufactured personae that increase their attractiveness and power over audiences. The parasocial relationship between fans and celebrities as “an interplay game between reality and fiction” that fans voluntarily involve themselves in with certain feelings that are “psychologically real and meaningful”. But they are also conscious that the relationship is unreal (Alperstein, 1991; Derrick, Garbriel & Tippin, 2008; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rosengren et al., 1976). Accordingly, it is alleged that parasocial relationships between fans and celebrities are now more intensively focused on manipulating audience fantasies.

Studies reveal that fans often see their idols from four degrees of adoration – (1) as a brand; (2) as a celebrity; (3) as an intimate; and (4) as a god. According to each degree, they will show different affections, feelings, and behaviours toward celebrities. To be a brand, famous people do not have to suffer the deep level of private-life intervention by fans, since the main focus is on the products – for example, singers with songs, movie stars with films, etc. For the next degree, as a celebrity, their private life revolves around the interest of fans exploring more about their works. As an intimate,

fans feel they are a part of celebrities' lives. Celebrities are part of their intimate circle with specific expectations about success and recognition (Giles, 2003; Schickel, 1985). The highest level in a parasocial relationship is a god – a representative of a ritual, a belief, an immortal symbol (Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Kozinets, 2001). Depending on what extent fans adore their idols, one-sided interactions will consequently rest on different intensities of attachment.

A parasocial relationship is confirmed to be a one-sided interaction, mostly led by celebrities, designed to create a persona with audiences responding to specific messages through social media. The nature of a two-way interaction in a fan-celebrity relationship is simulated in the discourse of message replies but not in the actual social relationship between fans and a specific celebrity. For example, in Vietnam, there is a large number of fans of Katy Perry. However, how many people are able to directly interact with her? When she came to Vietnam as a celebrity-representative in The Under 30 Summit – Forbes Vietnam in May, 2015, there were very few people who had direct communication with her, and most of them were journalists. Even for these she seldom smiled. A disadvantage of being famous is that when surrounded by too many people with diverse requirements and expectations, celebrities have to suffer the phenomenon of “fame pressure” or “celebrity fandom” when every detail of their actions and activities become hot topics to be spread and inconclusively discussed. As such, it is unlikely that there will be mutual development and true reciprocal interaction in a relationship between a celebrity and thousands of fans (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Theoretically, a celebrity should be at the centre of a parasocial relationship and “achieve intimacy with what are literally crowds of strangers (Horton & Wohl, 1965, p.36); yet the true or real intimacy is still open to dispute. The two biggest reasons are (1) celebrities' distrust of others and (2) the multiple pressures of living a public life.

Firstly, as a public figure, celebrities' private lives are the main focus of audiences instead of their public roles. However, in the core understanding, celebrities are often representatives of specific social functions to their fans (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007, Turner, 2014). Currently, celebrities rely on false intimacy built up by mediation of technology whether as mass or social media. (Schickel, 1985). Celebrities are commonly cautious and skeptical about the honesty and sincerity of members of the public, as strangers who approach them may be less interested in them as person than as an opportunity to bolster their own prestige – the halo effect. In such cases, their sole interest is being close to fame, which make them famous too. Thus, such intimacy is called pseudo-intimacy (Gitlin, 1998, p. 14, pp. 81-83). Consequently, mistrust re-

enforces the establishment of a parasocial relationship between celebrities and audiences. At the same time, the number of celebrities has increased significantly leading to tougher competition in the celebrity market. Being a celebrity has become a “profession”, not simply as a result of true talent. From 1980 to 2003, coverage of celebrities doubled (McCafferty, 2005) and the interest of people in celebrities increased by up to 27.6% over 20 years. Under the pressure of maintaining their celebrity position and “sweet-talk” from the public, gradually, celebrities have constructed their own images to protect their benefits and positions.

Secondly, celebrities are brands that guarantee specific sets of experiences and values to consumers. For instance, Oprah Winfrey has been dubbed the queen of talk shows. However, the public seldom sees celebrities as they really are; instead they see them as social icons with generated social values, meanings and significance which are embodied by their images and accepted or rejected by audiences (Meyers, 2005). Being famous less for their accomplishments than they are for their media supported status, celebrities are the product of a higher level of perceived awareness by the public than are famous people. Implicitly, they are constructed by unique standards of requirements from different audience groups (Gabler, 1998). Gamson (1994) believes that a celebrity is the product of production teams for marketing purposes rather than someone who displays real talent that reaches out and touches the hearts of fans. Therefore, it is essential that celebrities have a beautiful public face and conduct themselves well (or at least display behaviour that captures audiences’ attention). In general, celebrities seldom have chances to express their true thoughts and actions, that is, their true or authentic self.

In short, the audience-celebrity relationship is definitely unequal with the celebrity or star channeling and is based on the affection and behaviour of fans towards the maintenance of celebrity pre-eminence. Due to the extraordinary nature of celebrities, the lack of truly reciprocal interactions, and the concealment of their true personal lives, real intimacy between fans and celebrities is seldom found. It can be predicted that there will be no chance for real intimacy in the future, when celebrities are even more reliant on production technology and are forced to aggressively protect their public persona.

3.3. The nature and variety of fan cultures

Studies of fan cultures have attracted significant attention over the decades. Overall, the study of fan culture has been through three stages: (1) historical fandom

(1950s -1980s); (2) the rise of media fans (1990 -1999); and (3) cyber fandom through the Internet (2000 to now). In the 1990s, fans were enthusiastic about shows such as *Star Trek*, *Blake 7*, *Alien Nation*, and *Doctor Who* or film episodes of *Bay Watch* (Bacon-Smith, 1992). The new forms of cyber-fandom are the product of the Internet which is able to generate online communities of fans (Jenkins, 2005). People can start to build communities based on their consumption practices and culture preferences regardless of where they are in the world (Jenkins, 1992). Fans become active rather than hitherto passive moderators of “social and political movements” and “become part-time collaborators with official producers seeking to incite and retain dedicated fan audiences and part-time co-opted word-of-mouth marketers” for their beloved brands, celebrities, and intimacy relationships (Hills, 2010, p. 58). Sometimes, fans are depicted as brainless consumers who are willing to pay premium prices for their favourite programmes, movies, logos, and so on. Negative fan stereotypes often view fans’ behaviours and perceptions as gross distortions (Bacon-Smith, 1992).

Sharing common values, fan cultures formulate their own unique language or ‘fanspeak’. Those wishing to participate in the fan community must adopt a specific argot in order to fully participate and be accepted as members of the fan subculture. The Internet permits people to connect across regions so fan communities are often comprised of diverse international populations and national cultures. Therefore, terminologies used in fanspeak often reflect not only fictional contexts but also ‘gaming’ or ‘hacker lingo’. Normally, abbreviations such as BNF “Big Named Fan” or Netizen (citizens of the Internet) are common through Internet circles. There is an implicit demand on fans to make efforts to understand their chosen fan culture (Rogow, 1994), as well as the need for significant expenditure of effort and cash. Fan culture develops when a group of fan with common interests create a social network to read, watch, or follow a specific media product or celebrity. Because of the Internet and social media, fandom is continuously growing larger and larger with more complex interests (Jenkins, 1992).

3.3.1. Types of fans

Typically, the main reason fans rely on fan culture/ fandom is that this offers them a place where their fan activities are accepted. In a fan culture, fans do not suffer negative comments about their interests nor are they judged for their actions, or their social, racial, economic, or educational backgrounds. However, fan cultures are not uniform. A study by Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) identifies three types of fans:

cultists, enthusiasts, and anti-fans, who were chosen due to their hard-hitting influence on textual productivity and formulations of figures in celebrity-forming production technology. Cultists join a fandom through their cult activities surrounding specific famous people or celebrities. Due to their worship of their idols, cultists can perform unimaginable actions that may potentially damage celebrities or themselves or both. There are many cases in the world in which fans have starved themselves in the hope of marrying a music/movie star and, then killed themselves when their wishes are rejected. Jordan James Parke – a fan of Kim Kardashian – has spent more than US\$150,000 on cosmetic surgery to transform himself into a copy of Kim. Enthusiasts are similar to cultists but are less obsessed in their approach, preferring to copy their idols by wearing the same clothes, makeup, and hairstyles (Longhurst, 2007). This type of fan explains the effectiveness of using celebrity endorsement in advertisements in order to attract product followers. The ‘enthusiasm’ of fans ensures that sales volumes of brands are increased. It is not surprising that TV producers have made use of Rihanna’s fame to create a reality show based on ‘*Rihanna’s fashion design competition*’. Not only does it attract Rihanna enthusiasts – since she is one of the world’s most famous singers with a giant fan club – but also those who are attracted to fame and whose presence increases the attractiveness of the show.

Anti-fans, on the other hand, are the antithesis of idol-worshippers. They do not appreciate the norms and values of popular stars and celebrities and accordingly, they resent the success of particular cultures or characters. For instance, *The Twilight Saga* has a large number of both fans and anti-fans. Anti-fans’ negative reactions to *The Twilight Saga* and its actors are based on a rejection of violence and the lack of reality. Duffett (2013) defined anti-fans as those whose pleasure is “knocking the show rather than enjoying it” (p.48), the inverse of loving critics – they are not fans. Interestingly, there exist “original” critics, “loving” critics and “hating critics”. Original critics are individuals who separate themselves from emotional passion when “trawling through the whole range of products in order to decide the best and worst of the crop”, and loving critics are those who with “their fannish identity” “cultivates no such critical distance” (Duffett, 2013, p.48). In contrast to fans’ enthusiasm and identification, hating critics are defined by that author as audiences who “passionately dislike or even detest the object of their attention” (p.48). The reason for the existence of anti-fans is that they want to contradict mass sentiment or protect their community from being marginalized or bypassed by fan communities. In Vietnamese showbiz, there is one clear example for this case in which two big-sized fan communities of two popular

female singers typically point out the flaws and weaknesses of an opponent celebrity and his/her fan community in order to enhance their own favourite celebrity. Media takes advantages of this conflict and hatred by circulating news and setting fire to arguments to attract a greater audience.

Idolizing specific famous people, such as music or movie stars, is a global phenomenon; however, at its depth, this idolization involves a complicated process reflecting people's culture in media consumption (Iwabuchi, 2010). It connects to sociopolitical issues in advancing interests whether on a local or international scale. On this point, Iwabuchi (2010) and Jenkins (1992) have opposing notions about the borderless relationships of fans and the cross-connection of cultural awareness. By seeing fans as activists in their culture, Jenkins (2004) proposes that transcultural media flows aid in the collaboration of fans and media producers. There are many cases in which fan strategies reflect voluntary participatory culture in socio-political life (Jenkins & Shresthova, 2012).

The research on fan cultures must recognize the knowledge and terminologies used by fans in contexts that reflect the complexities and implications of transnational circulation and consumption of media (Iwabuchi, 2010). For instance, looking at Indian films where fan communities build their cultures around Indian cinema, imagination should be based on the national-scale of culture (Punathambekar, 2007). Hills' (2002) 'transcultural homology' is based on Willis' (1978) theory of cultural homology – "symbolic fit between the values and lifestyles of a group". Homological meanings could be shared horizontally across cultures among fans where the devaluation of one specific identity over others becomes a common sharing point for sustaining fan culture. For instance, Harry Potter is a globally famous story that is far different from the traditional comics of Japan. The widespread popularity of Harry Potter in Japan has led to the circulation of a transnational narrative of Western style.

Transcultural over transnational is the common feature of fan cultures under the support of the Internet since geographic location and distance is no longer a barrier to building connections. Cross-cultural fandom reflects the affinities between common cultural contexts in which, regardless of differences or similarities in cultures, fans share their common interests and then build up their own social networks to create and spread widely unique fan-based cultures.

3.3.2. Internet and fans online

Fandom is all about interaction and communication; however, these factors have changed dramatically with the impact of the Internet and social media. In Fandom, people have capacity in interacting with each other regardless of the geographic location. The appearance and growth of the Internet and social networking sites have altered the nature of communication (Ram, 2011). Rihanna, Eminem, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Shakira are among the top celebrities who greatly increased their number of fans through social media (over 50 million people each, as of March, 2014).

In the role as a register of popularity, Internet-based social networks connect more and more people around the world. Subsequently, fandom is a growing phenomenon and celebrities are achieving greater benefits across borders. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, by their nature, are internet-based social networks that allow and facilitate the creation, sharing and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). With the increasing number of Internet users, comments and feelings of fans towards a specific celebrity and his/her actions or activities, regardless of whether they are positive or negative, are transmitted to every corner of the world. The internet brings people closer together; however due to its freedom and the ease by which users can broadcast their ideas, it is easy to magnify disagreement and dissent in fans by which the real damage is on both online and offline lives of celebrities. Thanks to the Internet and digital development, the fandom of ‘dead idols’ continues to live on whereby YouTube allows its users to retrieve the records of Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson or any other dead celebrity.

Typically, fans conduct many activities through social media with Internet support; however, there are three most common activities. Firstly, fan fiction refers to reading news about celebrities and writing a column, a comment, or just a quick reply through the social media page of celebrities. Secondly, as well as letter writing, fans create fan art – they draw pictures and make picture-based clips of celebrities and then share to others via Facebook, Tumblr, etc. Thirdly, fanvids refer to the recomposing or editing of songs or film scenes created by their stars, often humorously to gain admiration. In all these activities, fans are quite open and articulate in depicting their idols. According to Booth and Kelly (2013), through necessity, fans substitute conventional methods of interaction, such as meeting in person, with ‘virtual’ interaction through online and digital technologies. In other words, they conduct online activities enthusiastically, however the opportunity to meet their idols offline in face-to-face meetings strengthens the bond among members in their community.

The activities of fans both online and offline can have either a positive or negative impact on celebrities, but they always provide satisfaction and pleasure to fans. Duffett (2013) points out that there are a variety of pleasures in conducting fan activities including the pleasure of connection which can create a sense of intimacy between stars and fans, pleasure of appropriation like spoiling (publicizing mystical or crucial information of a show/TV series or a fictional story of a film before it is released or broadcasted officially) and other popular fanfic activities (fictional writing by fans), and pleasure of performance in which participating, collecting, fanviding, blogging and impersonating are mostly complimented among fan communities. In order to extend fans pleasures, various objects of their attention are exposed in more than one medium for them to consume (Nikunen, 2010).

3.3.3. Impact of fans on celebrities

Fans participate in interactive conversations with each other according to their hierarchies within the fandom (Hills, 2002). Fans proactively contribute their voices to discussions about specific media contexts with full autonomy but under mutual influences (Booth and Kelly, 2013). Normally, fans build up profiles of their favourite characters or idols on friendship-building disciplines and collaborative fictions. For instance, when the youth idolize characters in the *Glee* series (Star World), they make imaginative efforts to become a part of the characters' lives. They then develop a harmony with the real actors and also expect them to act and live in the same manner as their characters. The fans of *Glee* continuously create their own fictions and interactive dialogues. Therefore, wise celebrities should be fully aware of the importance and necessity of masking themselves with personas and performances according to the desires and expectations of their fans.

Generally, fans are an important part of celebrity promotional culture by contributing to celebrities' public profile through gossip, shaping celebrities images, and consuming and imitating celebrities' styles and products. This is not unexpected with the development of gossip channels such as TMZ.com and ET. Information about celebrities' private and public lives is the life blood of TMZ.com and thus it attracts a lot of attention of fans. 'Super gossip' stories (such as, "Jennifer Lopez threw a ton of shade at Mariah Carey ... by burying her head in her smartphone while MC was hitting high notes onstage at the Billboard Music Awards") is always presented as the headline on a gossip website in order to provoke gossip by fans and/or viewers. Through this way, the fame of a celebrity is repeated iteratively and creates a wider framework of

public visibility that increases public interest, whether positive or negative. In the case of Angelina Jolie, fans help share information about her humanitarian activities in the form of gossip. Gossip about Angelina Jolie and her work and life builds a huge level of interest and “a range of sophisticated testing of hypotheses about whether or not certain events have happened in Jolie’s private life” (Jerslev, 2014, p.178). In addition, shaping and consuming celebrities’ products is the direct halo of the celebrity effect. This means that the core product in this case is the high visibility of celebrities. Celebrities are thus to themselves and those who manage commodities that produce revenues and profits for what they represent (Turner, 2014).

In conclusion, there is a global desire for fame; yet a huge amount of sacrifices and a heavy toll on privacy and the integrity of personal and emotional relationships are required to become and stay a celebrity, especially with the competition between celebrities. If fame is the direct result of being outstanding due to specific talents, celebrity is the product of an image-making technology and professional production, mediation and manipulation. Through the media, celebrities build up illusionary intimacy with their fans to confirm, maintain, and strengthen their positions through parasocial interaction. Depending on the types, practices, and viewpoints of fans, celebrities may use different tactics to attract their attention and maintain their loyalty. This chapter has covered the relevant theories and discussions about celebrities, parasocial relationships, and fan cultures as the theoretical background for understanding the importance of celebrities’ social image protection and management. Celebrity, currently, is not a status based on talents or outstanding skills but a professionally marketed image that costs money and effort to build up.

Chapter 4: The role of social media in the image management of celebrities

Prior to the development of social media, fans maintained passive contact with their favourite celebrities through news in printed media forms such as magazines or newspapers. Social media has technically changed the interactions between celebrities and their fans as daily activities of celebrities are actively shared and celebrities or their managers provide “personal” news items for widespread circulation which are structured to attract and respond to the concerns and interests of their fans. The fact that celebrities are more accessible through social media as a global communication channel brings both opportunities and challenges (with positive and negative effects) for reinforcing their images as well as managing their social visibility.

4.1. Social networking sites and their impacts on celebrities

The impact of the Internet has transformed how people perceive social situations, especially through increasing the opportunity to connect with others outside their immediate social context network. Network interaction has also had an impact on the socio-psychological disposition of users (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007; Tufekci, 2008; Zhao, 2006). The central factor that drives contact-seeking through social networks is the profile of users (Gross, Acquisti & Heinz, 2005). Celebrities in particular are deemed to attract people because of the attention paid to designing and updating their profile information. As a tool to create initial contacts with others, profiles of celebrities are strategically engineered according to the social image or persona they wish to deploy to attract public attention. This means that through social networking, people, including celebrities, can build up the images or personalities they want. Accordingly, in real life they seek to project their “social-network” identity when interacting in public. Social networks are defined as “a category of websites with profiles, semi-persistent public commentary on the profile, and a traversable publicly articulated social network displayed in relation to the profile” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). However, with the openness and sharing features of social networks, celebrities receive comments that are complimentary or critical of every one of their actions.

The fact is that everyone, even celebrities, who joins a social network has to accept the phenomenon called “social grooming” or gossip. On the one hand, social grooming improves the individual’s reputation and social status. On the other hand, if

the process is not well managed, social grooming could damage the individual's "social capital" and self-esteem (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The question of maintaining a good public image is extremely important for celebrities since it is their means of livelihood. Celebrities and their managers invest significant time and efforts into public image building. The higher the rate of comments, hits and tweets etc., the larger their following which may lead to a higher profile and promotional and marketing opportunities. To increase the engagement level of followers, individuals relentlessly update their profiles, showing their daily activities along with comments, shares, likes and dislikes, changing their appearance in photos and pictures, joining groups or participating in trendy activities, etc. (Boyd & Heer, 2006; Lampe, Ellison & Steinfield, 2007; Tufekci, 2008).

Social media, besides meeting the function of social connectivity, is influenced by celebrity culture (Netchitailova, 2014). Making use of their existing fame, celebrities use social media as a tool to express their power and demonstrate the qualities by which they are supposedly distinguished from "everyday individuals" (Marshall, 1997). Through social media, it is likely that everyone has two identities so that a discrepancy between the private and public image of the self is possible and perhaps unavoidable (Wittkower, 2014). Individuals have the opportunity to follow, un-follow, friend or unfriend others when they are engaged in social media such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram in a dynamic social process in which they can exercise their personal choice for identity. Celebrities can be seen as epitomizing this act of self-creation (Ellis, 2010).

Van Dijck (2013) raises the question of self-expression versus self-promotion when using different social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Goffman's (1959) theory of symbolic interactionism can be applied in the Internet age whereby users exploit "interface technologies" to "promote unconscious self-expression" or "enable conscious self-promotion" (Van Dijck, 2013, p.201). The development of the Internet as a global communication system has created the term 'mass self-communication' (Castells, 2009) by which celebrities can now generate a larger number of fans because geographical constraints no longer confine them to local as opposed to global audiences. Alongside the advantages to celebrities and the "fame industry" of wealth creation, social media have the potential to enhance 'human relationships' with quick connectedness (Christakis & Fowler, 2009; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Van Dijck, 2013).

4.2. Opportunities/ benefits of social media to celebrities

Social media have become a mandatory instrument for connecting with fans and building up celebrities' brands. For instance, Gigi Hadid and Kendall Jenner – two famous young models – are using social media to burnish their careers which are expanding outside of the boundaries of the fashion industry. Hadid uses social media to share relatable and attractive contents to audiences and as a consequence, the celebrity as well as fashion industries are interested in developing and expanding her brand because she is regarded as having the power to engage women throughout the globe. This means that celebrities can independently create and spread their personal information widely, including hobbies, habits, and so on to selected target groups or demographics, rather than waiting for or being dependent on print and audio-visual media. A public profile can be conceived as the passport to attract and impress audiences through social networking. Publicized images and information are also in the hands of celebrities. In order to develop intimacy with audiences, a celebrity can create a social media profile to reflect his/her actual personality and individuality rather than self-idealizing him/herself. Social networking tracks various sources of personal information to reveal “personal environments, private thoughts, facial images, and social behaviors” (Back et al., 2010, p.372). Miley Cyrus, in spite of her rebellious image, is still regarded as honestly expressing her authentic personal style to the public. Recently, she revealed herself to be a bisexual person. However, although she and other famous people guarantee everything shown is “real” or truly themselves, their authenticity may still be questioned. It is in fact very difficult to determine what is authentic and what is not in their words and behaviours. Sternberg (2006) maintains that the concept of faithfulness and the unmediated personalities of celebrities are based on illusion. However, in spite of the ambiguous and unsubstantiated authenticity of famous individuals' expressions on social networking sites, such sites assist celebrities to become closer to the public and to gain the intimacy, their empathy and belief as well as their faithfulness.

Interestingly, in 2010, Alicia Keys used social media as her main channel of communication for her campaign – a digital death. She and her fellow celebrities sacrificed their social lives on-line in order to support the lives of thousands of children by raising \$1 million for the charity Keep a Child Alive. In another campaign to raise fund for HIV/AIDS victims in India and Africa, celebrities committed not to use or post anything through their social pages until \$1 million had been donated. Lady Gaga and

Kim Kardashian are two celebrities who joined that campaign. Of course, such social media campaigns have mutual benefits: they allow celebrities to cultivate their current fan base and attract new fans who share a sense of ‘social community’. Celebrities, then, fulfill their fans’ desire for gossip and news, but are also able to influence fans into supporting pro-social causes. Taylor Swift is now the most influential artist in the world – because she knows how to talk with her fans through music, fashion styles, and is able to share her personal stories about love or problems in her life through her Fanpage. Besides, she is active in supporting social causes such as Red Cross, UNICEF and Habitat for Humanity, etc.

Social media allow celebrities huge visibility which has a significant impact on their fame and career. “Counterbalancing the costs of high visibility are major benefits, notably profits, privileges, and power” (Rein et al., 2006, p.332). The global reach of the Internet means that celebrities have global presence without the constraints of distance. When fans in the US are in their beds, Asian fans are enthusiastically discussing the new music video of Taylor Swift’s “Bad Blood” and comparing it to the latest video of Madonna, “Bitch, I’m Madonna”. Or Vietnamese fans can easily access images of Western celebrities on a daily basis and even converse with them through the text functions of social networking pages – all of which fosters the celebrity-fan bond. In addition, the openness of social pages allows fans to share their ideas with other fans and recommend their choices. In sum, owing to its mass connectivity, instant interaction, and global reach, social media play a big role in helping celebrities to promote their images, stories and information to mass audiences, which not only strengthens the celebrity-fan bond but also enlarges the size of their fan base (Baym, 2012). It is noticeable that the more sincere celebrity stories appear to be, the closer the celebrity-fan relationship. Also, from the celebrities’ point of view fan support is essential since without it, fame and then commercial opportunities would go. Kristen Stewart, for example, became embroiled in a love scandal with the film director Rupert Sanders, betraying Robert Pattinson in the process. This incident caused a “boycott” by fans along with much criticism and controversy. As a result, Kristen Stewart “disappeared” to seek shelter for an indefinite time. In contrast, with the strong support of fans, K-POP stars have overcome difficulties and continued on the road to success, such as SNSD or T-ara who have promoted their talents to a mass population despite boycotts and scandals.

Social networking sites, therefore, can serve to either increase a celebrity’s positive fame or cause him/her to ‘lose face’ until such time that he/she can develop

renewed trust and social support. Social support is necessary to famous individuals since “among the benefits of receiving social support are better psychological adjustment, higher perceptions of self-efficacy, better coping, improved task performance, better disease resistance and recovery, and lowered-risk of mortality” (Baym, 2010, p. 82). Importantly, celebrities would like to receive the kind of support which says that they are needed and matter to others; “their life’s work is not just a trivial leisure commodity” (Baym, 2012 p. 298). This provides a spiritual motivation for stars to pay tribute to audiences, work harder and produce more attractive cultural products with better quality.

4.3. Challenges/drawbacks of social media to celebrities

As mentioned above, social media can create great challenges for celebrities who are trying to safeguard their reputation and their personal life. With the growth of paparazzi teams and the market for celebrity gossip, celebrity images are a highly priced commodity with the result that every aspect of celebrities’ public and private lives are surrounded by those wishing to gain from them.

In contrast to past decades, picture-based information can now immediately be posted and shared through Internet-based media tools that are out of the control of celebrities. Famous people will often take legal action against specific companies and individuals for the use of their images on Internet or social media pages for business purposes without asking permission or paying fees. In 2013, TV3 presenter Rachel Smalley requested the removal of her photos from weight-loss ads on Facebook. However, she is answered by Facebook that it is not simply a case of removal since ownership must be proved. Taylor Swift is among artists who have bought ‘a proprietary/copyright’ for her name to avoid possible trouble. However, she recently had to buy back domains that used her name since they were linked to a “black website”, which cost her over US\$ 1 million. Indeed, many stars hire social media experts to manage their online personae and control the huge amount of incoming comments. However, these efforts face serious problems of “maintaining control” and risk a loss of privacy as a daily occurrence. Only a week after Jennifer Lawrence and Kate Upton’s accounts had been hacked, a series of their personal photos was spread throughout the world on social media and on online newspapers. Also, Justin Bieber’s shameful antics and comments made on his smartphones have been leaked to the media on several occasions. Generally, keeping personal information and photos in the Cloud is unsafe and many celebrities have failed to control the leaking of personal

information. In Vietnam, there are many “fake” celebrity Facebook accounts/pages being created by anti-fans with a lot of posts and pictures of celebrities that may damage their images and destroy their careers as well.

These examples of identify theft, copyright violation, defamation or awkward image-management show the two sides of social media’s impact. Firstly, negatively, celebrities have to suffer the loss of money and good reputation. There are many cases that show that stars must halt their careers while waiting for the ‘stymieing’ of public to cease. Secondly, positively, social media offer an opportunity to shine as a top-influencing star. This was the case of Kim Kardashian when her sex tape with her ex-boyfriend was circulated on YouTube. Regardless of whether it was leaked deliberately or not, the sex tape made Kim famous overnight. One of the crucial aspects of being famous is the trade-off between one’s public and private life. Currently, stars are more open to sharing their personal lives through normal lifestyle pictures, because, it is the part of the celebrity’s’ job to “become friends” with people (Baym, 2012). Obviously, the public is interested in the daily lives of celebrities as they want to see celebrities’ real “selves” behind the scenes. They crave for a feeling of attachment and they want genuine stories from their idols. Therefore, stars attempt to engage in self-disclosure and portray themselves as “real” in order to build their fame. By conveying their true “selves”, celebrities ‘ordinary persons’ in the eyes of their audiences. This plays a role in obtaining the audiences’ empathy as well as building and maintaining intimacy in the celebrity-fan relationship (Lai, 2006). Nevertheless, authenticity remains a key factor since the vast majority of their public images are selectively constructed so as to minimize any possible negative exposure and maximize the positivity of their publicity. Simultaneously, Bhana (2008) maintains that social media portrayals of celebrities are chosen and deliberately exploited to their advantage and the celebrity industry in general. However, despite the complexity in assuring the authenticity of what celebrities show on Facebook, their daily information and images continue to facilitate intimacy in the celebrity-fan bond.

Social media and personal pages are the shortest and the most convenient way to update fans about celebrities’ situations – what they are doing, where they are eating, who they are talking to or meeting, etc. The more famous celebrities are, the more their private lives will be stalked and observed. Kanye West had to publicly apologize to Beck – the Best Artist of the Year in the 2015 Grammy Awards – under the pressure of public opinion after West criticized Beck as a non-deserving winner. And of course, West’s personal social media page was the place to do that. Social pressures came from

sources that were out of the control of West. However, while the public saw this as a scandal, West unintentionally turned the situation to his advantage: it increased his fame. Some suggested that this was a media stunt planned by him to enhance his media exposure. In the aftermath, West's name could be seen across the media, attracting a great deal of audience attention. The apology was the perfect solution for this scandal, following which, West has become even more loved by his sincere fans. Therefore, a scandal is a double-edged sword that if managed and conducted cleverly, can increase a celebrity's influence, fame and high visibility.

Celebrities need to keep an ongoing engagement with social media, providing a narrative of their activities for their followers and social media users. Just a week without new posts on her social media pages, Miley Cyrus was rumored to be dead. Currently, one of the significant jobs of celebrities in this social media era is taking good care of their social networking pages and the biggest concern is how to ensure posts are attractive and relatable enough to engage current fans and build the fan base. The study of celebrity psychology has provided evidence of narcissism that consists of (1) a need for a positive self identity and the avoidance of self-criticism; (2) extraversion; (3) a strong desire to be liked by others; and (4) a need for public preferences (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992; Oltmanns et al., 2004; Wallace & Baumeister, 2002; Watson & Biderman, 1993).

Social media is the perfect channel for celebrities to boost themselves. But how much should a celebrity share? Keeping control on information and ensuring parts of celebrities' personal lives are kept private is the top concern of celebrities and their managers. Bad image management on social media can definitely cause problems for celebrities. Do Manh Cuong, for instance – a famous fashion designer in Vietnam – received a great deal of criticism from audiences via social media regarding his fashion styles and fashion shows. The result was an increase in the number of anti-fans and negative public pressure.

Overall, Branaman and Lemert (1997) conclude that “one's reputation is produced through the use of self-presentational performances that are either publicly validated or discredited by interested parties based upon the context in which interaction occurs” (cited in Colapinto & Benecchi, 2014, p.228). The reputation of celebrities depends on the level of feedback and the nature of the comments (positive or negative) they receive from the general public and fans. In sum, the fame of celebrities depends on audiences' perceptions of their actions and activities. For instance, despite retiring from his soccer career, David Beckham is still in the top list of celebrities due to his contributions to

social causes that include NICEF, Red Cross, and WildAid. Also aiding his status are his product endorsements for brands that include Emporio Armani, Calvin Klein, and Motorola, his enthusiastic image construction as an “ideal family man” and his social activism on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Because the number of Internet users is increasing every second, the use of social media is vital in terms of celebrity image promotion. Nevertheless, a celebrity’s public image must be shrewdly and carefully managed. Furthermore, due to the rapid dissemination of information the Internet allows, it is likely that in some cases, celebrities are unaware that their actions are being discussed, commented on, and criticized in other parts of the world. For these reasons it has been claimed that social media “is both an explosive opportunity and a disruptive challenge to the fundamental parameters of crisis management” (Colapinto & Benecchi, 2014, p.231). Without the support of social media, celebrities could not manage scandals successfully and stage comebacks. Conversely, social media is the fertile soil for scandals to blossom and get worse. Therefore, to handle scandals wisely requires strategies and tactics to provide solutions and catalyze celebrities’ careers and fame. Generally, information management is about dealing with the “out-of-the-head” responses through which public image control manages the complications of celebrity. This is especially important for public relations managers in organizations which use celebrity endorsements. However, as discussed previously, social media provides powerful benefits in promoting celebrities’ images by helping to tighten relationships with fans, generating a successful public persona, putting them into the top tier of celebrities and enhancing visibility so as to attract new fans, audiences and sponsors.

4.4. Relationship between celebrities and audiences/fans on Facebook

As pointed out, the relationship between celebrities and audiences/fans is a parasocial one where celebrities are in the active position of controlling which types and what kinds of information or personal messages are being shared to sustain the appearance of an intimate, one-to-one relationship with large and culturally diverse audiences. However, regardless of which media channels and tools that celebrities use to connect with their fans, narcissism and top down control, however nuanced, are still the dominant feature of celebrity culture.

Facebook is deemed to be a powerful tool to create sociality and connectivity (Van Dijck, 2012) as it allows each user to have his/her own voice. As an interactive media channel, Facebook creates space for fans to raise ideas, comment on, and discuss the lives of celebrities; however, topics and posts are mostly under the control of

celebrities as the part of their direct engagement with fans. Vin Diesel – the star of the *Fast & Furious* series – is the current king of Facebook as an actor due to his “monster presence”. One of the topics Diesel has focused on is the death of his good friend Paul Walker. Fans of Walker, through the intermediation of Diesel’s Facebook page, can share their sorrow and sympathy. Clearly, in this situation, a celebrity is controlling the interactivity on his Facebook page. The general proactiveness of celebrities determines how big the size of their fan base. Emma Watson, a star in the *Harry Potter* series, is “ahead of the game” in the battle of gaining social media followers. She has nurtured her broad online fanship from the first day of her acting career. In addition to 12.8 million followers on Twitter, this talented and beautiful actress has 21.2 million fans on Facebook (in April, 2014), also, “she has a team but really drives all of it and is incredibly involved”, with a “day’s worth of her posts reached 70 million” (Busch, 2014, para.5).

The power of connectivity across mass populations means that when a comment appears on one page, followers of celebrity pages and their friends can see and reply to everyone signed on to the page rather than to a limited round of target groups. Fans can now create their own opinions, both favourable and unfavourable, regarding celebrities and use tags or hashtags (#) to mention them. One famous case is the song “Sorry, blame it on me” by Akon. He was earlier abused for using young girls for sexual games and the song is Akon’s apology under pressure from social comments. Implicitly, despite strong control by celebrities and their managers, parasociality is being altered. The ultimate power in narrating stories is, now, a shared power between celebrities and fans and social media users – though it is still an unequal contest. As such, there is evidence of adjustment in the relationship between celebrities and fans on social media sites such Facebook and Twitter. Today, with their advantage of global numbers, social media fans are placing pressure on celebrities to behave and act properly for the benefit of both sides, rather than solely for celebrities’ own purposes.

The nature of celebrity-fan interaction has been shaken with developments in technology and the higher level of education and knowledge of fans. Fans are also able to exert a definite influence on other fans, especially those who share the same cultural values and beliefs. Thus, there are cases where American fans are reluctant to criticize their favourite celebrity whereas Asian fans are quite willing to show their objections. Fandom is marked by an emphasis on spiritual and community values which are exercised through the expression of common ideas. Harrington and Bielby (1995) claim that “connecting with other fans and sharing viewing experiences is vital to both the

social construction of shared meanings and to the persistence of long-term viewing patterns” (p.47). This means that social media has the potential to provide fans with the power of strong connectivity which can enhance a common lifestyle and shared values. It is essential that celebrities consider the power of target groups and related groups. When the power of posting, manipulating, and controlling is no longer solely in the hands of celebrities, and the ability to connect people is no more an exclusive privilege, celebrities must utilize the strategy of “being sincere and intimate friends” with others rather than constructing “fake” self-idealized, narcissistic images to attract interest in the short-term. Victoria Beckham was once famous for her “posh” image; however recently, more often fans enjoy her sharing of daily-life pictures such as cooking and shopping in more casual clothes.

In summary, social media has created new modes of self-promotion for celebrities (Shuker, 2013). With the development of the Internet and the popularity of social networking sites, it is essential that public relation agents, image-makers, and celebrity managers treat social media as a crucial instrument for building and promoting the public images of celebrities as well as establishing and strengthening the celebrity-fan relationship. “Social media is an essential part of celebrities’ communicative mix” (Colapinto & Benecchi, 2014, p.221). Compared to other media channels, managing an online reputation through social networking sites requires conscious control, wisdom, and prudence.

Chapter 5: Identity

This chapter will discuss the notions of identity and the self as held by Vietnamese people in general and youth in particular. The chapter will commence with a comparison between Western and Vietnamese perceptions of identity in order to explain the difference in attitudes of Vietnamese people to national versus global stars who are mostly from Western cultures. Importantly, concepts of the self and identity of Vietnamese people in the past and in contemporary youth cultures/subcultures will be examined. Finally, the chapter will more deeply examine how the need to be outstanding and “break through the clutter” is changing attitudes towards traditional values and creating a new subculture of micro-celebrity.

5.1. Western notions of identity versus Vietnamese perceptions

5.1.1. Distinguishing individualism and collectivism

The distinction between individualism and collectivism (Hofstede framework, 1984) is helpful in understanding the differences between Western and Vietnamese perceptions of identity. Individualism and collectivism are defined as “the degree of which individuals are integrated into groups” (Hofstede, 2001). In a society where individualism is dominant, individuals are highly conscious of the value of the self and believe that a similar value is held widely. Valuing the self is somewhat related to narcissism when individuals have an excessive interest in themselves or their physical appearance and a desire to be admired by others, which usually comes along with egocentrism. Such individuals concentrate on personal accomplishments and realizing their self-determined objectives. By contrast, a collectivist society emphasizes strong links between the individual and the group and consequently the values of cohesion and conformity are paramount. Collectivists insist on maintaining a public façade of conformity, seek to avoid confrontation and prioritize agreement and harmony (Hofstede & Mooji, 2002). If different cultures influence the perception of value, individual perceptions may determine whether these values are accepted or merely receive lip-service. A value will be adjusted, depending how it aligns with the personal values of the individual. For example, individual experiences distinguish those favouring personal achievements and those caring about social supports (Triandis, 1984).

Other concepts are utilized to explain differences between individualism and collectivism, namely self-perception or self-explanation (Polyorat & Alden, 2005;

Zhang, Mittal & Feick, 2002). These concepts emphasize the role of emotion and internal processes in order to explain the differences in individual perceptions (Singelis, 1994). Under individualism, people tend to act on their unique wants and wishes while under collectivism, they are more like to reference their behaviour to societal or group norms and standards (Polyorat & Alden, 2005). Self-perception of cultural values and boundaries is argued to explain individual differences and explain the nature of cultural exchange and influence. For instance, collectivists are predicted to be more responsive to changes by groups who claim to represent broader collective interests whereas individualists may be more resistant and seek to mark themselves off from collective values and trends. Globalization has made people more integrated by which the process of cultural exchange and cross-culture exploration is facilitated. Evidently, more and more Orient audiences listen to Western music; and simultaneously, the wave of Korean, Japanese and Chinese music and movies is permeating across the world. Amid this contemporary globalization, impacts of culture on individuals' perceptions might be lessened. It means that people across cultures are more socialized in absorbing new things from other cultures. The higher the level of socialization in the society they are living in, the dimmer the line between collectivism and individualism.

5.1.2. Western notions of identity and non-Western perceptions

As a generalization, a culture of individualism is predominant in Western culture whereas nations in the Orient such as Vietnam have a collectivist culture. Hofstede (1984) and Geertz (1983, p.59) characterize the Western notion of identity as resting on “a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivations and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background...”. It means that Western philosophy emphasizes the uniqueness of the individual as an absolute value which can lead to narcissism and a disregard for others' values and opinions. By contrast, non-Western philosophical traditions do not support individualism and are reluctant to elevate the individual over group values and traditions (Van Meijl, 2008). Currently, individualism, arguably because of the influence of social media and the rise of neo-liberalism, has a greater prominence in public life across the globe.

The impact of social media, with its emphasis on private individual use and consumerism, is yet to be fully understood but the extent of penetration is enormous. Currently there are more than 3 billion Internet users (Asia is the largest with 45.6% as

of December, 2014) and approximately 1,55 billion Facebookers, 316 million Twitter users and more than 230 million Tumblr accounts (as of November, 2015) worldwide (Leading social networks worldwide as of November 2015, ranked by number of active users (in millions), 2015). The amount of information being exchanged on a daily basis is massive and social networking companies have billions of dollars turnover. Facebook is the leading company and exemplifies the business model of the sector which operates as a forum for sharing user-produced content, relying on earnings from advertising and other promotional activities. As with the traditional broadcast media, social media companies rely on economic attention in which the greater the number of “hits”, the greater is the revenue stream. The “like” or “follow” function is a particularly important aspect of earnings and it is here that celebrities play a key role as brand ambassadors and endorsement (Curtis, 2012). Social media provide a fertile soil for individualism, even acting, explicitly and implicitly, as the advocate for Western concepts of selfhood. Yet, at the same time, social media have the potential to provide a space for groups sharing common issues and concerns to develop a culture of collectivism.

For post-modern theorists, however, identity and the self is never a unitary concept but rather a concatenation of performances. In this conception the self, therefore, is not an essence or a primary source of being; rather, it is an outcome of a selection from available models and repertoires of selfhood. (Lyon, 1994; Hall, 1996). Therefore, both in Western and non-Western philosophies, the self is conceptualised as “pluralist, fragmented, emergent, dialogical, relational, inconsistent and culturally determined” (Murray, 1993, cited in Van Meijl, 2008, p.178). In other words, the traditional distinction between the self and society is being superseded and social media, with their capacity for globalization, are playing a significant role in this transition.

5.1.3. Vietnam’s perceptions of identity in general

Basically, Vietnamese culture prioritizes a view of the self that is collectivist rather than individualist – though this emphasis may be lessening in the young generation who are responding to post-modernism. From childhood, Vietnamese people tend to show less egocentrism, especially in “good friend” relationships, and perform their social roles and duties out of the fear of being punished rather than through an independent appraisal of the consequences (Leichty, 1963). The Vietnamese concept of identity rests on the value of “saving face in public” and of fitting in with group norms and beliefs. This differs from individualism as found in the West in which individual values and needs have a conceptual and practical priority. The Vietnamese tend to view

themselves as individuals, whatever their personal talents and abilities, only insofar as required to fit in with group standards and values. Raised within a collectivism-based education system and living in cross-generational family households from childhood, Vietnamese people generally have a high respect for family relationships. Family life is often the first choice in Vietnamese peoples' hierarchy of values. Broadening to the wider society, there is a strong attachment to social status and hierarchies. For example, in social relationships, people who descend from an "influential family" are often respected and are given specific opportunities and favourable conditions for promotion. Individuals with a good reputation and high-ranking position in big companies or state bureaucracies are often given preferential treat and have a high level influence over the careers and lives of others.

Consistent with this, celebrity brands play a significant role in the expression and acquisition of social status, with the common features of status reflected through the behaviours and activities of Vietnamese celebrities. When observing the images and activities of Vietnamese celebrities posted on social media (on their own pages or online newspapers), it is easy to recognize that the images of beautiful scenes and luxurious fashionable items are meant to represent their elite and upper class standing. Their comments on hot social topics and their commitment to various social and political causes of the moment are highlighted but the longer term consequence of those activities are rarely considered. For instance, the latest showbiz scandal is the "curse" words uttered by the Singer Tuan Hung towards the show *The Song Being Loved* (Bài Hát Yêu Thích show). Immediately, My Linh – a diva of Vietnam's music industry – criticized the male singer. And then, Thanh Duy Idol – a new singer made famous by the singing contest show *Vietnam Idol* – joined the conversation criticizing both, generating an ever expanding cycle of comments and counter-comments. Fans are interested in these kinds of topics because they can learn much more about the personalities of the celebrities involved. The supporting and opposing ideas of fans, anti-fans, other colleagues or the public help in maintaining the heat of the topic (Xuan Phuong, 2015). Another example was last year's sensational case when Siu Black (the famous singer) was on the verge of becoming bankrupt because of business failures and gambling. Show operators refused to work with her, and despite the protest of many celebrities and performers, she still lost her opportunity to work and her career has since declined (The truth of big debt of Siu Black, 2013). Such examples confirm the fragility of Vietnamese celebrities – especially those who have limited talents or have a level of talent that is not outstanding. On the other hand, it might be thought that the culture of

collectivism makes them more dependent on group approval than are celebrities in other cultures. In fact, the dynamics of popularity exhibited by Vietnamese celebrities tend to reflect the values of the young generation rather than the values of the whole society. Collectivism in Vietnam is also reflected by sharing or donating. There is a famous Vietnamese saying: “Whole leaves wrap torn leaves” (All things for all people). Traditionally, sharing/donating is considered to be a highly respectful act showing a high level of sympathy; yet in recent times, the youth demographic has transformed this ethical value into the “utilitarian” pursuit of fame for its own sake.

In sum, in non-Western countries, including Vietnam, individuals are more inclined to share common group values and rely on these values when expressing their own identity. There is evidence that this value-orientation is being changed by the incursion of social media as a vehicle for globalization. Currently, Western notions of identity are being promulgated by social media amongst the younger generation. This concept of the self emphasizes self-promotion and the self-centred pursuit of personal advantage.

5.2. Vietnamese concepts of the self and identity (through time)

5.2.1. History of concepts of identity of the Vietnamese people

Vietnamese concepts of the self and identity generate from Oriental culture where people generally share and live within communities. Individual performance and achievement are based on common shared values of the whole society rather than recognition of the individual as unique.

Prior to the 19th century, Vietnam was dominated by China for 1000 years. The Vietnamese culture was therefore deeply influenced by Chinese culture and traditions, notably Confucianism and Taoism. Vietnamese people considered their identity holistically as the harmonization of ‘body-person’. The emphasis was on the relationship between reputation, stature (body size), life experience, personal status, self-cultivation and lifestyle, and ‘heart-mind’ factors – such as conscience, confidence, soul, sentiments, and feelings (Marr, 2000). The relationship between ‘body-person’ and ‘heart-mind’ was the inspirational source for poets who used images of nature to reflect their soul, for example as moonlight (as translated by Huynh, 1979, p. 189):

How many in the world know my true self?

My heart I only bare to hills and streams.

Historically, before the 20th century, when the country was colonized by France, Western cultural influences were introduced into Vietnam society through main towns

and cities. The concept of individualism clashed with traditional values by arguing that it was necessary “to flee from fathers’ houses; to climb to a peak in order to feel all strength and possess one’s soul”; and “to embrace the whole world, and return to society to utilize one’s newly found creative forces to the full” (Nguyen, 1923, cited in Marr, 2000, p.777). This new concept of freedom could be seen as a reflection of colonialism and the wish to escape from a condition of slavery and subordination. Vietnam society in the 1920s prioritized hedonism and aimed to create “a social system bringing happiness and security to the greatest numbers” (Marr, 2000, p.779). However, the invasion of the Western style was associated with the formation of an urban bourgeoisie (middle class) that regarded itself as superior to the majority of “black people” (dân đen/ people living in poverty), which was a challenge to the culture of collectivism.

According to Marr (2000), throughout Vietnamese history, a distinctive concept of self-identity has been formed. Under the influence of Taoism and Buddhism for five centuries, Vietnam culture emphasized the importance of “eight verb-noun compounds in cause-and-effect sequence: redefine objects – deepen one’s knowledge – establish concepts – rectify the heart-mind – cultivate the self – regulate the family – govern the state – pacify the world” (Marr, 2000, p.773). These norms and values were regarded as defining a distinctive Vietnamese self. Over time, the first four compounds were made obsolete and self-cultivation amongst elites became the focus; however, within everyday life, collectivism remained important. The Confucianism adopted by elites (or intellectuals) gave prominence to five relationships of “ruler-subject; father-son; husband-wife; elder brother-younger brother; and friend-friend” without the concept of “personality” (Marr, 2000, p.774). Confucianism contained a social prescription that was aimed at “promoting loyalty, respecting authorities and social hierarchy” (p.774). Despite being under the yoke of slavery by China, through the efforts of Vietnamese leaders, Vietnam’s population was exposed to the concept of the “individual” quite early in the 17th century. The Western influence introduced the concept of the self as TÔI – a cultivated, well-educated self that was placed out of the control of the “quasi-family relationship”.

More than six decades ago, Alexandre de Rhodes inserted the Western concept of the first-person pronoun “I” into the Vietnamese dictionary, and Western cultural influence began to associate modernization with individualism. In the 1920s and 1930s, the perspectives of Nguyen An Ninh (who was eventually imprisoned for his public advocacy) was strongly influenced by Kant’s vision of enlightenment and personal

freedom which was contrary to the official culture, prioritized after the formation of the Communist party in 1930, which mixed Confucianism and Darwinism/Marxism/Leninism, associating the “perfectibility of human character” with collectivism. In the same period, young people were fascinated by the concept of individual heroism extolling “personal courage, fortitude and charisma” in the service of communist ideals. This emphasis was intensified by the promotion of role models in the war context in which the “emotional nuances and contradictions of characters” were downplayed (Marr, 2000, pp.780-781).

Vietnamese literature was fertile soil for portraying the self and identity of Vietnamese people across periods. The self with its emotional tones of fears, fantasies, weaknesses, and hopes was reflected through literary characters in the early 20th century who showed off their own sorrows and feelings regarding the appearance of Western ideas, urbanization, and expectations about the traditional family. Vu Trong Phung in his writings such as *So Do (Lucky Life)* (1938) sarcastically depicted the “crazy greed for modernization” in Vietnam. These kinds of writings attracted many readers since they laid bare the disorders of real life through their private thoughts. In addition to fictional explorations of the new life, non-fiction writing appeared where individuality was explored and the birth of autobiography provided the opportunity to “explore the self, inner feelings, personal motivations, interactions with siblings, wife and children” (Marr, 2000, p.783). With these developments, the perception of the individual “I” was given a greater richness.

After the August Revolution (8/1945), with the rise to power of the Communist Party, Vietnamese political culture insisted that “personal release and self-fulfillment, obedience and great participation” should be for the common benefits of society (Marr, 2000, p.790). By 1951, probably owing to the war context and the revolutionary demand to regain freedom and liberation from American control, the policy pronouncements of the country’s leaders were extremely dogmatic and peremptory, violating personality and individuality with re-education campaigns, criticism, and self-criticism (commanders/cultural cadres). By 1970s and 1980s, after national liberation, the country faced a new crisis of corruption, embezzlement and pragmatism in which influence and power were the two strongest forces. Individuality was still very limited due to the policies of the Communist Party and the government. The period was criticized for its suspension of the legal rights of citizens and a heavy-handed and repressive emphasis on collectivity and community.

5.2.2. The Modern context

The Renovation policy of 1986 has created an openness in the socialist-oriented market economy with surges of foreign investors coming to Vietnam and bringing new notions of identity and the self as an individual. There has been a subsequent enhancement of personal prospects, and prospects of rethinking and reorganizing the self internally. Each individual should seek for their own methods to be social and harmonious with surrounding people, nature and the universe. External identities defining the self in Vietnam are in accordance with the Vietnamese family, occupation, locality, citizenship, religion, and voluntary associations; however, people now have the opportunity to reveal their preferences as well as freedom of choice. Under modernization, self-perceptions and perceptions of others are steadily changing. Vietnamese people, especially the growing youth demographic, face a complex of influences primarily through (1) Chinese culture; (2) through Korean culture which has elements of traditional Japanese culture; and (3) through current Western culture. A key element in Chinese culture is the high value placed on maintaining a positive self-image or face in which the judgment of others is critical. Celebrities are highly significant others who encourage fans and followers to adopt the values, attitudes and behaviours that the celebrities share (Schultze et al., 1991). The high value Chinese cultural traditions place on group conformity plays into the celebrity-fan interaction – the more individuals communicate with their peers, the more susceptible they are to peer influence and materialism (Chan & Prendergast, 2007). Vietnamese youth now face a complex mixture of contradictory values. Chinese culture prioritizes (1) communistic values highlighting individual sacrifice and contribution to society; (2) Confucian values insist on a “saving” outlook (frugality, saving for the future/long-run demands); and (3) materialistic values that promote “money spending for personal enjoyments” (Chan, 2005, p.22). The switch from communist values to materialistic values is largely due to media messages relating to consumption (Paek & Pan, 2004). Leading the new materialism are Chinese celebrities who have a high level of earnings and a luxurious lifestyle and engage in self-promotion and patterns of luxury consumption despite the social emphasis on collectivism. Indeed, materialism is positively linked to the imitation of celebrity models in China, an influence which has been felt in Vietnam and other Asian countries (Chan & Zhang, 2007). For instance, the trend “Button Belly Challenge” in which participants post self-portraits of trying to reach an arm behind their back and around to touch their belly button was generated by a Chinese artist – Yang Mi – and has been taken across Asia, including Vietnam and the West. The ones

who can achieve the challenge can prove that they have a physical fitness and can also be praised of having a perfect belly. This fact confirms an emerging gap between the demands of conformity to collectivist values and individualism, with Oriental celebrities becoming more confident in showing themselves off. Another materialist trend started by famous Chinese people is the public display of luxury which is extolled as affirming China's emergence as a rich country. It can be easily seen that many new Vietnamese artists are also engaged in conspicuous consumption and the promotion of consumerism. It was not a surprise when nicknames such as "Branded Girl– Vu Hanh Nguyen" appeared, or articles about "Astonishing prices of one set of clothes of Viet stars". There are many famous celebrities who show off their wealth through images of their trips to the West that include luxury boats and hotels. These celebrities include young women such as Huyen Baby, Ha Min, and Ha Tong, and older ones such as Dam Vinh Hung with his US\$ 7 million house, Diem My with her US\$ 2 million yacht, and so on.

In the contemporary situation, Vietnamese society is becoming increasingly influenced by Western cultures and more and more artists are engaging in self-promotion, speaking out more loudly and strongly than ever before. Even the love-lives of artists that were usually kept confidential, are now influenced by Western celebrity gossip practices. Vietnamese celebrities are more free to tell their stories and voice their opinions about love, cohabitation, extra-marital affairs, having babies before marriage, late marriages, and so on. Huong Giang Idol (a transgender singer) gained wide media coverage when publicizing her love for and cohabitation with her boyfriend – a Canadian Vietnamese man. In reality shows such as Vietnam's *Next Top Model* or *Sabotage* (Secret Service/ Diep vu Tuyet Mat), the "love between contestants" is explored deeply with the purpose of attracting audiences in a similar way to Western-style programmes. Another example of cultural imitation by Vietnamese celebrities is the presence of Korean cultural styles in musical/movie/TV products, make-up, fashion, and so on. Despite being criticized by many, Son Tung – MTP's blatant copying of the famous rapper G-Dragon of Korea – was still received with great admiration and support by the youth which led him to becoming a hot celebrity in Vietnam's music shows. Circulating in online newspapers or on personal pages are innumerable pictures of Vietnamese stars with Korean-like faces and clothes. Obviously, the lifestyles of Vietnamese celebrities are being cloned from international trends in celebrity culture rather than expressing indigenous Vietnamese values. A similar phenomenon is also found in the common people, especially amongst youth. The "word of mouth" phase

that people often use when referring to advertising for make-up, regardless of whether it is targeted at the young or traditional people, is “Korean style”. The Vietnamese population is enthusiastically pursuing Korean-style make-up and cosmetic surgeries, as well as Western-style dress-up with the frequently updated fashion brand names such as Zara, H&M, Forever21, etc. Vietnamese people are increasingly starting to link concerns about their appearance (style and beauty) with branded products. Some measure of the depth of fashion consciousness can be found in the fact that smartphones, with extremely high prices compared to the average income of the Vietnamese population, are the most sought-after products.

The nature of Vietnamese society and the root mindset of ordinary Vietnamese people still cling to collectivism; however, within the confines of Vietnamese showbiz and the celebrity world, this value-set is being transformed. As depicted in the celebrity driven media world, Vietnam society is more open and more accepting of new cultures from the West. Formerly condemned practices such as one-parent families and single-mothers, cohabitation or LGBT are tolerated and people feel more relaxed when mentioning such phenomena.

5.3. Concepts of the self in Vietnam's contemporary youth cultures or subcultures

A generation is defined as “an age cohort that comes to have social significance by virtue of constituting itself as a cultural identity” (Edmunds & Turner, 2002, p.7). It means that each generation possesses its own identity within the culture of its society and the specific timeframe. A generation is not simply the result of time passing; instead, there are underlying meanings and separate behaviours in each generational cluster; that is, the uniqueness of each generation is defined socially and culturally (Bourdieu, 1993). Young people self-socialize (actively influence their own social development and outcomes) to achieve their own positions in relation to their peers (Alanen, 2001). Conversely, the younger generation may socialize their parents into the “self-socialization” world leading to the adaptation by the older generation of aspects of the emerging values and beliefs (Hoikkala, 2004). Pitt-Catsouphe (2009) examined the differences between generations by defining people by their working environment, age, and generation. In total, he defined six different groups: (1) The Millennials Generation (ages 26 and younger); (2) The Younger Generation (ages 27 to 35); (3) The Older Generation (ages 36 to 42); (4) Younger Baby Boomers (ages 43 to 52); (5) Older Baby Boomers (ages 53 to 61); and (6) Old People (above age 62). Within the scope of this

study, the younger generation is defined as those between 18 and 35 years of age – that is, a mix of the Millennials Generation and the Younger Generation.

5.3.1. The reaction of Vietnamese youth to the culture of individualism

Globalization tends to standardize national cultures, drawing local cultural forms into its orbit. With the growth of social media, information and knowledge from one place are easily shared and transferred to every corner of the globe, given the enthusiastic participation of the young generation. Stemming from their different information and communication needs as expressed on social media pages, the younger generation, with its high involvement in self-socialization, is more open in its approach to new cultural forms in global circulation. Currently, as is apparent in videos, on-line sharing, and writing (blogs, pages, etc.) young people are eager to express their own thoughts and opinions on specific topics. On Facebook, for instance, there are many closed groups and open groups being established for the exchange of ideas and state-of-the-art news. Normally, the two most common activities of Facebookers are “liking” and “reading”. Vietnam is a developing country; yet it is witnessing a strong trend in cultural integration into global culture, especially amongst the younger generation. Apart from the importance of the media, this strong surge towards global integration and Westernization is re-enforced by large increases in (1) the number of students “going abroad for study”; (2) the number of international school students in Vietnam; (3) the development of modernized shopping centres and international brand names as the result of economic integration and liberalization; and (4) technical infrastructure facilitating the development of Internet cables and TV. These developments encourage Vietnamese people to watch international channels and to be exposed to cultures of other countries all over the world.

The hedonistic lifestyle of Vietnamese youth, especially in urban areas such as Ho Chi Minh City or Ha Noi, emphasizes “night life” leading to the mushroom-like growth of small pavement restaurants, luxurious pubs, bars, night clubs, karaoke, and other exciting and sparkling entertainment attractions which tend to duplicate or imitate scenes and practices depicted in international movies (such as Hong Kong films of the 1990s and 2000s) and Hollywood cinema. Young people are enthusiastically adopting other practices. Recently “pool parties” in Hanoi have attracted thousands of young people. YAN TV – a new Vietnamese channel popular with the young – brands itself as the bellwether of the new values of hedonism, individualism, and the importance of fashion and lifestyle. “*Yan Star – No one else than you*” is the entertainment space for

youth to share their clips with thousands of others through a national TV channel. These developments mean that Vietnamese youth are extremely involved in the spread of Western individualism which is challenging the traditional values of collectivism and blurring the lines between national and international (Western) social and political values.

Observing social media pages such as Facebook (the most popular social network in Vietnam), YouTube, or ZingMe (a local social media site), reveals that young people seek to express their individuality through the open sharing of their own stories; Facebook, for example, is a lively life diary with videos and images. Interacting with and through social media, young people are free to express their reactions to media and online content such as news, fashion, and gossip. For instance, they are able to share interesting links and interact with others with similar interests and perspectives. This search for common interests is essentially a process of self-socialization in which the values of celebrity culture are central. Vietnamese youth have an intense interest in sharing comments about famous trends concerning fashion, stars, hot trends, news about Vietnam showbiz and celebrities, hot girls/ boys, etc. Many global memes from global popular culture as “Twerk It Like Miley”², “Belly Button Challenge”, “Bikini Bridge”, “Ice Bucket Challenge” or more recently “KissCam” are receiving enthusiastic responses from Vietnamese urban youth culture (Duc Tri, 2015; H.K, 2015; Mask, 2014). In recent years, besides gossips and showbiz news, young people are also paying attention to information about the world, economies, politics, business and culture more than ever before.

Vietnamese young people describe themselves as having open minds and inclusive attitudes that are defined as modern and progressive. They are more open to share and reveal their own thoughts and prepared to show off their “silliest faces” in public as the confirmation of their individual identity. However, still being affected by the traditional culture of collectivism, Vietnamese youth create and join groups composed of same-thinking members in order to gain the advocacy of social communities. Vietnamese youth also search for fame since they love the feelings of being noticed, admired, and supported by others. The “follower” phenomenon is popular in Vietnam’s young communities where leaders are often celebrities, famous people, hot girls, or hot boys. In terms of identity management, the younger generation are still more likely to share and show themselves openly rather than managing what

² <https://www.facebook.com/tilm.vn/videos?fref=photo> (Twerk It Like Miley trend in Vietnam)

they are sharing and showing. Many desire to express their opinions and relay personal information (or create and fabricate information) in order to get attention from the public regardless of the consequences. Their profiles are often lacking in public information such as news or current affairs; instead, profile photos or photo albums are full of pictures recording every single moment of their private everyday life. Vietnamese young people have created an individualist subculture which favours open expression and the latest trends in fashion and consumerism. This zone of “freedom” is surrounded by a culture of collectivism in which the community or group remains the context in which individuals forge a new identity and express their interest in fame.

5.3.2. Differences in ideas of identity between Vietnamese old and young generations

There exists a great difference between the beliefs and lifestyles of the Vietnamese older and the younger generations. Although they share the same values of collectivism and self-cultivation, they balance these values differently. Traditional values emphasize that self-cultivation should be in harmony with the values of the community. Confucianism and Taoism with “three submissions, four virtues” for women, “three bonds, five virtues” for men and the eight verb-noun compounds mentioned above, require that individuals cultivate the self in a way that is in balance with the family, village, and surrounding communities, and thereby contribute to collective rather than individual wellbeing. Basically, people achieve a good character and the higher good by making a collective contribution instead of seeking personal benefit. Older Vietnamese people have a collectivist orientation in which each individual is an element constituting the society. This feature is reflected in the relationship between neighbours. Sincerity in relationships and open communication between households is often maintained and strengthened by the older generation; however, the communication of younger people is often limited to only a passing acknowledgement without further engagement and often not even that. It is not unusual for young people who are neighbours not to know each other’s faces. This culture of withdrawal conflicts with ancient proverbs endorsed by the older generation that value the neighbourhood relationship such as “village affection and neighbourhood gratitude” or “a next-door neighbour is better than a distant relative”. One of the reasons for the younger generation’s lack of interest in neighbourhood is the popularity of social media in Vietnam on which young people spend most of their time, expressing their own ideas, stories, and feelings, and interacting and strengthening relationships.

Self-cultivation remains the traditional value shared by the young. However, the understanding and expression of this value is different from their ancestors and former generations. Young people tend to express their individuality as part of the pursuit of distinction and fame. Vietnam's youth are not reluctant to start a new trend or promote a new idea and a new fashion. For example, Vloggers such as JVeevermind, Dua Leo, and Pho Group are confident in offering their own opinions on social issues and current events through sharing clips at a dizzy speed on Youtube. There are many online groups and offline events called Startup that are followed with enthusiasm by many young people and fans. They rely on community for empathy, support, and crowd-funding for their new startup ideas, simultaneously confirming their proactivity and the strength of their own personality. However, there is a dark side to the phenomenon that involves the over-confidence of young people and the over-enthusiasm and exaggeration of telecommunication press. Singer Le Roi – the online phenomenon – is a prime example. He is an individual with a “terrible” voice but is confident enough to cover songs and publish them online. Drawing on the curiosity of the Vietnamese online community including “love-to-comment” online users coupled with the “sharp-witted exploitation” by entertainment business people, Le Roi's image has appeared widely in the online and offline world. There are many cases where young people have achieved fame overnight because of their looks and “hot” bodies, images of whom can be leaked accidentally, exposed on purpose by the owners, or uncovered by paparazzi.

Vietnam's traditional and contemporary thinking about the self and self-cultivation are different in notions and expressions. The traditional lifestyle endeavored to cultivate the personal good commensurate with moral values and social demands so as to achieve benefit for society as a whole. Within this tradition, each individual played an integral part; that is, the traditional self was the self of society. Contemporary lifestyles, however, insist on the modern self of individuality. Vietnamese young people confirm their own charisma, identity, and personality based on the values shared with other young people; that is, the contemporary self seeks to be “outstanding” within the community, working for personal benefit rather than society as a whole. The contemporary self contributes to the circle of the community which is constructed by whom with same directions before putting effects to other groups.

5.3.3. Differences in ideas of identity amongst the young generation today

Within youth culture, there are two basic manifestations of identity: thoughts and lifestyle. First, individualism is growing fast among Vietnamese youth under the

influence of Western media and neighbouring Asian countries such as Korea and Japan which increasingly follow American formats and models. Depending on their socialization and social background, individuals within the same generation may have different self-perceptions. There is a clear line between young people who have grown up and been educated in Vietnam and those going abroad to study, and the influence of the media and social media needs to be considered as a factor. Having the chance to absorb Western thoughts, young people are more open to sharing their attitudes to fashion, style, romance, and the latest celebrity gossip. Individuals who follow the media and social media are more likely to assume the style of a charismatic leader (who can bring followers together through his or her personality and charm, rather than any kind of external power or authority) within their groups, defining topics rather than acting as followers. Therefore, these opinion leaders still strive to develop a community despite individualism being given priority over collectivism. This is particularly so amongst the young who have been educated abroad in Westernized societies with the more developing media and social media, compared to those whose education has been local. The locally educated and those without overseas educational experience are more likely to act as followers and be less assertive and less public in their expression of opinions. They prefer being in the group, receiving the support of other members to standing out alone with their own different point of views.

In observing the behaviour of Vietnamese young people in the online environment, two kinds of interactive styles and identities are apparent. The first group depicts themselves as “media experts” – the ones with an entertainment mindset and their concerns are often on local show business gossip and news. The second group describes itself as “young intellectuals” who concentrate on following political, economic, documentary, or social news. They often form closed groups discussing specific topics about startups, ambitions, language learning, etc. However, in spite of these different orientations, both of these two groups share the same interests in proactively looking for information for fun and relationships and have opinion leaders tied to specific primary groups rather than making general impacts. Commonly in Vietnam, liked pages are about fashions, household products, beauty products, fun pages, and so on. In general, the younger generation consider themselves as proponents of openness and are ready to express themselves and engage in new global trends in fashion and popular culture. The ideal of self-cultivation has shifted from presenting the traditional concept of self as a respectable emblem of collective values towards the

“authentic” expression of the inner self. Indeed, there is a dominant emphasis on self-promotion which challenges but does not reject the demands of collectivism.

From the research viewpoint, there are a range of differences between the concept of the self amongst subgroups and subcultures which depend on a range of variables that include commitment to Confucianism; the degree of exposure to Western education if any and to what level; the degree of literacy and educational qualifications; whether from an urban or rural background and whether from the North or South region; and gender and religion. These factors also affect the older generation but the younger groups involved in social media crave an individual identity which is downplayed or even ignored by those who are older. For instance, there is evidence that the North and South regions have separate subcultures with the South being more individualistic with an open attitude to gender equality and commodity relationships (Jayakody & Vu, 2009; Taylor, 2001). For young people who are affected more strongly by their families than their peers, Confucianism has created a belief that women are inferior to men and should accept a subordinate position in the family and society (Schafer, 2010). The separation between male and female is still profound; for instance, regardless of being from the older or younger generations, a large part of society still ask women to marry before 30 with the notion that “late marriage in a male is normal, but not good for a female”. The son is more valued than the daughter in many families. The domestication and subordination of women, along with patriarchal control, has had a long history in Vietnam and is still prevalent today (Schafer, 2010). In the labour market, females must work harder, even three times more than an average male worker, to gain a similar wage or salary. This gender inequality is not unique to Vietnam society but is in fact a global phenomenon. However, in Vietnam, patriarchy is exceptionally intense and this means that females face an exceptional demand to deliver an exceptional performance both as a housewife and as an employee. Society looks down on women who are perceived as not being a good wife and mother. Vietnamese women are expected to sacrifice their personal time, hobbies, desires, self-esteem, and benefits to generate a good and happy family, over which they have no real decision-making power. These traditional features of society remain a fundamental element in different subcultures across regions. Although personal cultural experience and knowledge affect the response of individuals, the younger generation is, however, clearly opposed to the traditional, patriarchal system in Vietnam. They proactively advance liberal attitudes by highlighting their self-identity over traditional and social norms.

5.4. The need to be different in styles and new identities

5.4.1. The desire to be famous and the need to be outstanding

Celebrities, especially the young ones, are regarded as playing the role of leaders rather than followers. Therefore, they try to be different, to stand out from the crowd or break through the clutter created by the celebrity system and promotional media to market themselves to the general public and position themselves against rival celebrities also using the same strategies and tactics to become or stay famous. Consequently, the celebrity system is an attention-seeking business where each celebrity endeavors to promote his or her name and profile in the media through (1) their association with beautiful and distinctive products (e.g., record releases, public concerts), and appearance and acting roles; and (2) through ensuring that they have a good relationship with fans and the general public (service-provider and customer relationships).

Typically, celebrities are the ones who evoke and ignite new trends within the local communities, acting as opinion leaders who endorse global trends or provide insider tips on the latest developments. The influence of celebrities passes firstly to their fans and then subsequently to the wider Vietnamese community via the media and social media. Young people using social media to advocate for a trend or to comment on an item of news are affirming their right to have opinions within their immediate community. Celebrities, in turn, post updates and express their likes and dislikes online with the objective of maintaining their media profile and confirming their status as pace-setters and opinion leaders. It is difficult to conclude that celebrities are truly interested in posts or news they “like” or choose to “share” but these activities are clearly designed to persuade fans and the general public that they do. The expansion of entertainment in online newspapers in Vietnam with reporters enthusiastically searching out celebrity news through their Facebook pages has increased the chance (in quantity) for celebrities to be exposed to audiences.

The majority of Vietnamese celebrities are eager to use social media, especially Facebook and Youtube for self-promotion and marketing, and as a means to connect with their fans and online audiences. On celebrity Facebook pages, there is a series of “Good morning/ Have a nice day” pictures and captions from famous individuals or public figures which appear every morning. The need to be different and special means that celebrities must constantly work at self-presentation, and must be up-to-date and “in vogue”. Looking back at the “Belly Button Challenge”, there were many famous people in Vietnamese showbiz, from hot girls, and supermodels to ordinary young

adolescents joining the game. National or global trends are responded to by these people since they want to keep up-to-date in the mainstream and be noticed. However, in order to differentiate themselves, celebrities must think up “new games/activities” or create “a new identity”. The development of new trends is limited as is the number of Vietnam’s celebrities who have a unique personality and talents. Nevertheless, the frequency of change of image and the focus on superficial aspects of appearance inevitably raises the question of authenticity. In a collectivist society, Vietnamese celebrities are careful not to show off all aspects of their private selves, especially the craziest or weird parts of their personalities. Thus, the public seldom see their “bad/ ugly moments” or “silly pictures”. Despite this reservation, some celebrities, in an effort to attract the attention of the media away from their rivals, make a point of being iconoclastic. The model Trang Tran is a typical example with her unashamed curses and rude words. She is considered as a straightforward person who never says “yes” or “beautiful words” to people she does not like and she is quick to condemn anything that she finds offensive. Other celebrities seeking to advance themselves have adopted a similar strategy of seeking notoriety by speaking out on various controversial topics. For example, using his Facebook page to express his disagreement with the large number of Vietnamese youth who approved of the same-sex marriage law in the US, Duc Tuan – a male singer – has become the hot name in the discussions within the Vietnamese online community (Hong Giang, 2015).

The development of iconoclasm is not only found in celebrity culture; the same dynamic also applies to ordinary users as more and more young people covet the status of “micro-celebrities”. The younger generation seek to distinguishes themselves from other online communities and from the cultural values of their parents by creating distinctive subcultures online through Facebook pages (“Group of people who love Big Bang so bad”, “Group of people who are against and boycott China” or “Group of people who love doing gym”).³, Or in the gamer communities, many young girls and boys have become famous for being “slay leader” of a fighting group. They formulate a new vocabulary and a “fighting language” that is only meaningful within the “subculture of online fighting”. For example, in the world of the globally popular game *League of Legend* (LOL), “place wards” means placing video surveillance in locations in order to be able to observe what is happening when the character is not there, while

³ <https://www.facebook.com/hoithichtapthehinh/?fref=ts> (Group of people who love doing gym)
<https://www.facebook.com/m2b.vn/?fref=ts> (Group of people who love Big Bang so bad)
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/222716957757301/> (Group of people who are against and boycott China)

“gank” is defined as a surprise attack on the enemy and is often executed by the “junglers”, with many other terms that are only understood by LOL gamers. The cost of online subcultural fame is the sacrifice of the “real” life opportunity to make friends with “online competitors” outside of a gaming environment. Such contacts, in any case, having a limited connection to actual offline identities. Those young people who have become “micro-celebrities” receive support as well as criticism from other online users based on their Vlogs (video clips they have made), small online articles, and pages through which they not only express their own viewpoints, but also seek to claim a leadership status.

The need to be different and outstanding is probably the most significant phenomenon amongst Vietnamese youth. This is most strongly evident in urban areas where young people have more facilities and chances to learn about Western ideas of “individualism” and “materialism”. Particularly, with the growth of the Internet, geographical constraints are gradually being erased and the desire to be famous is a strong motivation for many Vietnamese people, especially the young.

5.4.2. Economic motive of fame

Besides the enjoyment of being known and admired, fame gives the recipients a chance to get much more money and other benefits. Rein et al. (2006, p.26) pointed out that the profits of fame can include “earning huge sums of money, getting the best tables at restaurants, having their cars parked in special places, and receiving VIP treatment at airports, hotels, and shops”. It is apparent that the desire for fame is driven by financial motives – one of the key reasons attracting people, especially young people, to pursue fame. Celebrities market their images to maintain audience interest and attachment, but a high media profile also leads to economic benefits such as celebrity endorsement, special treatment, and show and event invitations. For example, due to his good reputation, attractiveness, and talent, David Beckham is always considered as a good choice for product endorsement for world famous brands including Pepsi, Adidas, Samsung, and recently H&M. This job not only helps to promote the brands’ images and increase their revenues but also earns Beckham a larger amount of money than his soccer salary. Therefore, sponsorship and product endorsement offer financial benefits to celebrities (Frank & Cook, 1995; Gamson, 1994). Product endorsement or events participation has effectively helped brands and celebrities to become more commercially successful. Once a name is known by the public, lots of economic benefits follow; that is, opportunities for product endorsement

in TVCs (television commercials) or posters lead to guest invitations to events and on TV programmes to attract the attention of audiences. Through these activities celebrities can stimulate the consumption of their own cultural products through movies, DVDs, CDs, or tickets, which will bring them more money. In other words, these activities undoubtedly play a big role in fostering their fame and simultaneously offer them financial achievements. Some celebrities, mostly in middle-age, also write autobiographies with the main purpose of revealing their inner feelings, personal motivations, intimate interactions, and their philosophy of life. Such literary products also bring them financial benefits. An example of an autobiography is *Loving and Living* by the famous actress Le Van, with its shocking insights into her life.

The number of product endorsement contracts depends on the personal image and the level of popularity of each celebrity. Every valuable minute in a TVC can bring a celebrity a million dollars in earnings. For example, Ho Ngoc Ha – a top A celebrity – signs lucrative contracts with La Vie, Panasonic, and Pantene. Given these advantages, celebrities must carefully maintain positive (online and offline) images and avoid scandal. Moral clauses are strictly required in contracts, and if not observed, celebrities face the risk of having to compensate the brands for the loss of reputation and cancellation of their contracts. The endorsement is “not a personal entertainment tool, but a window acting as a commercial” (Colapinto & Benecchi, 2014, p.221) for the brand and celebrities themselves. Therefore, all images, attitudes, behaviours, or words of the chosen celebrities have a strong influence on their careers as well as the image of the brands. For example, the recent sensational extra-marital affair of Ho Ngoc Ha led not only to a boycott by a large number of fans but also by brands (Duong Dung, 2015).

The fact that there is an increase in the number of ordinary Vietnamese young people obsessed with acquiring personal fame provides incontrovertible evidence that fame is a potential pathway to wealth and the “good” life as defined by the Western media. Young individuals who yearn for fame and stars who try to keep it seem to regard achieving it by any means, whether positive or negative, as an indisputable good. Although a bad reputation can destroy the image of celebrities, the state of being known and noticed, discussed and gossiped about is not only perceived as a pre-condition for ordinary people to become celebrities but also a price worth paying for the benefits – notwithstanding the chances of failure are high and the status of celebrity uncertain and short lived. Thus, it is not surprising that more and more Vietnamese people, including young adolescents and famous individuals, try their best to get public attention by utilizing a wide range of attention gaining tricks that include pro-social activities such

as taking part in humanitarian activities, or joining reality shows which generate scandals. For example, Ngoc Trinh – a sexy bikini model – with her sensational statement “no money, only have soil to eat”, as well as other notable utterances, caused a controversy in the Vietnamese community. Despite being criticized as a materialistic, consumerist, and trivial girl, her name appeared in most online and offline discussions at that time. It is really only her beautiful face and sexy body that helps her to be successful in her modeling career. Her scandalous words, if not her notoriety, contribute to her public profile and gain the attention of others, resulting in many online game and cosmetic endorsements and VIP treatment at public events. In addition to the enjoyment of being loved, admired, and noticed, the fame, popularity, or notoriety also provide celebrities with economic benefits, which seduce and capture the attention of more and more Vietnamese people.

5.4.3. Celebrity models – prestige and reputation

Undoubtedly, fame provides an easy road to preferential treatment. There is an increasing number of Vietnamese young people who are determined to pursue a career in the entertainment industry and become widely known. With a pretty face, a good-shaped body, and a good fashion sense, young people can get the attention and admiration of their peers. Also, social media and online newspapers make a significant contribution to promoting their images widely. Hence, they can easily step into showbiz. The number of famous people in Vietnam has been increasing rapidly whereby almost everybody, especially the youth, yearn for fame. When Vietnamese celebrities refer to and learn the styles of the global stars in the West (e.g., Miley Cyrus, Brad Pitt, and Lady Gaga) as well as the styles of Asian stars (e.g., KPop singers), they, in their turn, become the reference group for aspiring celebrities amongst the young. For example, by imitating the style of Miley Cyrus, the female singer Toc Tien has attracted attention and quickly become the style model of many Vietnamese young individuals. Ly Hai – a male singer – is another clear illustration. His “family man” image, like David Beckham, has brought him admiration and respect from the public at large. Besides Western styles, the Korean wave is currently having a profound effect on the professional identities of Vietnamese celebrities, especially in terms of outlook and the style of cultural products.

Within the Vietnamese celebrity world, the “big star” and “old star” serve as role models for the new ones (newbies). Such role models include singers My Tam and Dam Vinh Hung and the “entertainment queen” Ho Ngoc Ha; models Thanh Hang and Xuan

Lan; actors Johnny Tri Nguyen and Dustin Nguyen; actresses Ngo Thanh Van and Tang Thanh Ha. The situation of actors Johnny Tri Nguyen, Dustin Nguyen, and Kim Ly is quite unusual in Vietnam showbiz because of their long-time residence in foreign countries (the US and Sweden). They are welcomed back in Vietnam, primarily because of their achievements in the international market, which in the mindset of the majority of Vietnamese young people is the perfect proof of their great talent. They are also expected to bring a new impetus and burst of creativity into the development of Vietnamese movie industry.

Positively, the celebrities adopting global trends are to be complimented since the lessons learned provide practical guidelines for the successful development of Vietnamese showbiz. Nevertheless, Vietnamese stars have been steeped so deeply in both KPop and Western styles that they have lost connection to the cultural values of Vietnam. Their images have gradually become a mixture (hybrid) of Western-Korean-Vietnamese styles that lack a distinctive national character. There is also the fact that the successes of the Vietnamese entertainment industry are still limited to within its borders. Seldom are the cases of Ho Ngoc Ha or My Tam registered on an Asian, let alone, international scale. Cases such as that of Vo Viet Chung, with his fashion collection “Lanh My A” featuring traditional Vietnamese dress being broadcast on FTV – the international fashion channel – remain rare.

While Vietnamese celebrities admire and consider global stars as their celebrity role models, the younger generation considers Vietnamese celebrities as their models. Many express their admiration and love toward famous artists such as Ly Hai or Quyen Linh for being family men; Ho Ngoc Ha or Thanh Hang for expressing what they believe in; and in the field of theatre, Thanh Loc and Hoai Linh for being two outstanding role models for the younger generation. These celebrities reveal two different trends in public exposure. While Ly Hai openly reveals his family to the public, there are only a few people who know the private life of Thanh Hang or Hoai Linh. However, in general, both kinds of role model have the reputation and prestige to influence or divert the thoughts, lifestyles, and viewpoints of the majority of the youth, who try to dress like their idols or copy their path to success. Because of the strong influence of stars as role models, it is no surprise that they are invited to events as a means of endorsement and to catch the attention of the public.

When discussing Vietnamese celebrities and their notions of fame and prestige, it is vital to mention their attitudes to possessive individualism as it is widely applied in the West, specifically in the US. This aspect of individualism is often considered to be

selfish by many Asians since it does not admit to or appreciate the role of social support behind individual achievement. People following this tenet, especially Western celebrities, believe that they are the owners of their own persons, and what they acquire by exercising their talents (even the talents themselves) has nothing to do with society. They strongly believe that all their success is a result of their own talent, efforts, labour and capacities, rather than being provided by the society or people around them. They also believe that they are not influenced by and do not rely on social obligations or the will of others, therefore, they do not owe anything to other citizens or society (Macpherson, 1962). In interviews, Western celebrities generally talk proudly and confidently about themselves – their talents, their personalities, and their capacities. They stress how they got through a difficult period of time to reach the success they have now or how hard-working they are to achieve excellent performances on stage or through roles in movies.

In contrast, Vietnamese people are educated and encouraged to respect and pay tribute to familial and social supports. Benevolence and righteousness (nhân-nghĩa) – two of the five Confucian virtues – are also highly appreciated. Vietnamese people in general and celebrities in particular always pay respect to and show gratitude for the love and support they have received from their families, teachers, friends, and colleagues. Vietnamese actors also give thanks to directors, writers, composers, costume designers, make-up artists, and all logistic staff for their significant support. Vietnamese celebrities can sometimes be regarded as too modest as they rarely “praise” themselves (although the opposite can be true). Obviously, the above-mentioned attitudes and values intrude deeply into the Vietnamese psyche, and are factors that strengthen a celebrity’s position in the audiences’ hearts since, in Vietnamese culture, gratitude and modesty are two important human virtues.

In conclusion, there are differences between Western and non-Western cultures in terms of the influences on the formulation of the self and identity. Western culture prefers individualism where the self is marked as self-sufficient, and people are expected to openly express and share their personal feelings and opinions. By contrast, collectivism is part of popular culture in non-Western societies where people share common values, and the individual is regarded as an integral part of the whole society. Vietnam is a non-Western country with a long-standing history of collectivism and self-cultivation within a shared framework of beliefs and values. Traditionally, the self is harmonized and integrated into the identity of the community and the whole society. However, since Vietnam has become more open, economically liberalized, and

integrated with global values, Vietnamese people, especially the younger generation, have begun to adopt the values of Western culture. This development has led to new subcultures of collectivist-based individualism in which individuals, especially young people, are more active and have more freedom in expressing their own opinions and showing their own personalities than ever before. However, they still need to live up to social expectations and common values to some extent in order to receive support from others, which facilitates their careers and their lives as well. From that, being famous has also become a strong dream of many young people. Also, the competition to be outstanding in the face of rivalry is tougher, leading to the need to be different and able to create new identities to reflect state-of-the-art trends as a tool to attract audiences. In order to keep up with global trends and attract audiences, Vietnamese celebrities regard their global counterparts, especially Western and Korean stars, as models to learn from and imitate. In turn, Vietnamese celebrities influence the thoughts and styles of Vietnam's general public, notably the youth.

Chapter 6: The Vietnamese context of celebrity

Fame is the dream of many. Celebrities, who have achieved fame, are strong magnets not only to potential audiences but also to academic researchers all over the world. There is a wide range of literature dealing with celebrity culture and its manifestation in many different countries across the globe. It seeks to discover the nature and specific features of celebrity culture such as the celebrity experience of fame and fandom in different social, cultural, and political contexts. As a consequence, it is not hard to find references to celebrity culture published in a variety of media such as books, scholarly articles, journals, magazines, newspapers, documentaries, and fictional films. This strong interest in celebrity culture can be found throughout the Western world and in Asian nations such as Korea, Japan, and China. The high level of media attention and, by implication, public fascination, is also apparent in Vietnam, a small South-East Asian country, whose political culture is founded on a communist ideology, albeit under pressure to modernize. Although the celebrity system in Vietnam is relatively under-developed compared to other countries, gossip, news, and information about celebrities and the circulation of their images is a prominent and frequent feature of media coverage including newspapers, television, radio, websites, gossip columns, and other media channels. However, very little academic research has been undertaken into the specific features of Vietnamese celebrity culture and how this may differ from the patterns established elsewhere, especially in relation to US led patterns and models. Out of the few studies that have explored the Vietnamese cultural, social and economic context of celebrity, the book *Consuming urban culture in contemporary Vietnam* (2003) edited by Lisa Drummond and Mandy Thomas provides authoritative analyses by a range of authors on cultural change in contemporary Vietnam, its popular culture, urban life, and changing media and how these may impact celebrity culture. In another text named *"Stars in the shadow: celebrity, media, and the state in Vietnam"* (2001), Mandy Thomas and Russell Hiang-Khng examine the relationship between celebrity and its social and cultural context and the relationship between the media and the State in Vietnam. Nevertheless, there seems to be no literature that specifically focuses on the phenomenon of Vietnamese celebrities, their characteristics, their trends, their relationship with audiences, and the popularity of social media, especially Facebook, in Vietnamese urban society and the world of celebrities. Therefore, this chapter will explore the social and cultural context of Vietnam in which both the Vietnamese urban middle class and celebrity culture have developed. Also, the influence of Vietnam's

media and politics on celebrities and the interaction between Vietnamese celebrities and fans will be discussed.

6.1. Social and cultural background of Vietnam

6.1.1. Vietnamese society in general

Since the introduction of the Doi Moi policy in 1986 which saw an opening of the Vietnamese market and later, participation in ASEAN, WTO, APAC and other bilateral and multilateral treaties with other countries, Vietnam has been undergoing some remarkable changes through the impact of globalization and the gradual development in economy, politics, culture, society, and other fields. Developing on from a nation in which more than 90% of the population work in agriculture with a high level of food production for the local market, Vietnam is now a powerful exporter of agricultural products such as rice, pepper, coffee beans, and chesnuts. The Doi Moi policy has moved the Vietnamese economy from “the subsidy era of central planning” into a socialist-oriented market economy (Leshkowich, 2008, pp.58-59). This new policy direction has created dramatic changes for the Vietnamese people. Doi Moi is translated as “renovation” (modernization) which refers to a “more open socialist economy” allowing a “multi-sector economy operating under a market mechanism with state management and socialist orientation” (Boothroyd & Pham, 2000, p.8). In addition, under the direction of Doi Moi, open-door policy, de-collectivization, private ownership, democratic social life, foreign trade, and relations with other countries have been implemented, fostered and promoted by the Vietnamese government, which has generated economic changes as well as social, cultural, and political transformations all over the nation (Earl, 2013). According to a World Bank report in 2008, in an 18-year period from 1990 to 2008, Vietnam’s GDP grew from US \$6.472 billion to US \$90.705 billion and the population growth rate decreased from 1.92% in 1990 to 1.22% in 2008, which led to an enhancement of the general standard of living that continues today (cited in Ly & Nguyen, 2010).

Based on the statistics announced by the General Statistics Office of Vietnam and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the total population of Vietnam was nearly 90.5 million people in 2014 (cited in Ngan Ha, 2014). The uneven distribution of this population between city and country in an area of 330,000 km² country has created a wealth gap between the rich and poor with ensuing socio-economic issues. In reality, only a minority of residents enjoy a high standard of living, with the majority of Vietnamese suffering from poverty and the effects of socio-economic inequality. The

monthly income of the majority of people is around US \$20, and the figure is even lower in some remote areas. The impoverished ethnic minority households located in mountain areas account for 50% in the total amount of poor households in Vietnam. There has been an increase in the number households living in poverty due to inflation and the economic downturn in recent years (Dieu Linh, 2015). Earl (2013) concludes that the consequences of Doi Moi are a widening gap between rich and poor, and between urban and rural communities. He concludes that social inequality is the dark sides of the renovation process in Vietnam. The wide gap between rich and poor was a feature of the previous bureaucratically centralized and planned economy but it has been exacerbated dramatically in the current socialist free market. The new market mechanism has encouraged many individuals to engage in illegal activities such as speculation, embezzlement, and corruption which threatens to undermine Vietnam's national potential. Moreover, those gaining wealth based on loopholes in the market economy have made little or no contribution to the state or shared their wealth with the public (Le, 2015).

Vietnamese society, therefore, reflects inequality in income, lack of opportunities among social classes, uneven distribution between urban and rural areas, and poverty amongst ethnic minorities. Gender inequality is a controversial problem in Vietnamese society. However, there has been some development in the roles and positions of Vietnamese women in recent years with more and more women becoming politicians, scientists, and managers. With more than 50% of the population entering the labour market, an increasing number of women are participating in most fields. A 2011 report called "Vietnamese women's roles and positions in this integrated and developed country" points out that the number of female entrepreneurs involved in foreign investment reached 66.8%, and over 90% of Vietnamese women are literate, the number of female bachelor graduates is 36.24%, master is 33.95%, and PhD is 25% (Le, 2013). Also, currently, there is 24.4% of delegates in 13th Vietnam's National Congress (2011-2016) are women, this number is expected to increase in the next coming years (Le, 2015). However, according to Vietnam Women's Union, recently, in spite of certain achievements in gender equality and the gradual lifting of gender prejudices, Vietnam is still facing challenges in strengthening the social positions of women. Inherently, this country is still influenced by old feudal perspectives in which men are appreciated and placed in higher positions than women. Gender inequality is strongly believed by many to be a natural fact supported by traditional customs and cultural practices. The low level of education and the burden of house chores have prevented many Vietnamese

women from undertaking careers. In addition, women trafficking and prostitution remain a complicated social issue.

In addition to social inequality and poverty there are other significant social problems. Drummond and Thomas (2003) note that after 1986, despite the transformative impact of globalization on economic activity, the creation of new opportunities, and wealth-making, challenges have arisen from HIV/AIDS, alcohol and drug abuse, marital breakdown, petty crime, and teenage suicide. Similarly, Leshkovich (2014) argues that poverty, homeless, unemployment, corruption, drug addiction, abortion, a low level of education and lack of social responsibility are the negative consequences of the development of a socialist-oriented market economy in Vietnam.

6.1.2. Urban middle class

“Middle class” is a term used widely in mass media channels as well as in many fields such as the economy, politics, and society. It is not an easy term to define. This is apparent in the proliferation of names such as the ‘new urban middle class’, ‘the new rich’ and ‘the new bourgeoisie’ (Robinson & Goodman, 1996; Pinches, 1999). Commonly, these terms refer to a group of individuals who belong neither to the highest or lowest class in a social hierarchy (Earl, 2013). Historically, Western countries have categorized those people between the rich and the poor or low paid employees as middle class. Some other countries use the term to identify a category of people who have a certain economic independence, but do not, however, having any big social influence or hold any real power in their society (Bui, 2014). Fan (2000) defines middle class as people “having a little more than enough” (p.91). Middle class individuals are seen as possessors of cultural capital such as being intellectual, having a fashionable appearance, displaying a modern life-style, and having managerial and technical skills (King, Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008). The term ‘middle class’ contrasts with two other terms: ‘the upper class’ and ‘the lower class’. The middle class group is identified by many factors depending on the country being considered such as income, property, intellectual and educational level, manners, and behaviours (Bui, 2014).

In the near future, the middle class will undergo a sharp increase and will have a remarkable impact in many fields all over the world. OECD (the organization for economic cooperation and development) predicted that the world’s middle-class households would rise from 1.8 billion people in 2009 to 4.9 billion people in 2030, and two thirds of this figure would live in Asian countries (cited in Lee, 2015). The new urban middle class in Asian societies could include three advantaged groupings: “people

with administrative power, people with economic capital and people with education, experience and employable skills” (King et al., 2008, p.792). Undoubtedly, the numerical increase in this social class will lead to higher levels of consumption and the growth of employment not only in Asian nations but all around the world. Moreover, improvements in education and healthcare can be expected and these will facilitate long-term economic growth. As a country situated in the Asian region, Vietnam has also witnessed the enlargement of the middle class within its population with around 2 million people joining this group annually. The statistics of the United Nations, the World Bank and the General Statistics Office of Vietnam show that from 5% of the population in 1992, the middle class made up more than 60% of the population in 2014 (cited in Ly & Nguyen, 2010). Based on the 2012 survey of Boston Consulting Group (BCG), Vietnam is currently the nation that has the strongest rate of middle-class growth in Southeast Asia and is predicted to reach 33 million people in 2020 with the income per capita going up from 1400 USD to 3.400 USD (Ha Thu, 2014). Similar to other countries, the Vietnamese middle class has made a large contribution to society through many industries. Their high consumption level provides an example of the benefits of the pursuit of good living standards (Ly & Nguyen, 2010). The concentration of the middle class not only in two of most developed cities of Ho Chi Minh and Ha Noi, but also in other cities like Hai Phong, Da Nang, Binh Duong, and Dong Nai, demonstrates the socioeconomic influence of the Vietnamese urban middle class throughout the nation. According to a survey by BCG in 2012-2013, 90% of the Vietnamese urban middle class has a strong belief in a better, brighter future for the next generation. Meanwhile, the figure for some other Asian countries like China, Indonesia and India is 70% (Phan, 2014).

Although globalization presents many challenges, the majority of the urban middle class in Vietnam has an optimistic view that the economy is growing. In Vietnam, there are individuals with a stable income and an increasing level of consumption. Investment in and the expansion of a large number of multinational corporations such as LG, Samsung, KFC, McDonalds, and Starbucks in Vietnam’s market is the strong evidence of the attraction and economic potential of the urban middle class. Alan Phan, a well-known Vietnamese socioeconomic researcher, also remarks that the optimism and the strong consumption of the middle class are domestic motivation and stimulation for Vietnam’s economic development (Phan, 2014).

In addition, the emergence of the middle class has created increasing demand for political freedom and civil rights, which will facilitate the democratization process of

Vietnam (Phan, 2014). In Western countries, capitalism and democracy have grown up simultaneously following the decrease in the power of the land-owning aristocracy and an increase in the rights of labour and the middle class. The middle class has played a significant role in political and democratic issues (Lee, 2015). It is arguable, as Lee (2015) believes, that the growth in the middle class can prevent governmental and state organizations having exclusive control over political resources. In Vietnam, the middle class has a high level of education compared to the majority of society and has a clear understanding of the issues of corruption and democracy. Nevertheless, the majority of the middle class have tended to cooperate with the government in order to secure benefits and cultivate good relationships with state officers. Hsiao (2006) similarly states that the “urban middle class usually gets benefits from ties to the state and they remain generally supportive of the state so long as their interests are maintained”. Thus, in order to protect their interests, many do not challenge the government or struggle for democracy in society. Nevertheless, in recent years, Vietnam has witnessed the occurrence of a variety of civil and democratic protests or demonstrations carried out by individuals coming from the middle class. Typical examples are Dr. Nguyen Quang A, rapper Nguyen Vu Son, blogger Pham Thanh Nghien, blogger Dieu Cay, lawyer Le Cong Dinh, and businessman Huynh Duy Thuc who raise their voices against the autocratic leadership of the Vietnamese communist party in order to support the development of democracy in Vietnam. They have been arrested, mentally and physically harassed, suffered legal punishment, home detention and imprisonment. Lately, there have been large-scale demonstrations on the streets and on social media by Vietnamese students and other intellectuals over the cutting down of trees by the Vietnamese government in the capital of Hanoi (Wendling, 2015) and in dispute with the Chinese government’s violation of Vietnamese territorial rights at sea with the development of oil rigs (Vietnam protestors attack China over sea dispute, 2014). Discussing the role of the middle class in Vietnamese society, lawyer, liberal and democratic activist Le Cong Dinh said optimistically that although the role of the Vietnamese urban middle class was not as strong as in Western or developed countries, their impact would be expressed in upcoming years in Vietnam’s socioeconomic growth as well as political transformations (cited in Kinh Hoa, 2015).

Figure 6.1: Vietnamese residents stand up against the cutting down of trees by the authorities in the capital of Ha Noi



Source: Danlambao (2015)

Figure 6.2: Vietnamese people take to the street over the sea dispute with China



Source: Hoài Hương (2013)

The key points are:

a. Education and employment

Similar to its neighbor China, in Vietnam “education is important in determining an individual’s earnings and economic development” (Fan, 2000). Education has always been seen as the route to higher social status, social mobility, respect and success for many Vietnamese individuals, and also a means to achieve a middle class status (King et al., 2008) becoming doctors, pharmacists, journalists, teachers, and lawyers. The results of a survey of Vietnamese middle class families by King et al. (2008) found there were “76% of fathers with educational qualifications above higher secondary levels in large cities – 65% in smaller urban areas, whereas the figure is 66% for mothers in large cities – 49% in smaller urban places” (p.798). With the open-door policy and globalization, education has been supported and facilitated in Vietnamese society. Through bilateral and multilateral educational co-operations, there is an increase in the number of scholarships offered. Furthermore, there are more and more middle class parents with good financial standing who are willing to send their children to overseas countries in order to obtain higher education and more qualifications regardless of the high living costs and tuition fees. It can be said that the Vietnamese urban middle class is characterized by the propensity to pursue higher education, and to seek employment and job mobility in state bureaucracies, all of which requires the support of the state (King et al., 2008). Boring but safe state employment is chosen by the urban middle class because of its stability, status, power, lifetime job security and social benefits after retirement (Nguyen, 2003). Besides, state employees have more opportunities to access scholarships for study abroad. Although the state remains a major employer and oversees economic regulations, rights, and inspection processes, this control has been loosening in recent times. Nowadays, there is an increasing number of urban young middle-class individuals seeking job opportunities in a wider variety of industries and sectors. Although they are not an independent force for political transformation, at least they exercise a degree of discretion which is not under the control or action of government (Kerkvliet, 2001, pp.263-269).

Overall, Vietnamese society still appreciates the norms and values of community, hierarchy, traditional morality, and respect for the older generation. The individual is seen to be relational, a part of family or certain social groups rather than autonomous and independent (Leshkowich, 2014). Therefore, the thoughts, activities or decision-making of the young are strongly influenced by their families and parents (both mother

and father) who have a big voice in the career decisions of their children (Nguyen, 2003). Nevertheless, with the trend towards globalization and higher levels of participation in education, young urban middle-class individuals have more independent spaces for developing personal skills and pursuing their own dreams. Interestingly, a growing number of the young Vietnamese middle class have chosen to work as freelancers such as photographers, wedding planners, event coordinators, and web designers, or open and run coffee shops, small restaurants, bars, night clubs, clothing stores, or barber-shops which can offer them more freedom, flexible working time, little pressure, and more leisure time, which all relate to so-called creative labour.

b. Leisure and Consumption behaviors

As pointed out in the last chapter, the demand for leisure and entertainment products and services is growing for the whole Vietnamese public, especially the young urban middle class, whose entry to higher paid jobs has given them a relatively high disposable income. As Jorgensen (2005), Thomas and Drummond (2003) conclude, the Vietnamese middle class has a lifestyle closer to the global urban middle class and this is evident in the propensity to purchase modern consumer goods. These authors point out that the Vietnamese urban middle class pays a great deal of attention to consumption and social issues rather than political issues. The key interests of the Vietnamese urban middle class are leisure, consumption and entertainment, they are “urban dwelling and leisure oriented” (Earl, 2013, p.87). The survey of Victor T. King, Phuong An Nguyen and Nguyen Huu Minh (2008) shows that the Vietnamese urban middle class can be considered to be cultural consumers with time for leisure activities such as watching TV programs, movies, DVDs, reading news or listening to music. In Vietnam, newspapers and magazines are tools of entertainment, news and information sources for urban middle class youth. Most published Vietnamese magazines target the high-income middle class. To serve the tastes of this social group, “the content of these sections centers on luxury products and exclusive international and Vietnamese brands available to high-end consumers in cities including Ho Chi Minh and Ha Noi” (Earl, 2013, p.90). These sections focus on exploring international or locally famous, wealthy and successful figures who can attract readers and have an influence in the formation of consumption decisions mostly amongst the urban middle class. The common content of these sections are family life, consumer products, and celebrities. For example, topics of *New Fashion (Thoi Trang Tre)* magazine are diet, beauty, leisure, international celebrities, fashion, and exclusive living spaces. *Women’s World (Gioi Phu Nu)*

concentrates on family, women, fashion, showbiz, health and life-style products, and services. Consumer magazines mostly focus on beauty, fashion, cosmetics, and style to attract readers. The dominant content appeals to urban middle class tastes and fashion sense through the use of good-looking models with beautifully made-up faces, sexy ladies, or six-pack men in order to achieve high circulation and big revenues (Hien, 2012). Clearly, the urban middle class increasingly appreciates appearance and physical beauty since these are usually associated with affluence and superior social positions in Vietnamese society. The mushroom-like growth of spas, beauty salons (cosmetic surgeries), fitness centres including gym rooms, yoga classes, dance-sports courses, and other health and beauty care services has also proved increasingly high social living standards and the public's attention to their physical bodies.

Figure 6.3: The cover page of a Vietnamese magazine for women



Source: Sao Viet (2014)

Figure 6.4: The cover page of a Vietnamese magazine for men



Source: Nguyen (2015)

Figure 6.5: The cover page of a Vietnamese popular magazine for family



Source: Tjep Thi Gia Dinh (2015)

These trends indicate that there is a strong emphasis on non-political news and celebrity gossip. Although newspapers daily update political news concerning the activities of the national government and other nations around the world, reportage avoids criticism and investigation of the activities of the national government such as corruption. One of explanations for this is that the press is the efficient tool of the government in propagandizing the policies of the communist party, and is prevented through censorship from covering negative aspects of the state. Political issues are seen as sensitive because they can generate social instability. As a result the media tend to focus on apparently innocuous issues such as celebrities and life style consumption. In spite of some dramatic changes such as news sources, appearance of publications, online versions, the print lifestyle media is still under loose but persistent control of the government and has to converge with the state's world-view (Earl, 2013).

The young urban middle class lives by the slogan "You Only Live Once" (YOLO), which means that national and political issues are set aside for a devil-may-care focus on enjoying life as much as possible through a variety of entertaining activities. Given a stable, disposable high income, the young urban middle class tend to have a positive attitude and high optimism toward the future. According to the World Value Survey in 2001, most middle class people say they are happy and satisfied with their situation (cited in King et al., 2008).

Figure 6.6: Street food vendors are considered to be favourite places to gather by young adolescents



Source: Duongbo.vn (2015)

Figure 6.7: A well-known crowded roof-top bar in the center of Ho Chi Minh city



Source: Marion (2013)

Globalization and the Internet have brought pop culture into Vietnamese society (Drummond & Thomas, 2003). They observe that “Vietnamese cultural life has become increasingly affected by the global flows of ideas, capital and products” (p.2). Currently, popular icons, celebrities are presented and embodied in many different products. So compared to older people, who do not have detailed knowledge of a wide range of public figures, the young urban middle class is aware of a variety of celebrities, ranging across various fields and coming from different countries (Thomas & Heng, 2001). Also, Drummond and Thomas (2003) claim that “there is an intense and growing fascination with foreign celebrities” (p.7). At the same time, the Internet and social media such as Facebook and YouTube are connected to negative consequences. There was one pitiful and controversial case in which a teenage girl took her own life by pesticide poisoning after her ex-boyfriend uploaded a clip of them having sex. The clip spread widely amongst many young netizens and met with harsh and scornful comments. The heartlessness and lack of respect for privacy amongst young online users of social media contributed to her suicide since the traditional value of face and honour are appreciated in Vietnamese society (Quynh Tran, 2015). It can be a terrible thing for anyone whose name, image or reputation is damaged. Although Vietnamese Internet usage and accessibility are still under the control and censorship of the government, it has become an increasing challenge for the state to manage Internet usage in this globalized era.

c. Other behaviours and special features

Two of Vietnam’s traditional cultural values are compassion and philanthropy. These values are common to the Vietnamese public as whole and the urban middle class in particular with a focus on community, charity, and compassion towards the economically disadvantaged and poor. The young urban middle class have inherited this positive traditional value and promoted it enthusiastically in both the offline and online world despite random instances of cruelty such as in the case of the young woman who committed suicide. Pages, posts, status, clips about animal protection, environmental conversation, donations to the poor, and warning messages about social evils are supported and shared widely at a dizzy speed amongst the Facebook community. Not only does this help people in need and promote social welfare, but it also raises the sense of national solidarity and fosters affiliation in the community.⁴ In addition, a

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/tuthienphuyen> (a charity associate Facebook page)
<https://www.facebook.com/thienvi.hkhn> (a charity associate’s Facebook page)

variety of humanitarian activities, voluntary programs, and charity organizations have been established online and have recruited a wide range of individuals from students, teachers, lawyers, doctors, journalists, and celebrities – proof of the prevalence of these social values. Individuals are keen to be part of “Philanthropic Association”, “Understanding the Heart” program, “Vietnam’s Dreams” and “Green Summer Campaign”.⁵ The aim of such programs is wide ranging from giving clothes, food, and medicine to residents in flooded areas, raising funds for poor children to have heart operations, to building houses for people living in extreme poverty. Nevertheless, the young urban middle class also have the tendency to envy, criticize and condemn each other, with hostile views of the value of success, beauty, and popularity. *Flappy Bird* is a good illustration of this tendency amongst the young urban middle class. *Flappy Bird* – an online game well-known not only in Vietnam, but also around the world – was created by a young and talented Vietnamese man. The fame and other financial benefits gained by Nguyen Ha Dong has made many young individuals jealous and has encouraged them to scrutinize negative aspects of the game. Under a great deal of pressure, Nguyen Ha Dong removed Flappy Bird from all game downloading applications (Huy Phong, 2014). Additionally, the life and stories of female wealthy, successful, and pretty models and actresses are subjected to distortion and fabrication which produces negative gossip. These narratives of envy and jealousy can usually cause trouble for the lives and careers of stars and celebrities and place them at risk of physical and mental disorders.

In general, the whole of Vietnamese society and the middle class in particular have been affected by the global flows of ideas, values, and items. Besides sharing common characteristics with the middle class in other countries such as the preference for leisure, optimism, entertainment, and consumerism, the Vietnamese urban middle class also possesses its own political and socio-economic features because of Vietnam’s specific social and cultural context. In coming years, with the adoption of new forms of media and technology, this group promises to facilitate and generate social, economic, and political transformations in Vietnam.

⁵ <http://hieuvetraitim.org/> (Understanding the heart)
<http://hoinhanai.blogspot.co.nz/> (Philanthropic Associate)
http://www.thanhdoan.hochiminhcity.gov.vn/vanphong/tintuc/default.aspx?cat_id=923 (website of Ho Chi Minh city Youth Union)

6.2. Celebrities, media and politics in Vietnam

6.2.1. The role of government control over media

In general, as in many others countries all over the world, especially authoritarian or communist nations, the Vietnamese mass media operate under a strict regime of censorship imposed by the government. The media are responsible for encouraging respect for the rule of law and the institutions of government. In this process it can be argued that the media make an important contribution to ensuring acceptance and passivity in relation to the status quo of the Communist Party's rule. The most widely used and apparently effective method is a combination of professionally filtered information and news and the provision of entertainment that encourages mass distraction. This situation is similar to agenda-setting when the media (the press) choose government-censored news and information about issues which should be offered to the public. McCombs (2003) states that in agenda-setting, media channels "collect" issues and contents which are thought to be important to the audiences rather than providing information the public needs. Currently, as with traditional media broadcast channels, online news media also functions under government censorship and control (Walker & Orttung, 2014). The limited access to websites in China such as BBC News, CNN, and Hong Kong News provides a clear model to the Vietnamese authorities. Facebook, for example is not allowed in China, with the Chinese government offering Chinese residents its own social networking site called Weibo.

However, in Vietnam, the situation is slightly more open. Social networks, especially Facebook and YouTube, are widely used, especially by people located in urban areas. Vietnam was ranked in 10th position on the list of 10 nations having the most of social media users in the world (Current popular social networking sites , 2015). The number of Facebook active users in Vietnam was more than 30 million in June 2015 (Tuoi Tre News, 2015). The control of cyber-space is much looser than in China and young urbanites with an increasingly high level of education have recently raised their voices online about a variety of topics relating to politics and democracy. Nevertheless, there is no privately owned media and no press freedom as understood in the West. Published articles, broadcast programs and even online posted news and discussions are censored carefully and sensitive political issues are publicized in the press and other media channels. The government "allows citizens only a little room to act and speak publicly on important issues" (Kerkvliet, 2001, p.269) and attempts to silence the public discussion if being found that it badly impacts private interests of

those in power (Gainsborough, 2002, Zabuzhko, 2002). The opportunity for a popular discussion of state-related issues remains severely limited. Article 88 of Vietnam's criminal code enacted in 1999 prohibits the publication or broadcasting of propaganda that distorts, defames, or damages the reputation of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam – as this is defined by the ruling Communist Party. A large number of journalists, lawyers, bloggers and other democratic and human rights activists have been tracked, harassed, arrested and sentenced to prison under the provisions of this article (Bui, 2013). Censorship and authoritarian measures over the mass media such as those found in Vietnam have been witnessed in many countries which have similar regimes – including China, Russia and other authoritarian nations all over the world. Dat Lai Lat Ma or Luu Hieu Ba are well-known activists for democratic issues in China, while Cu Huy Ha Vu, Le Cong Dinh, Dieu Cay, Nguyen Phuong Uyen are prominent activists struggling for democracy and human rights in Vietnam.

Since the Vietnamese media are prevented from playing the role of watchdog and critic of society, news and programming tend to focus on a diet of innocuous entertainment. Consequently, gameshows, celebrity talk shows, reality TV shows, competitions and other programs about celebrities, health, love, fashion and family have become a safe and permitted fertile land for the provision of media content. Moral lessons, public health and safety issues are the most popular topics covered by the Vietnamese media (Thomas & Heng, 2001). Commentators see this as an efficient strategy for ensuring that entertainment will reduce the development of mass mobilization, mitigate public anger, or distract attention from social and political problems. Watching competitions such as *Dancing with the Stars*, *X-Factor*, *Vietnam's Idol* or *The Remix* are much more attractive than discussions on the complications of Vietnamese political life or than taking to the streets in demonstrations against corruption. Gradually, in Vietnam, citizens are developing a culture of passivity, rather than paying much attention to political issues or putting effort into bringing about political transformations. As well as Vietnam's pre-existing culture of deference, the state works as an actor producing culture in Vietnam (Leshkovich, 2008) with the effective support from the media channels which have been very successful in distracting the interests of the population from political life and forming public opinion in the way state leaders want. Thomas and Heng (2001) point out that the Vietnamese government has succeeded in creating a regime of public pleasures that is consonant with governmental purposes and agendas. The perspectives, attitudes and lifestyles of the general public and youth have therefore been shaped by the state-controlled media.

The role of celebrities is central to this process. By being exploited by media as a frequent source of news and content, celebrities are "making tastes, ideologies, relations of power in the wider social environment in the Vietnamese people" (Thomas & Heng, 2001, p.295).

6.2.2. Celebrity and the growth of tabloids

Due to the existence of governmental controls and the taste preferences that the media cultivate, Vietnamese young urbanites are relatively ignorant of long-term important national issues and pay most of their attention to the contemporary leisure life and celebrity world. As a consequence in Vietnam, many well-educated individuals remain unaware or passively accept government control of the media (King et al., 2008). The majority of urban middle class youth prefer sports, entertainment news and celebrity gossip in print and online formats (Earl, 2013). Every detail of the daily activities of public figures, from going out with friends, appearing in events, wearing fashionable or out-of-date clothes to breaking up with their lovers, is discussed and circulated in most of the media channels (especially online newspapers)⁶. This not only satisfies public curiosity, but also nourishes the high consumption level of Vietnamese youth. As a result of being targeted and exploited by the media and the public, the celebrity industry in general and celebrities themselves gain the most benefits from these arrangements. Most stars and celebrities, along with their publicity managers, PR agents, and image-makers have full awareness of the importance of frequent exposure and high visibility in the media channels. The coverage of images and the circulation of news and gossip plays a big role in building fame and maintaining the "hotness" of celebrities. Exposure management is an art which aims to draw public attention to celebrities and bring them to their side in order to get, maintain, or augment star fame and power (Rojek, 2012). Thus, the development of tabloids and online gossip websites in Vietnam has not only responded to public taste, especially of the youth demographic, but also facilitated the development of a celebrity industry while supporting Vietnamese governmental purposes. Discussing the nature of tabloid journalism, Marvin Kalb – director of the Shorenstein Center for Journalism, Politics & Public Affairs of Harvard – remarks that the tabloid form (or tabloidization) has led to a decline in topical news

⁶ <http://www.yan.vn/>
<http://news.zing.vn/>
<http://www.yeah1.com/>
<http://kenh14.vn/>

coverage; instead, it has given rise to stories relating to sex, scandals, and entertaining (cited in Nguyen, 2012).

Recently in Vietnam, there has been a growth in the number of tabloids, gossip columns, websites, Facebook accounts, and YouTube videos with stories and features about public figures which have been fabricated to enhance their attractiveness and rapid circulation among Vietnamese youth. The popularity of tabloids alone suggests a thirst for celebrity amongst Vietnamese's readers and audiences (Thomas & Heng, 2001). Most of the gossip news circulated in magazines, tabloids, or on social media sites relates to the celebrity world and covers celebrities' daily activities, appearances, cultural products, families, relationships, and their statements and comments on any topic. It appears that every detail of famous individuals' movements, gestures, words or even frowns and a smiles are captured by news providers and discussed with excitement by the general public, especially Vietnamese youth. Nevertheless, the reliability and the accuracy of these kinds of information are being questioned, since the news sources are not verified. (Nguyen, 2012; Ky Duyen, 2012).

For illustration, the death of the actor and model Duy Nhan has become the hot topic for the public, especially amongst young Facebook users. There have been many images about his funeral with its sorrowful atmosphere and the tearful faces of his relatives and friends who are stars in Vietnam. Besides stories about his personality, his young wife and his cancer treatment process have been extensively exploited and endlessly recycled in Vietnamese tabloids and within the Facebook community.⁷ Another recent controversial case is the famous female singer Ho Ngoc Ha who has been named the "Entertaining Queen of Vietnam". This beautiful woman has recently appeared in most pages online and offline due to an extra-marital scandal.⁸

Celebrity-related stories, therefore, whether faked or at least partly genuine, have a greater ability to attract public attention and set up heated discussions in the youth community than do politics and state-related issues. With the support of social media such as Facebook and YouTube, not only do Vietnamese young people have space to actively raise their own voices, but they are also facilitated in showing off their wealth,

⁷ <http://kenh14.vn/duy-nhan.html>

<http://ngoisao.net/nguoi-mau-duy-nhan-qua-doi-vi-benh-ung-thu-mau/topic-19421.html> (Model Duy Nhan died of blood cancer)

<http://vietnamnet.vn/vn/van-hoa/236424/2-lan-tro-treu-bop-nghet-trai-tim-vo-duy-nhan.html> (The hurtful wife of Duy Nhan)

⁸ <http://kenh13.info/nghi-an-dai-gia-kim-cuong-bo-vo-va-3-con-theo-ho-ngoc-ha.html> (Married business man with 3 kids left his family for Ho Ngoc Ha)

<https://www.facebook.com/HoitaychayHoNgocHa> (Group of people who are against and boycott Ho Ngoc Ha)

<https://www.facebook.com/PhimHDVietNam.Fan?fref=ts> (extra-marital scandal of singer Ho Ngoc Ha)

expressing their ego, criticizing others, and gossiping endlessly. Eventually, this process can turn them into online micro-celebrities who are either admired or detested. Nguyen Ngoc Thach and Gao are authors who are well-known for their Facebook posts in which they express their personal ideas about a wide range of social topics such as books, health, family, and the Vietnamese celebrity world. They both have their own follower communities and simultaneously, anti-audiences.⁹

6.2.3. Importance of LGBT audiences and general attitudes to sexual non-conformism in Vietnam

LGBT is an acronym for lesbian – gay – bisexual – transgender individuals who have a “common experience as targets of heterosexism and transphobia and their common, yet complex, struggle for sexual and gender freedom”(Anti-Defamation League, 2015, p.3). Overall, the LGBT community has been the target of prejudice – suffering from negative stigmas, attitudes, stereotypes, and targeted violence involving bullying, abuse and harassment. They have difficulties in finding interpersonal support or having a voice or forum through which to assert their sexual orientation or gender identity in relation to “new/unfamiliar settings” and many other challenges in their social life (D’Augelli, 2002; Maccio & Doueck, 2003; Oswald, 2002; Rosario et al., 2001).

Currently, there is evidence that the acceptance of the LGBT lifestyle is growing; however, the lack of acceptance of homosexual behaviour remains strong (Drake, 2013). According to the survey by Pew Research Center (2013), up to 45% of Americans believe that the discrimination in homosexual treatment is a sin. The survey also found that the acceptance level has shown a significant increase across religions and affiliations (between 2003 and 2013, homosexuality acceptance rose from 47% to 60%). Furthermore, there has been an increase in the number of people bravely admitting their own real sexual orientation or gender identity all over the world and are prepared to suffer, if necessary, being insulted or humiliated. The survey also shows that approximately 67% of Americans support well-known public figures (famous people, stars, or celebrities) who are open about being LGBT community members. This has been an attitude that has taken time to develop – in the 1970s, Navratilova was a tennis champion who received many advertising contracts prior to officially admitting to being a lesbian; however once she “came out”, people still admired her talents but turned their back on her “real” life. Currently, stars are more open in publicizing their

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/vuphuongthanh> (Gao’s Facebook page)
<https://www.facebook.com/Mr.Sexy.Clown> (Nguyễn Ngọc Thạch’s Facebook page)

sexual orientation since the fear of losing fans, to some extent, has lessened. Matt Bomer came out as gay two years ago and is living happily with his gay partner and his three sons. Obviously, “being gay” is not a constraint in his career since he gained huge success as the role of the lady-killer billionaire Christian Grey in the movie *Fifty Shades of Grey*. The world has been witnessing the growing role of LGBT fans whereby more and more artists (LGBT or not) are showing a higher respect to this audience group. For instance, Lady Gaga – well-known for her support of the LGBT community – publicly read out a letter from a lesbian fan at her concert in Vancouver in 2014 and also invited her to the stage and had a drink with her. This act by Lady Gaga received a huge endorsement from fans and helped to strengthen and expand her fan base. Recently, the legalization of same-sex marriage in the US has recognized the values, influence, and power of the growing LGBT community. This trend has also received a positive endorsement from the Vietnamese Facebook community and famous figures within it who have made their Facebook profile picture rainbow colored in allegiance to the symbolic rainbow flag of the LGBT community and a celebration of the LGBT community around the world.

In Vietnam, with globalization and the development of the Internet, the higher level of education and the growing number of young people who study abroad, the traditional prejudices against the LGBT people is gradually declining. However, the public is still curious about the true gender identity of some celebrities and various rumours circulate concerning this issue. For example, Quang Dung – a famous male singer – was the subject of a “gay” rumor because he wore a pair of flower shorts in a movie. The fact that he divorced his wife – a Miss Asia in the U.S., Jennifer Pham – and has still not re-married is viewed as evidence that supports the rumours. However, the more modern thoughts and perspectives of young people in Vietnam have encouraged LGBT people (including Vietnamese celebrities) to expose their true sexual orientation. The Vietnamese celebrity industry has witnessed many successful well-known individuals confirming their real gender identities such as Thai Thinh (a famous song composer), John Huy (a famous and beloved choreographer), and Huong Giang Idol and Cindy Thai Tai (who have undergone transgender surgery). Questions of LGBT identity have become a hot topic in Vietnamese show business when every single male artist, especially singers, is rumored widely to be gay. In this case, those artists are in a passive position in which the public relies on some “suspicious-looking” incident to fabricate “gay” tales. Isaac, for instance – the leader in a popular music band – has been rumored to be gay (and coupled with another member in his band – Jun) based on

pictures capturing the two men showing intimate behaviour together. Regardless of whether it is the truth or not, the rumour not only keeps their social profile at the forefront of media attention but also attracts the support and admiration from LGBT fans. At the same time other artists perhaps intentionally mislead the audience by adopting unisex styles. Dao Ba Loc – a male singer famous for participating in a singing competition (*The Voice*) – always appears in the media or in daily life in “girly-style” make-up and dress. Despite being criticized by some, this image attracts interest from many audiences and especially from the youth demographic. In addition, on social networking sites in Vietnam, many men post clips of themselves in female costumes and makeup when discussing social issues, using raised voices and “too-much-girly” gestures, behaviours and expressions. The ridiculousness and humor of these clips have gained not only critics, but also attracted the interest of young audiences, who have made them into “micro-celebrities” in the online world. Micro celebrities are defined as individuals whose celebrity-hood is micro since their name does not actually appear on the big screen, but in the capillaries of reality TV shows and social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or Instagram; therefore, they are ranked as “B-list” celebrities.

The current status of Vietnam’s online celebrity sites create confusion around the gender identity of stars and celebrities raising questions of identity and authenticity. Who are real LGBT performers and who are shamelessly (or cynically) pretending to be LGBT to capture audience attention. LGBT identity has become a major theme explored in movies, music, and gossip journalism and talk shows and fandom is significantly structured by an interest in LGBT celebrities. As a result, the latter have received significant acceptance, support, and respect from both their families and society. Once a LGBT celebrity bravely admits that he/she is a gay/lesbian/transgender/bisexual, it is a powerful motivator for the LGBT community to believe in themselves and to have confidence in their sexuality. An LGBT celebrity becomes a public affirmation or “reason to believe” in a sympathetic, respectful, meaningful, and fair life. Yet given that acceptance is far from total, LGBT audiences seek for “real cases in life” to prove their values and beliefs. The identity deficit that LGBT individuals feel is gradually fulfilled by examples of efforts to accept one’s sexuality and of being authentically who one is sexually. So, it was not surprising when the wedding of a famous gay couple – Adrian Anh Tuan and Son Doan (Vietnamese fashion designers) – became a significant media event representing the voice of tolerance and freedom in Vietnam. LGBT fans, accordingly, often reveal a higher level

of loyalty towards their celebrities, though have a higher expectation of LGBT relationships since just a minor “defect” in relationships of famous LGBT people could destroy LGBT fans’ trust in the quality and viability of their gender identities. Compared to Western societies, Vietnamese public’s perception is not so open to LGBT community, however, its members have so far received certain acceptance and respect from the general public. On 24th November, 2015, Vietnam’s government just passed a new legislation about transgender rights which will allow those who have undergone sex reassignment surgery to register under their new gender. This law will take effect in 2017 after being voted in favor by 282 of 366 lawmakers (Vietnam law change introduces transgender rights, 2015).

Generally, Vietnam’s mass media, although subject to state control, have played a role in shaping the public’s perception of leisure, entertainment, and lifestyle which supports the government’s policy of developing consumerism, therefore, celebrities are the most media-exploited topic. Although the Vietnamese public currently have more freedom in expressing their opinions on social and cultural issues, there remains little genuine freedom of speech or freedom of the press in political, democratic, and state-related issues. However, with globalization and the growth of social media, a better-educated younger generation is developing a cosmopolitan approach to fashion and culture which is more open-minded and accepting of experiment and change. This youth demographic is also significant as a driver of economic development and, accordingly, is gaining a stronger voice in the social and political life of Vietnam.

6.3. How Vietnamese celebrities perceive themselves

6.3.1. Vietnamese celebrities’ perception of fame

Never has the Vietnamese celebrity industry been more obsessed by fame as in recent times. Many “games” are being played, even “bold-faced” ones in the competition to gain public attention. This obsession with fame, exemplified by Reality Television shows, has created a new attitude to success. Now everyone can contemplate becoming famous despite having limited talents, either on the basis of physical beauty or the determination to succeed. The public apparently accepts shock phenomena such as the singer Le Roi who has an extremely bad voice yet shows unlimited confidence in himself on video clips he posts online. Kenny Sang – a Facebooker who shows off his virtual (boasted) assets and unreal wealth – accepts that being famous (or notorious) entails being abused or criticized (“throwing stones”). Based on the curiosity of audiences and the enthusiasm of other famous artists in capturing the “money-earning

moment” through online advertisements, “nonsensical phenomena” are popping up like mushrooms. Even known artists with real talents are struggling to find ways to maintain their fame against competition that includes being “being sexy” or “showing off skin or body’s curves” – a popular trend used by many young stars such as Linh Chi, Ngoc Trinh, and Angela Phuong Trinh (model and artists).¹⁰ Nowadays, show business in Vietnam is facing a race amongst stars and celebrities to create attention-generating scandals that promote and maintain their fame. These “fame slavers” try their best to stage events that “break through the clutter” and engineer controversy. Actions such as appearing in strange or revealing costumes, creating sex videos, and engaging in very publicized affairs are designed to attract media attention and communicate an image of exciting non-conformity.

These practices bother real artists who work hard and with passion to generate great products for their fans and audiences. Thanh Loc is a big name in Vietnam theatre and is respected for his serious and dedicated work spirit and his passion for his career. In his biography *Tam Thanh va Loc Doi* (Mind and Life) (2015), Thanh Loc elucidated his living ideal:

“[M]emoirs are not something that must be told in full; there are stories just being kept for the owner. These are not reminiscences, just stories to be told and shared in order to smile when seeing each other – an encouraging smile. Such a beautiful life, why do we have to frown at each other!” (Thanh Loc & Nguyen, 2015 p.5).

Being famous is a unique feature of the career that he selected based on his own talent, rather than something created through publicity alone, and he does not take advantage of his career to boast the fame. Another example is Hoai Linh – a famous and talented comedian. His influence is wide within the comedy field and he has the power to attract huge audiences in various kinds of reality shows. The fame of Hoai Linh is undeniable. His name is at the top of the list of hacked social media sites where people illicitly seek to profit from the public’s interest in him. Hoai Linh insists that *“to gain fame, there are many ways, yet being famous and beloved by true talent is the only right way. Promoting one to become a star is easy; however, standing sustainably in that position is extremely difficult.”* (cited in Quynh Nhu, 2015).

¹⁰ <http://soha.vn/giai-tri/can-can-h-vong-eo-56-nong-bong-cua-ngoc-trinh-20150404115116104.htm> (sexy hot belly of bikini model Ngoc Trinh)
<http://eva.vn/lang-sao/angela-phuong-trinh-lai-mua-cot-gay-soc-c20a149104.html> (singer and actress Angela Phuong Trinh with pole dancing again)

To those artists, the key objective of their artistic career is to create high-quality products for audiences, not to create a favourable image with the public..In fact, many celebrities do not want their personal lives to be explored too much in the media and are often upset by intrusions into their private lives. The contradiction between privacy and public expectations is an issue that haunts famous individuals in the Vietnamese celebrity world, with the result that these individuals suffer from stress and mental depression and their public image is impacted. The recent invasion of the privacy of one Miss Beauty (Nguyen Cao Ky Duyen) makes this conflict clear. A photo taken by a fellow passenger of this 19-year-old pretty girl in an awkward sleeping posture on board an airplane has been widely circulated in social media (especially Facebook) and has attracted a great deal of both criticism and support from other stars and netizens in the online community (Tri Thuc Tre, 2015). This case has aroused the issue of the privacy of public figures who are routinely subjected to the curiosity, scrutiny, criticism, judgement, and expectations of the public.

Drawbacks of being famous in Vietnamese society are not as intensive as in developed countries such as America and England where the geographic scope of star presence is not within the boundary of one country but is global. Equally, the paparazzi system is not as professionally developed or as popular a job in Vietnam. The negative aspects of fame are common to some degree across all countries, yet in the Western celebrity system, “loss of privacy, sensitization, demanding expectations, the gratification of ego need or symbolic immortality” be the most pronounced features of the “celebrity career” (Rockwell & Giles, 2009, p.178). For Vietnamese celebrities, the concern over the loss of privacy is apparent, yet in the final analysis, many celebrities are proactively seeking to publicize their own private details. Vietnamese celebrities have their own specific attitude towards publicity. Do Manh Cuong – a famous designer – uses Facebook to protest against critics of his new collections. His use of bad language and the nature of his action have confirmed his “fussy behaviour”. In another interpretation, he is effortlessly chasing the image of “being stylish, “being cool”, “being rich”, etc. to boost his prestige. Again, My Linh has declared that she does not want her personal life and her family being publicly exposed, yet currently, her family officially appears in advertising shots. It might be said that they wish to publicize only the most favourable aspects of their private life. . Indeed, the definition of being famous or a celebrity in Vietnam is ambiguous even when fame is an important source of income for the celebrities involved.

6.3.2. Relationship between Vietnamese celebrities and audiences/fans on Facebook

In recent years, Facebook has developed as the main channel for communicating with the fans of Vietnamese celebrities. With more than 30 million Vietnamese users monthly and one in three Vietnamese residents logging into Facebook at least once a month (Tuoi Tre News, 2015), Facebook is the most popular site in Vietnam and a fertile soil for celebrities to not only build and foster interaction and intimacy with fans, but also to establish and promote their images and products. In the past, fans relied on magazines, newspapers, radio, and television to learn about their idols' activities and situations. However, the information provided was given from the perspective of the writer; seldom did fans have the chance to talk and hear directly from famous people. Accordingly, fans often constructed the images or personalities of their celebrities based on their roles and characters in films and from what was written about them in papers and magazines. At that stage, personal life was still, to a large extent, a closed world to the average member of the general public. Therefore, it was understandable that the public felt surprised when they learnt that Viet Trinh – a famous and beautiful actress – was a girlfriend of Pham Huy Phuoc, a rich man with a number of convictions who was now in jail with a death sentence having swindled hundreds of millions of VND. Based on her character in her films of the 1990s, Viet Trinh was originally perceived as “docile and decent” by the general Vietnamese public.

Things have changed with the increasing popularity of Facebook in Vietnam. Image making is no longer sequestered behind a wall of personal management and journalistic agreements as the number of Vietnamese people using the Internet, especially Facebook, has rapidly increased. Facebookers have built up a strong network in which information shared with comments and replies are the main tools for maintaining interactivity and instant communication, which facilitates real relationships in the offline environment. It can be observed that Vietnamese celebrities use Facebook to share information about their cultural products as well as market themselves to audiences online. Surfing around Facebook pages of Vietnamese celebrities and famous stars, it is common to see that the rate of response to every celebrity post is estimated at more than 10,000 “likes” for hot topics. Based on their fan structures, local nationality accounts for approximately 80% of “likes”, with Taiwanese, Thai, and Cambodian making up the other significant fan communities.

Vietnamese stars and celebrities manage their Fanpages and Facebook accounts relatively carefully, especially in terms of pictures. Every picture is fixed and made to

be beautiful with the support of photo-editing software (such as Photoshop) before being shown to the public. The background of the pictures are often events that the celebrities participate in, their daily activities in the house, visits to shopping malls, or simply standing next to their assets like luxurious cars, expensive bags, jewellery, and accessories. Images or posts illustrating the connection between the fashionable life, leisure, and consumerism, and that feature products, are suitable to the tastes of the Vietnamese young middle class. For example, Ngoc Trinh, Tang Thanh Ha, and Ly Nha Ky frequently post about their luxurious and fashionable lifestyles which attract a high level of attention and admiration from young people. Vietnamese celebrities are quite industrious in updating and sharing through Facebook so that we often see “blank” status reports such as a “good morning”, “good night”, “bon appétit” quotes with smiley faces. Their strategy is to create a friendly image and intimate relationships with fans. The relationship between Vietnamese celebrities and fans hardly corresponds to parasocial intimacy since the direct and symmetrical interaction observed through the comments and replies of celebrities towards fans is limited. This situation could be said to be dominated by a simulation of parasociality. Facebook Fanpages are considered to be a communication tool for updating the status or news of celebrities without the need for interviews. Fanpages offer the “authentic” voice of the celebrity and thus replace indirect media such as second-hand reports in magazines or newspapers. Celebrities in Vietnam rely on offline meetings and online talk shows or activities on Facebook to further the sense of friendliness towards audiences.

However, if not managed well (for example, a bad or shocking status or negative comments), celebrities’ Facebook page can easily become a place where scandals are generated and grow at an unpredictable speed, which can bring trouble to celebrities. Also, there remains an inadequate management of personal image via Facebook when online newspapers or Facebookers can easily copy and share “authentic” images with different captions or reinterpretations through just one or two lines in their posts. This situation constrains the opportunity for celebrities to construct a preferred authentic image and can increase the numbers of followers and “likes” whose motives are quite mixed. Also, there are many “fake” accounts created by anti-fans with the purpose of destroying the image of celebrities that they hate. This requires the better management of image and information sharing so as to avoid conflicts, arguments, misunderstandings, and scandals which can destroy the images of celebrities.

The increasing uncertainty in pursuing a career and using Facebook to connect with fans has become synonymous with the sacrifice of personal life and the need to

negotiate public criticism and dissent. The demands of fans are more complicated as the expectations concerning celebrities exceed their professional circle and become tied in with public issues – issues which cannot be ignored if a popular fan base is to be maintained. For instance, when Dong Nhi shared the column “Calling for Blood Donations” to resolve blood shortages of A and O, she changed her image as a good-hearted character to that of a concerned citizen and charity fundraiser. Her post received approximately 100,000 “likes” and over 200 “shares”.

In conclusion, in Vietnam, as in other countries, the nature of celebrity has evolved through the support of media with an emphasis on social media, particularly Facebook and has become a hot topic attracting much public interest, especially from youth. Although media is still under the control of government, Vietnamese people now have more freedom and more places in which to express their own opinions than ever than before. In Vietnam, the possession of a famous name or persona brand has become a powerful magnet for attracting mass attention and considerable earning opportunities, especially by cultivating the interests of the younger generation. Celebrities are engaging in significant efforts to build and maintain their image portfolios by all means, even to the point of exposing their controversial personal lives or at least making their lives seem controversial. Some yearn for the rewards of prestige and wealth that come from “being known” or “being famous” regardless of good reputation or notoriety. However, some famous Vietnamese individuals do not worship fame; rather, they protect themselves and work hard to create professional cultural products. However, these celebrities are the exception not the rule. In spite of the growth of interactivity stemming from the popularity of Facebook, the connection between Vietnamese celebrities and fans continues to reflect a parasocial relationship in which the interaction is still limited to a largely one-way exchange controlled by celebrities or their employees. However, Vietnamese fans – with a higher level of education and higher information accessibility and information receptiveness – are expecting and asking for more real, direct, symmetrical, and frequent interaction with the “true” personality of celebrities.

Chapter 7: Facebook observation – Case studies

This chapter includes tables that show the data collected from the Facebook pages of four Vietnamese celebrities over a six-month period (01/03/2015 to 01/09/2015) and a report discussing what was found from the observation. The four selected celebrities are female singer Ho Ngoc Ha, female model Nguyen Phuong Mai, male singer Ly Hai, and male comedian Hoai Linh.

7.1. Facebook Pages Data of the four selected celebrities

Hồ Ngọc Hà – Ho Ngoc Ha (Facebook fan page) (small blue tick)¹¹

Table 7.1: Data collected from Ho Ngoc Ha's Facebook page from 01/03/2015 to 01/09/2015 (see appendix 1 for full table with more details)

Theme	Topic/Content	Post	Comment	Share	Like
Work					
Musical product	Liveshow –Tour (PR+tickets)-Stage performance	55	9805	1827	879867
	DVD/CD/MV/MP3	73	14516	2848	969800
Product endorsement	Vaseline (body lotion)	1	196	83	41185
Other work	-Judge positions for musical contests -Parties/ Events participation	20	4200	717	471072
Total for Work		149	28717	5475	2361924
Personal life					
Family	With her son (going out)	1	536	66	120574
Friends	On the foreign tours with her friends	7	3026	526	441959
Fashion-beauty	Her photo (in fashionable dress) in Vietnam/ foreign countries	13	5029	727	787614
Ideas of herself (personality)	Taking about her scandal (and express her personality as well)	8	6199	487	332138
Total for Personal life		29	14790	1806	1682285
Social activities					
Social activities	Talking about social issues and her charity work	4	6733	1900	493782
Total for Social activities		4	6733	1900	493782
GRAND TOTAL		182	50159	9181	4537991

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/casihongocha/?fref=ts>

Table 7.2: Data collected from Nguyen Phuong Mai's Facebook page from 01/03/2015 to 01/09/2015 (see appendix 2 for full table with more details)

Theme	Topic/Content	Post	Comment	Share	Like
Work					
Model	Fashion model	66	754	5	7537
TV Presenter for VTV3-MC	Presenter/MC in programs or events	23	224	2	2502
Reality TV show	“Secret Service” (Điệp Vụ Tuyệt Mật)–scandal around this show	11	154	1	952
Other work	Events and parties participation	26	183	1	1813
	The film she starred in/ poster	1	12	0	97
Total for Work		127	1327	9	12901
Personal life					
Family	Birthday/ Parties with family and friends	5	84	0	767
Friends	With her friends (working, travelling or hanging out for dinner, cinema, bar club)	32	264	2	2936
Pets (social activities as well)	Her cat and calling for animal protection, against dog meat and hunting other endangered species	16	124	6	851
Image in daily life	-Images of her daily activities (fashionable appearance and sexy body) -Status showing her emotion/feeling	77	1473	20	11536
Total for Personal life		130	1945	28	16090
GRAND TOTAL		257	3272	37	28991

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/meoluoi91?fref=ts>

Table 7.3: Data collected from Ly Hai’s Facebook page from 01/03/2015 to 01/09/2015 (see appendix 3 for full table with more details)

Theme	Topic/Content	Post	Comment	Share	Like
Work					
Singer	Stage performance – Tour – MP3/MV	11	2918	567	886874
Actor/ Producer	The film starred and produced by him (his production company)	22	10259	4062	896725
Take part in events/ interviews/ game shows	-An interview of his wife in VTV3 - Taking part in a TV show about family	3	1034	148	277577
Product endorsement (his whole family)	Endorsing for Dutch Lady (a milk company)	4	583	249	98231
Total for Work		40	14794	5026	2159407
Personal life					
Family	Daily images or clips of his family of wife, 3 children (1 son and 2 daughters)-> lovely, happy, and healthy – a family full of love/ sometimes with his parents/ or her parents	105	91657	9988	13711191
	Measuring his body for wax-statue making	2	595	90	115721
	Sharing knowledge and experiences about child raising, cosmetics, medicine, and foods	21	17570	120602	1193976
Friends	Joining his friends’ wedding parties	3	1209	207	541278
Total for Personal life		131	111031	130887	15562166
Social activities					
Social activities	- Clip about social evils -Charity: calling for donations, food, and clothes for the poor and the orphans, fund raising for heart operations	30	12399	29649	561847
Total for Social activities		30	12399	29649	561847
GRAND TOTAL		201	138224	165562	18283420

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/lyhai.minhha/?fref=ts>

Table 7.4: Data collected from Hoai Linh’s Facebook page from 01/03/2015 to 01/09/2015
(see appendix 4 for full table with more details)

Theme	Topic/Content	Post	Comment	Share	Like
Work					
Comedian	Domestic and foreign tours/Stage performances	2	5690	691	530680
Roles in movies	Scenes of the movies he starred in or their posters	3	10437	1250	811539
Judge	Images of being a judge in talent contests	4	18486	2735	1589560
His own restaurant	Image of his noodle soup restaurant	3	9497	2298	541284
Total for Work		12	44110	6974	3473063
Personal life					
Friends	-Photos with friends -Gifts from friends	4	18039	3448	1569680
His own ideas of his personality/morality	Talking about moral obligations/ his ideas about fame	4	25953	2951	1078641
Daily images	His selfies in daily life (in a humorous and demotic way)	6	49417	3718	3238911
Total for Personal life		14	93409	10117	5887232
Social activities					
Social activities	Share a meaningful documentary (on TV) about Vietnam’s archipelagos	1	452	123	15134
	Praying for people in the Central Vietnam (overcome the severe floods)	1	2005	505	192897
Total for Social activities		2	2457	628	208031
GRAND TOTAL		28	139976	17719	9568326

Key:

Post: number of posts by each celebrity

Like: number of likes. Note: Facebook does not have “Dislike” function

Comment: number of comments made by fans for posts of each celebrity

Share: number of times fans share the posts of each celebrity through their Facebook page

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/VoHoaiLinh?fref=ts>

7.2. Report of four celebrities' Facebook pages – discussion

This report will focus on analyzing data shown in tables above to discover how the four chosen celebrities use Facebook to interact with audiences and manage their name.

The first case is Ho Ngoc Ha's Facebook Fanpage with more than 4,099,931 likes as of the 1st September 2015. She uses Facebook to share information concerning her new albums, upcoming tours, and live shows such as methods to buy ticket and show schedules. She sometimes shares behind-the-scene pictures along with her thoughts about a new project in order to maintain audience excitement and encourage them to come back for more information while they wait. Usually, during promotion time, these kinds of post appear with a high level of frequency. She also shares events that she attends whether they are entertainment events, parties, or charity activities including support for poor children, calling for blood donations, or responding to International Yoga Day. Making known her activities allows her audience to become familiar with her image, her life, and her connection with people within her circle and greater society. Facebook is also a platform through which she can give product endorsements for the products or brands she represents. There are also many posts showing her beauty, her fashion style and interest in fashion brands, her domestic products, and her taste in music. Each post receives hundreds of comments. For example, it can be observed that in a post showing her image endorsing a mobile phone brand, some comments are positive such as "You are so beautiful" and "I will definitely buy this phone cause I am your big fan"; however, there are still some negative comments with cruel words like "You are a husband stealer, go to the hell". As a top star in Vietnam show biz, rumours and gossip about her have never stopped. However, regardless of the fact that many of these stories are fabricated, she remains silent about them. This does not mean she does not care; rather, she knows well that such stories, no matter how good or bad, are necessary for keeping the heat on her name. If these stories remain unclear and dim, people will become more curious. In short, Ho Ngoc Ha is able to manage the media and retain her audience's interest and Facebook is one of the useful tools she uses to carry out her strategic plan.

Next is Nguyen Phuong Mai – a fashion model. Although this girl does not have a big number of fans like the three other celebrities discussed in this research (only 13,185 followers as of the 1st September, 2015), she is known for her strong and frank character. She is a model, thus, her Facebook page is mostly about her fashion style and her beauty. Pictures of her in beautiful outfits with carefully applied make-up are

usually shared on her wall and as a matter of course these are Photoshopped (photo-edited). It can be said that Mai takes good care of her appearance and is proud to show herself on any occasion. Because of her confidence in her beauty, she can be seen as quite arrogant. Her Facebook page also shows her daily activities, the reality TV shows she appears in, and events she takes part in either as an MC or a guest. She keeps her online home (Facebook page) clean by only allowing people to follow her and only sometimes replying to inbox messages from fans. Besides, many of her posts are about cats (her pets) and calling for the animal protection. Her Facebook status is usually in English to show she is a trendy girl in this globalized world, which not only shows off her good English, but is also appeals to young, urban middle-class Vietnamese who account for most of her fan community. Her posts usually get a few comments (approximately 15 comments for each) since her fame is not as high as the three others. Most are positive such as “ What a sexy body, it is my motivation to work out every day” or “I love your dress”.

The third celebrity is Ly Hai (his Facebook name is Ly Hai Minh Ha – a combination of his and his wife’s names), a married couple with three children. The page he shares with his wife had received 4,607,099 likes as of the 1st September, 2015. Their wall is mostly about their modern, happy family. There are pictures, articles, and quotes regarding how happy their family is and how cute their kids are. As Ly Hai is now 50, he has become more mature and wants to project the image of being the backbone of the family. His wife is the one who gives active, positive, and efficient help in managing the page. She usually posts her ideas and experiences of family building, child raising, cosmetics, and medical care. Not only that, to keep their friendly image, she also replies to most of their fans’ comments. She shows good taste in fashion and beauty and people tend to ask her questions upon these matters. She always tries to make her family look good to the public. Aside from posts about her family, she also shares information about her family’s charity work. She uses their Facebook page as a significant tool to call for donations or support for the poor and the miserable in society. Because of the good reputation and high popularity of their family, status updates on their Facebook page attract hundreds to thousands of positive comments. For illustration, posts about his family’s children get comments such as, “Love your cutie children, wish your family happiness and good health” with only a few negative comments such as “Why you raise your children in that way? Such a bad mother”. It is rare for her to share any bad status updates or to reply impolitely to anyone or over any issue. People admire Ly Hai’s wife not only for her high level of education (Master of

Law), her beauty, her cleverness, her intelligence, but also for her good manners. In general, Ly Hai Minh Ha knows how to keep a positive name and image. Recently, their page has been used as a place for their whole family to endorse Dutch Lady – a famous milk brand – with posts and TVCs (television commercials) calling for fans to go to a social event organized by that brand.

Finally, the fourth celebrity is Hoai Linh – a famous comedian in his 50s. He is admired by many people for his charm in acting and his traditional moral philosophy. His Facebook page had 8,399,729 likes as of the 1st September, 2015. However, compared to the other three celebrities, the frequency of his status updates is very low. People of different classes and ages, especially in rural areas, look up to him for his colloquial way of speaking and his simple lifestyle – never showing off his wealth, wearing simple clothes, eating frugally, and using Vietnamese in all his Facebook posts. Although he takes part in many TV shows as a judge, an actor, and a singer, it is hard to find a picture of him in flashy costume on his page. Besides using Facebook as a tool to call for charity support, he is regarded as a kind, intimate, and friendly man for sharing funny selfie pictures of his daily life. He keeps his Facebook page just as simple as he is. He does not even delete bad comments or illicit commercials posted on his page by some audiences with the purpose of taking advantage of his fame for their benefit. As a very well-known comedian in Vietnam, his posts get thousands comments each and most are observed to be positive. For instance, comments on his selfies include, “You look younger with this new hair” or “I admire your talent and love your way of life”. Also, comments in response to a post calling for donations for people in Central Vietnam recovering from the severe flooding include “Pray for Central Vietnam’s poor residents”, or “Let’s give a hand in helping our beloved Central”. However, he rarely replies to fans’ comments; instead, he sometimes gives thanks for people’s support and love for him. Otherwise, he keeps silent about any rumours that are spread about him. In short, his personality as shown through his Facebook page reveals a simple, demotic, sincere, and unostentatious man.

Similarities and differences

According to the data, all four celebrities use Facebook not only to promote their work but also the activities of their daily lives. Mostly, they share posts (clips, images, news, ideas) related to their upcoming cultural products depending on what kind of field they are working in. Therefore, posts on their Facebook page are mostly concerned with albums (CD/DVD), singles, music videos, movies, plays, shows, and events that these

people publish, organize, produce and join. In addition, they update their status and pictures of themselves hanging out, traveling with family and friends, etc. One common feature shared among all four celebrities is that they maintain a good relationship with the media by always inserting links on their Facebook pages to articles that discuss them in positive and supportive terms, while simultaneously sometimes correcting wrong information written by tabloids. Furthermore, they remember to tag the names of their assistants such as make-up artists, costumes stylists, and photographers who contribute to their appearance. This action is not only regarded as a PR tactic, but also fosters their relationships with these assistants.

Since Ho Ngoc Ha and Ly Hai are singers, their Facebook pages are channels to advertise their musical activities whereby they can inform their fans about live shows and performances with detailed information about tickets and schedules. These posts get many likes from fans with the amount ranging between 10,000 and 90,000 likes – but sometimes up to more than 100,000. As well as sharing details of their professional careers, Facebook allows these fans to share aspects of their family life – a subject that gets even more likes or attention from fans. Ho Ngoc Ha's posts about her son and their daily life activities generally receive more than 500 comments and approximately 120,500 likes. Ly Hai and his wife usually update news about their popular family, with a large number of fans following his children's images and videos. Ly Hai's Facebook page can get thousands of comments for each post, many shares, and thousands of likes (from 22,550 to 252,582). There is a big difference in share activities among these Facebook pages. While posts from Ho Ngoc Ha, Ly Hai, and Vo Hoai Linh concerning their work and personal lives are shared hundreds of times by fans, those from Nguyen Phuong Mai are rarely shared due to her lower popularity compared to the other three celebrities.

There are some significant differences among the four celebrities' Facebook pages based on observation. For example, unlike the three other celebrities, Vo Hoai Linh's Facebook page is simple, honest and friendly – reflecting an individual who wants to preserve and promote traditional cultural values to the public, especially the youth. In contrast, Ho Ngoc Ha and Phuong Mai who are models show themselves as extremely fashion conscious on their Facebook pages with updates on new global fashion trends that appeal to the taste of the young generation. These kinds of posts receive many likes and shares from their fans.

This difference reflects the personality of each of the celebrities and their different viewpoints, tastes, and ages. Ho Ngoc Ha and Phuong Mai are representatives of 8X

and 9X Gen; their posts concerning fashion and luxury are suited to the leisure, entertainment, and consumption trend of the majority of young, urban middle-class Vietnamese today. Meanwhile, Hoai Linh is representative of the 6X Gen; his simple and friendly image appeals to the older generation as well as the young who come from a lower class in society. In Ly Hai's case, his Facebook page attracts the interest of people who are married or those who want to create a modern family like his with a nice wife and cute kids. Thanks to Facebook and his clever, intellectual wife, Ly Hai's image as an "instant noodle" singer has evolved; he is now regarded as a successful man who knows how to take good care of his family and he is a role model for many people to look up to.

Additionally, the way they handle scandals may vary but there are some common points. Ly Hai, Ho Ngoc Ha, and Phuong Mai delete bad comments and sometimes share positive articles about themselves. Hoai Linh seems to ignore all bad comments and illegal advertising comments. When facing a critical problem, he never answers directly but instead uses action to prove the rumors wrong and untrue. Ho Ngoc Ha is the same – she keeps silent whether the news is wrong or right and instead focuses on her work (cultural products). Both Hoai Linh and Ho Ngoc Ha choose to clear misunderstandings by sharing status updates or pictures related to the rumours instead of explaining themselves. Their aim is to avoid any arguments on Facebook. For example, recently, when Ho Ngoc Ha's extra-marital affair scandal became one of the hot gossip topics, instead of making a straight and frank statement, she chose only to share images of herself and her son to show their close bond. Or in the case of Hoai Linh, another famous comedian posted a critical status about one of Hoai Linh's shows. Although this became a topic of argument in the community due to the manipulation and circulation of the criticism by the press and online users, Hoai Linh had no comment; instead, he decided to appear with that comedian in another event and express his admiration for his colleague. This solution helps protect the artists from rumours and scandals and encourages fans to focus on the artists' career and fame built through their own labour and professional products. In Ly Hai's case, despite having a large number of fans following his page, Ly Hai's Facebook has caused no scandals. He and his wife keep the family's good reputation so well.

However, Phuong Mai is a different case – she is the one who creates her own scandals. In one particular incident the scandal occurred over Huyen Chip, a girl who eats dog. Mai used relatively bad and impolite words to describe Huyen Chip's personality and appearance. Some of her comments were very ill-bred, such as saying

the girl was less than a dog. The fact that Phuong Mai is a celebrity who is a role model to many young girls and expressed her opinion in such a negative way meant that she stimulated a great deal of debate amongst the Vietnamese Facebook community. After receiving a great deal of opposing feedback from audiences over her post and comments, Phuong Mai updated her status to apologize to the girl; however, simultaneously emphasizing that it was her strong personality and her love for animals that urged her to use “overly frank” expressions. This incident really damaged Phuong Mai’s image, and meant that she became far more cautious. Since this incident, she has also become calmer and more mature when dealing with individuals she does not like. When there are rumours about her bad behaviour, for example on a reality TV show that she has joined, her reactions are much more planned – she only posts information about her presenter/MC job and posts links to newspapers which state how things actually are instead of raising her voice and arguing strongly as in the past.

Hypotheses discussion

The following discusses the hypotheses of this study. Based on the data collected, the first hypothesis which says that the number of work-related posts are higher than private-life-related posts is not correct for all celebrities. For Ho Ngoc Ha and Nguyen Phuong Mai, posts relating to their work are higher in number than posts about their private lives. However, on the Facebook page of Ly Hai, posts with images of his family outnumber work-related posts. One good explanation for this is that he and his wife aim to build his image as a “family man” with his wife and children as the “ideal family”. As a demotic and “tight-lipped” person, Vo Hoai Linh has not produced many posts (either concerning his work or private life). Three celebrities Ly Hai, Ho Ngoc Ha, and Phuong Mai usually post status updates and share their images on their Facebook pages 1-2 times per day respectively, whereas the figure for Hoai Linh is 1-2 posts per week. The second hypothesis, which stated that the number of “Likes” and “Comments” by fans on posts relating to private images or information of the four selected celebrities are more than work-related posts is well supported by the data. That is easy to understand since the private lives of celebrities are always a topic that attracts the most attention from audiences and makes fans feel closer to celebrities.

7.3. Final discussion

Obviously, celebrities who run their Facebook pages proactively can attract a very large audience. It can be observed that status, likes, comments, replies, and inbox

messages can help them not only to create and keep celebrity-fan interaction, but also to get closer to their fans. Through posts and status updates about their performances, images, stories, or points of view, Vietnamese celebrities can receive likes and comments that mentally support them and provide precious motivation. More importantly, because of its free cost and instantiality (high speed of spread/ubiquity), Facebook is also used frequently as an efficient marketing channel when Vietnamese stars need to introduce, release, and spread their cultural products, product endorsements, social campaigns, or any other daily activities. In addition, celebrities take advantage of Facebook to evaluate and measure attitudes to them or to collect feedback from audiences concerning their products before, during, and after releasing them. In sum, Facebook is an important tool with which Vietnam's famous individuals can deliver and correct information about themselves or actively promote and PR their names, on their own, in the way they wish, no longer depending on traditional media channels to do so.

However, privacy violation is one of the dark sides of Facebook in which information concerning celebrities' private lives can be twisted, fabricated, and spread widely. More importantly, celebrities open themselves up to scandals on Facebook should they project a bad image or manage their information badly. Status updates, comments, and images are sometimes posted by celebrities without full awareness of the consequences. Social media in general, and Facebook in particular are the ideal environment for the development and exacerbation of scandals. However, if handled wisely, scandal can become a catalyst for name promotion as well as the career development of celebrities.

Chapter 8: Recommendations and Conclusion

8.1 Recommendations for Vietnamese celebrities who use Facebook

In Vietnam, many celebrities who have frank, hot-tempered, arrogant, or ostentatious characteristics often post unwise statements or comments on Facebook leading to scandals which can have negative impacts on their images and careers. Although some comments are intentional with the purpose of reheating their name, most are made by mistake; however, whether unwittingly or not, such comments create a bad reputation for celebrities. There are many celebrities who do not belong to any entertainment or celebrity company or do not have any manager; instead, they build and manage their name by themselves. Lacking the professional skills required for image management and experiencing the stressful life of being a famous person, it is hard for them to avoid making mistakes in managing their images as well as handling scandals when they occur. Therefore, besides teams of experts in costume, makeup, hairdo, photography, etc., it is suggested that Vietnamese celebrities recruit a personal manager (even a specific online image manager) who can help them in planning, directing, managing, and marketing (PR) their activities, images, and statements online and offline. These people not only assist celebrities in presenting an attractive appearance in public, but also make a significant contribution to celebrities' sustainable career development in the long term. Especially, public relations practitioners (PRPs) and image managers can play a big role in the control and handling of scandals. Hughes and Shank (2005) believe that PR managers are those who "identify the issues that drive the public's perceptions of the degree of the scandal" in order to "effectively manage and mitigate its impacts" (cited in Colapinto & Benecchi, 2014, p. 224). Similarly, Rein et al. (2006) regard PR practitioners as having both the responsibility and the skills to salvage and improve the situation when celebrities become involved in scandals or offer poor performances. If a scandal happens, celebrities should keep silent at first since this is regarded as not only "a wise sign of maturity and positive attitude" but it is also "aimed at deflecting attention onto something else" (Colapinto & Benecchi, 2014, p.226). PR practitioners or managers should be those who deliver statements to the media and public on behalf of the celebrities when a scandal breaks. Once the heat of the scandal subsides, or when the time suits, celebrities themselves have to make a clear and final statement about it after discussing the situation with their managers.

The second suggestion for those Vietnamese celebrities who utilize Facebook is that their main focus should be on career development, their cultural products, and their image. They should not get bogged down in other issues or the scandals of other celebrities. This means that they should put lots of effort into exposing, posting, and promoting information on their Facebook pages that is useful and constructive to their work and their products. All of their posts on their pages should contribute significantly and positively to the work they are doing or the image they are building. For example, thanks to researching, analyzing, and meeting the tastes and concerns of online audiences, Ly Hai and his wife (Minh Ha) have established, maintained, and promoted his image as a “family man” and his family as an attractive unit within Vietnam’s Facebook community. Ho Ngoc Ha, who in order to be known as a successful, beautiful, and hard-working singer with a fit body and trendy tastes, has focused on sharing information about her stage performances, musical products, and her own image as fashion conscious and a gym enthusiast.

There are also several other principles that Vietnamese celebrities using Facebook should keep in mind. Firstly, they should consider what they want to say or show carefully, asking the advice of their managers before posting, sharing, and commenting on anything on Facebook (their pages as well as the pages of others). In other words, they need to be responsible for what they post on their pages – that is, by showing ‘expressive responsibility’. The level of education of Vietnamese fans and followers is increasing – most of them are intelligent with knowledge about the basic functions of the Internet and social media. Therefore, Vietnam’s celebrities should not be careless in exposing their information or tell lies to their audiences since the Facebook community will find out the truth sooner or later. Another important principle is keeping balance between personal life and public life. Celebrities should make strategic choices about which information needs to be disclosed or keep it private so as to “maximize the personal, professional and social benefits for themselves, their loved ones and their fans” (Baym, 2012 p.305). Wise disclosure is extremely important in terms of keeping the heat on the name of Vietnamese celebrities since distance creates curiosity which helps to maintain fame, whereas disclosing all could threaten fans’ experience. Celebrities should allow audiences to discover some things by themselves, which can make it fun for them.

In short, with an increasing number of Facebookers in Vietnam and the high level of Facebook usage (log-in) verging on “addiction” amongst the young, celebrities must keep up-to-date by using Facebook as a supporting implement in attracting audiences,

building and maintaining relationships with fans, and promoting their images. Nevertheless, Vietnamese celebrities need to be aware that Facebook is an efficient marketing and interactive tool that supports their career, not the place they can show all of their “true” personality and express all they think and want to say without control or management.

8.2. Conclusion

This research has addressed the question of how Vietnamese celebrities use Facebook as a significant tool for image management and communicative interaction with their fan bases. It has also provided insights into an as yet under researched phenomenon of Vietnamese celebrities sampling examples of Facebook pages. Accordingly, this research explored the ways in which cultural, social, media, and technological factors influence the development of positive and negative images and the behaviours of celebrities. Importantly, benefits and drawbacks that Facebook have brought to celebrities in Vietnam were pointed out. This study provides Vietnamese celebrities, their managers, and academic researchers with access to more information about the context of Vietnamese celebrities and their Facebook usage and offers celebrities effective strategies and plans for improving their image as well as their careers.

In Vietnam, media has the responsibility to deliver messages and educate and thus influence the awareness, perspectives, attitudes, behaviours, and lifestyles of the general public, especially the youth. However, the celebrity world is hugely exploited by media channels with the purpose of satisfying audiences’ curiosity and gaining public attention since information about stars, especially their private lives, is extremely attractive to ordinary audiences. Although Vietnamese media is still censored and controlled by the government, with globalization and the growth of the Internet Vietnamese people are now more open-minded and freer in raising their voices, expressing their identities, and acquiring cultural values from many different countries in the world. Also, despite still being under the influence of collectivism which means that they need social support and must satisfy public expectations to some degree, Vietnamese, especially the young, are daring to express themselves and project own characters and identities.

The popularity of social media in general and Facebook in particular means that such media are able to influence the Vietnamese public, especially celebrities. An increasing number of famous Vietnamese individuals use Facebook to promote their

image and interact with fans proactively. Not only do they produce work-related posts, but they also proactively share information and images of their private daily lives which attracts a great deal of interest from online fans. It can be concluded that Facebook is an effective and increasingly necessary tool with which Vietnamese celebrities can manage and enhance their names as well as build and foster relationships with audiences. However, if Facebook use is not managed well, scandals (big or small) can be generated easily in the Facebook environment. Therefore, Vietnamese celebrities must be very cautious when using it or should have professional managers to manage their pages in order to avoid careless status updates, bad comments, anti-fan attitudes, and negative scandals.

This research is limited in several ways that need to be addressed in further researches. Limitations include restricted time and locality (only Vietnamese celebrities and their Facebook pages were examined). Additionally, the number of celebrities whose official Facebook pages were observed and analyzed deeply was only four and therefore not representative of all celebrities in Vietnam. Although Facebook observation was continuous and information was consistently updated, the data collected for analysis and discussion from the four celebrities' pages was from a six-month period only (from 01/03/2015 to 01/09/2015). Therefore, the results do not reflect and represent all situations. Nevertheless, this thesis explored the ways in which Vietnamese celebrities use Facebook, it discussed the Vietnamese context of celebrities, and it also offered recommendations for Vietnamese celebrities when using Facebook for their image management and name promotion.

It is also suggested that further research take into consideration the following issues: A mixed method (qualitative and quantitative) analysis should be applied, such as interviews and survey questionnaires in order to produce more research data, corroborate findings and improve insight into the subject. Also, Facebook observation should be more comprehensive and more multi-faceted, and the data collected should be presented in a more cohesive and logical way. Finally, on the bases of more comprehensive survey, feasible and effective strategic plans that can be used by Vietnamese celebrities when using Facebook should be explored and described in more detail.

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Appendix 1: Table of data collected from Ho Ngoc Ha's Facebook page from 01/03/2015 to 01/09/2015 (full table)

Theme	Topic/Content	Post	Comment	Share	Likes
Work					
Musical product	Liveshow –Tour (PR+tickets)- Stage performance (only her or with other singers+ info about venue, time)	55	130-89-150-121-88-105-78-88-329-241-236-204-148-81-60-88-155-123-87-75-62-79-119-266-981-323-182-188-157-235-326-271-233-103-63-76-281-195-213-89-277-108-336-188-215-88-34-126-107-173-74-169-479-71-242	20-34-47-17-21-24-4-41-40-36-43-39-29-33-14-36-55-39-4-27-13-11-13-40-81-23-32-33-15-25-31-34-34-33-22-17-45-29-13-5-42-22-77-27-69-20-7-45-48-33-28-83-123-15-36	17297-5522-6896-8925-3630-4483-6200-5805-27995-18577-32836-30692-20854-13910-6838-14107-21597-9792-5880-10674-9416-6280-5625-15131-52030-18771-10875-9009-11043-25682-21598-19860-20023-14818-4543-8733-32238-29378-8509-16024-30329-11055-32548-28616-18781-8233-4903-20045-21644-15793-10311-7826-28556-9844-19287
	DVD/CD/MV/MP3	73	122-123-275-153-108-339-74-123-295-110-218-33-106-94-120-54-37-55-47-50-57-57-126-875-345-452-584-158-343-272-320-108-196-274-160-334-152-209-93-555-100-287-297-361-190-217-	2-20-48-23-21-73-33-28-147-31-55-6-21-43-30-20-18-19-4-22-1-13-19-73-29-33-58-27-31-13-23-7-28-40-18-55-14-24-7-175-24-31-67-46-48-	12607-13963-33274-24770-7099-36282-17191-18035-16155-13687-27629-6939-14166-14263-21170-5540-6953-6988-8928-8916-6757-6727-11648-60424-30036-24458-44801-10270-12510-9463-12052-6493-17369-22365-14784-43190-22090-18212-8933-106598-2275-21937-

			190-449-516-151-162-44-375-206-187-109-145-240-217-321-180-288-122-110-144-83-62-60-161-122-93-121	104-36-68-87-54-38-5-75-77-38-36-24-55-132-55-47-75-23-31-31-14-27-12-32-29-37-38	23843-29878-19485-34915-19961-13771-52933-42806-13583-26847-772-33025-9142-20894-10868-15400-27386-8039-18919-12040-26466-6499-9662-15589-6999-5363-5840-21461-16622-17148-18424
Product endorsement	Vaseline (body lotion)	1	196	83	41185
Other work	Party with Beckham in London (image of dress)	4	237-147-57-575	16-22-1-62	51330-26224-2435-59498
	Article appreciated her judge position in The Voice and update information about the position as judge for upcoming musical contests	2	396-386	41-56	32762-30427
	Recruiting collaborator for HNH entertainment (her production team)	3	75-96-64	20-26-14	3935-6082-4039
	PR for a product made by her production team (T Production and HNH Entertainment): MV of Son Ngoc Minh	2	30-14	4-18	4922-3052
	Opening a writing competition about her / feelings, thoughts of fans	1	44	35	4506

	for her “HNH-the impress/ stamp of VN’s showbiz”				
	Her photo in the cover page of magazines (keep relationship with media)	3	97-441-560	25-84-100	12464-56883-66011
	Calling for participation in a Video Clip competition (for her song)	2	72-99	21-14	5296-12042
	The ambassador for a social event (International Yoga day campaign)	3	256-62-492	76-3-79	30466-3639-55059
Total for Work		149	28717	5475	2361924
Personal life					
Family	With her son (going out)	1	536	66	120574
Friends	On the foreign tours with her friends	7	293-468-478-133-585-613-456	29-79-62-28-102-107-119	51730-62426-84048-18948-80169-80900-63738
Fashion-beauty	Her photo (in fashionable dress) in Vietnam/ foreign countries	13	209-613-181-951-303-402-588-431-165-423-137-377-249	53-43-69-112-26-60-77-67-34-58-14-71-43	50781-92333-44608-112193-54325-74532-88344-45561-19594-83260-18805-62442-40836
Ideas of herself (personality)	Criticizing a tabloid writing about her untrue swanky lifestyle (simultaneously give thanks to an online journal helping her to correct the info-> wants to build good relationship with media)	3	884-309-397	36-42-33	70403-27368-23059
	Talking about her love scandal	4	990-513-693-1043	79-43-119-69	47642-12545-32591-50798

	(extra marital scandal) – indirectly mentioning about dark sides of fame (always being observed, gossiped, rumored, judged and criticized)→ pressure, stress but still confident				
	Thanks for her mom/ dad: always being by her side (after her mom wrote a post on her own Facebook supporting her daughter in her love scandal)	1	1370	66	67732
Total for Personal life		29	14709	1806	1682285
Social activities					
Social activities	Talking about model and actor Duy Nhan's personality (after his death)	1	4105	343	331651
	Donation to school building in her hometown	1	1057	93	80111
	Helping poor families in her hometown	1	911	95	59634
	Calling for blood donation	1	660	1369	22386
Total for Social activities		4	6733	1900	493782
GRAND TOTAL		182	50159	9181	4537991

Appendix 2: Table of data collected from Nguyen Phuong Mai's Facebook page from 01/03/2015 to 01/09/2015 (full table)

Theme	Topic/Content	Post	Comment	Share	Like
Work					
Model	Fashion model	66	14-53-42-39-13-2-11-11-6-13-2-44-6-9-4-4-6-12-5-2-7-2-34-26-7-21-19-15-1-1-4-4-10-16-50-35-11-7-2-10-22-6-2-8-11-3-40-2-5-2-1-5-33-2-3-6-6-7-5-5	1-1-1-1-1	184-313-82-292-61-21-39-159-26-133-19-186-198-50-191-117-150-59-85-119-60-70-77-361-288-53-193-164-166-62-30-43-39-71-155-281-481-309-121-65-41-23-114-133-64-177-85-159-56-342-48-25-24-12-8-31-80-246-25-44-50-64-30-18-34-31
TV Presenter for VTV3-MC	Presenter/MC in programs or events	23	47-5-5-1-21-2-10-1-21-13-12-10-3-30-15-10-3-4-6-5	1-1	198-22-66-120-57-232-95-163-87-227-97-131-83-41-276-204-135-29-90-20-41-60-28
Reality TV show	“Secret Service” (Điệp Vụ Tuyệt Mật)–scandal around this show	11	6-4-10-7-7-45-19-19-10-16-11	1	65-23-52-61-19-60-137-135-56-157-187
Other work	-Her appearance in events (with another male /model singer) -Link of articles talking positively about her appearance at events/ Status “Happy Vietnam Journalists’ Day”-> wants to keep good relationship with the press	26	1-5-17-1-5-14-39-10-1-2-7-20-23-10-9-10-9	1	19-11-25-10-15-37-125-118-41-30-136-294-8-140-16-11-20-17-20-14-128-66-163-177-118-54-
	The film she starred in/poster	1	12	0	97

Total for Work		127	1327	9	12901
Personal life					
Family	Birthday/ Parties with family and friends	5	43-8-11-4-18	0	289-112-187-50-129
Friends	With her friends (working, travelling or hanging out for dinner, cinema, bar club)	32	10-14-11-7-1-1-3-5-1-2-9-4-7-6-31-22-10-20-3-9-14-7-4-7-4-2-13-2-4-3-7-21	1-1	158-87-155-109-54-10-7-23-13-10-112-26-11-26-17-11-33-17-77-92-80-89-92-295-329-89-202-216-193-154-90-59
Pets (social activities as well)	-Her cat -Sharing posts of abandoned cats→ looking for the owner -Sharing articles about people fostering abandoned cats -Sharing link about one hero dog protecting his owner against burglars -Calling for animal protection – against eating dog meat and hunting or exploiting other endangered species	16	10-1-1-1-10-15-12-8-5-11-11-3-21-7-7-1	1-3-1-1	12-2-2-28-23-6-63-80-69-172-79-21-133-66-28-67
Image in daily life	Having dinner/lunch/breakfast – or daily activities (in fashionable appearance)	23	19-26-12-2-17-11-5-21-47-18-13-46-1-17-39-22-13-29-14-73-22-2-20	1-2-1	263-219-182-103-181-35-94-107-265-425-173-159-140-24-252-468-177-166-155-156-605-227-55
	Status showing her emotion (happy, excited, sad or her personality: strong, frank, sincere and enthusiastic)—emotional	24	3-8-5-82-16-43-25-13-14-21-11-14-32-20-19-22-16-11-5-9-11-9-12-22	1-1-1-1-1-1-1-2	51-127-32-165-75-75-145-163-304-166-174-140-181-36-157-49-196-198-177-207-46-150-85-94
	Talking about her upcoming trip (travelling + business trip) (or spa) and showing the image of her face (“no make up”) and suggest good cosmetics -> wants to	11	11-6-27-34-33-13-35-11-19-5-12	1-1-1-1-1	70-45-191-52-194-154-311-135-202-184-124

	show natural beauty				
	Introducing and PR for her Instagram account	2	8-8	0	61-65
	Gym –Muay Thai- “Belly Button Challenge” (recently)→ suitable and supportive of VN’s youth (gym-sexy and healthy body)	9	19-55-8-29-45-27-24-7-8	1-1	48-44-427-38-177-165-166-97-64
	Supporting for LGBT community (rainbow colored profile picture)	1	8	0	109
	“Have a nice day”- “Good morning world”- “Bon appetite”	3	7-14-21	0	95-116-144
	PR for her jewelry trade	4	26-5-7-9	0	116-40-37-41
Total for Personal life		130	1945	28	16090
GRAND TOTAL		257	3272	37	28991

Appendix 3: Table of data collected from Ly Hai's Facebook page from 01/03/2015 to 01/09/2015 (full table)

Theme	Topic/Content	Post	Comment	Share	Like
Work					
Singer	Stage performance – Tour – MP3/MV (sometimes images with his colleagues)	11	185-111-47-183-263-280-148-51-1137-355-158	30-51-16-44-70-22-15-23-129-91-76	110299-30033-9557-55970-106613-97662-54678-26852-252013-129503-13694
Actor/ Producer	The film starred and produced by him (his production company) (PR: press, trailer, tickets, behind-the-scenes, premier, show times, cinemas, feedback of audiences)	22	360-15-155-482-260-921-100-131-413-852-1920-987-156-877-348-219-327-327-50-396-420-543	146-20-363-89-120-21-24-206-302-1298-363-37-776-76-57-32-32-4-37-26-33	19421-895-20555-16864-41442-197002-31110-14144-30542-23292-52449-28752-42023-29370-11231-93233-26362-26362-3073-56422-75501-56680
Take part in events/ interviews/ game shows	-An interview of his wife in VTV3 - Taking part in a TV show about family	3	242-664-128	44-77-27	89644-132643-55290
Product endorsement (his whole family)	-Joining in an outing trip –an event of Dutch Lady -Posting a clip/a TVC (television commercial) of Dutch Lady→ PR for this brand, promote the image of his family	4	133-146-163-141	53-150-33-13	8601-24791-53032-11807
Total for Work		40	14794	5026	2159407
Personal life					
	Daily images or clips of his family of wife, 3 children (1 son and 2 daughters) (at home, hanging out, having holiday	105	783-433-1057-1423-1061-621-504-897-214-957-1140-629-958-612-	118-39-57-54-95-95-239-77-45-101-91-111-134-369-60-41-766-	182765-128111-1057-143425-169587-249317-220732-137363-209325-94661-207835-106-219929-188525-169129-226457-

Family	trips or anniversaries)-> lovely, happy, and healthy – a family full of love/ sometimes with his parents/ or her parents		1489-544-1987-2825-1047-700-467-596-496-128-614-1528-855-2011-787-647-1930-331-208-76-503-821-1089-54-1366-2071-489-1320-796-550-102-363-354-1073-645-275-588-609-731-786-318-406-369-215-10760-432-5253-105-606-140-193-557-550-131-308-479-628-320-2290-449-963-754-256-395-2607-460-110-1846-76-786-221-683-797-722-680-514-987-318-494-1071-1029-54-122-194-254-397-1473-2669-283-793	212-143-71-34-48-35-87-92-113-131-106-81-197-76-35-4-72-104-67-15-121-93-39-158-132-125-33-240-52-188-146-30-129-81-84-65-74-69-58-75-306-86-86-72-115-30-35-92-194-57-40-45-105-45-81-111-68-21-58-144-61-25-202-14-62-22-34-55-75-100-32-103-55-76-119-121-22-48-27-75-49-156-183-58-216	60528-98852-162076-104016-60178-50235-183807-114891-144669-57111-33546-216847-168801-261639-167259-174366-252582-142577-63815-22550-136084-179832-169357-10871-138104-146857-89386-180336-168328-143562-24918-47957-130113-191517-193428-90898-159531-163934-172420-191897-91429-113524-65966-300845-24376-198197-31933-159688-17931-77185-130482-107518-58581-107936-166998-187827-155173-165973-147075-227791-138743-43614-93746-239449-133380-38932-218978-28506-147450-90151-137510-134472-144429-173178-66750-161679-85034-96501-92339-161060-12683-16842-88767-55691-84498-222498-268603-106210-75071
	Sharing knowledge and experiences	21	433-820-338-731-5556-415-	755-998-69-619-14613-72-	57898-48310-99109-98804-204362-77179-

	about child raising, cosmetics, medicine, and foods		110-386-282-388-108-821-1980-2004-1176-260-679-670-183-87-143	1030-1554-1128-3107-192-493-10576-10691-3428-840-2020-57609-347-10147-314	16447-58069-26622-17652-10552-61625-159204-93268-45830-31397-23956-19220-17292-7130-20050
	Measuring his body for wax-statue making	2	505-90	64-26	101695-14026
Friends	Joining his friends' wedding parties	3	188-517-504	40-102-65	116049-257502-167727
Total for Personal life		131	111031	130887	15562166
Social activities					
Social activities	Charity: calling for donations, food, and clothes for the poor and the orphans, fund raising for heart operations (the whole album named <i>Charity activities</i>) / updating or making public lists of donators	25	1548-30-42-478-585-117-8-27-36-305-729-1104-150-30-2642-35-301-52-20-26-20-50-1016-121-2	594-1-836-70-2-1-23-3241	134704-3163-4038-26344-84928-13686-2400-3424-10977-18611-20061-47070-6863-4287-30528-7483-17199-5166-2262-4075-5456-6132-28906-6481-912
	Clip about kidnapping or messages for other social evils	5	591-325-1278-600-131	11559-11742-670-328-582	34651-28328-70546-25509-7657
Total for Social activities		30	12399	29649	561847
GRAND TOTAL		201	138224	165562	18283420

Appendix 4: Table of data collected from Hoai Linh's Facebook page from 01/03/2015 to 01/09/2015 (full table)

Theme	Topic/Content	Post	Comment	Share	Like
Work					
Comedian	Domestic and foreign tours/Stage performances	2	2938-2752	386-305	226120-304560
Roles in movies	Scenes of the movies he starred in or their posters	3	1346-1150-7941	127-286-837	172029-78720-560790
Judge	-Images of being a judge in <i>VN's got talent</i> – with a status “ <i>It is so hard to keep that smile, but let's enjoy life</i> ” -Backstage at a comedian contest with his friend (in an outstanding and funny suit)	4	4945-3756-2869-6916	498-357-285-1595	453117-374170-289429-472844
His own restaurant	Image of his noodle soup restaurant	3	1874-4983-2640	302-1383-613	91995-339978-109311
Total for Work		12	44110	6974	3473063
Personal life					
Friends	A beautiful and meaningful calligraphic painting – a gift from his friends → thanks to his beloved friends. Shows that he is a grateful person	1	1483	345	168347
	Gathering with high-school friends	1	3534	476	371905
	Meeting with his old friend who he pays a lot of respect to	1	3143	227	269513
	In traditional dress (ao dai) with his colleague	1	9879	2400	759915
His own ideas of his personality/ his fame/morality	Posting an article telling inaccurate things about him, fabricating stories about him → correct and criticize the tabloid (the growth of tabloids and gossip columns sometimes damaging celebrities' images)	2	2161-6858	201-472	71860-411263
	A status appreciating one contestant in a competition (among debates by audiences about that	1	12667	761	420376

	contestant)				
	Status is a Buddhist chant with the image of a wizard and a cluster of bananas dedicated to “keyboard heroes” – those who criticize, judge, and condemn others through social media, which means to get them away → implies to criticize that negative trend of society → funny, humorous but profound	1	4267	1517	175142
Daily images	Selfie in a fruit garden (roles in movies too)	1	8861	617	789779
	Images of dried fish-> he loves eating them-> demotic	1	6747	896	577004
	Selfie with new short hair	1	16267	940	745168
	Selfie at his friend’s restaurant-> PR for her restaurant	1	11502	592	461150
	Receive a national award	1	1588	101	264310
	Selfie when lying in bed tiredly-> to be exhausted	1	4452	572	401500
Total for Personal life		14	93409	10117	5887232
Social activities					
Social activities	Share (PR) for a meaningful documentary (on TV) about Vietnam’s archipelagos	1	452	123	15134
	Praying for people in the Central Vietnam (overcome the severe floods)	1	2005	505	192897
Total for Social activities		2	2457	628	208031
GRAND TOTAL		28	139976	17719	9568326