



# Constructing “Productive Youth:” Journalistic Discourse, Power Relations, and Pop-Culture Consumption in Vietnam

Do Anh Duc\*, Phan Le Huy\*\*

**Abstract:** This article examines the construction of journalistic discourse regarding the cultural consumption of Vietnamese youth through music entertainment programmes. The research focuses on prominent case studies, including *Sao Mai Điểm Hẹn*, *Vietnam Idol*, *Rap Việt*, and *Anh Trai Vượt Ngàn Chông Gai* (the Vietnamese version of Call Me by Fire). Adopting a constructivist perspective, the article draws on a qualitative methodological approach that combines content analysis and discourse analysis of 28 articles from online newspapers *Tien Phong*, *Tuoi Tre*, and *Thanh Nien*, with in-depth interviews with journalists who work in the culture and entertainment sector. The findings reveal established patterns within journalistic discourse concerning youth cultural consumption, latent biases, and the intricate network of power relations that interact to shape media perspectives.

**Keywords:** social construction; journalistic discourses; Vietnamese youth; culture consumption; popular culture.

*Received: 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2026; Revised: 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2026; Accepted: 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2026*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33100/jossh.2026.2.1.3>

## 1. Introduction

Youth has become a pivotal focus across the social sciences and humanities as a socially constructed lens revealing broader cultural transformations (Peregrino and Prata 2023). In Vietnam, this perspective aligns seamlessly with both legal mandates framing youth as dynamic agents of national development (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2020) and

scholarship documenting their cultural experimentation and social agency (Nguyen Xuan Tung 2012; Vu Thi Thanh Tra 2017; Dao Thi Thanh Thuy 2023).

Central to youth identity formation is cultural consumption, which is understood through constructivist lenses as an arena where individuals continuously negotiate their positions within social hierarchies (Furlong 2013). While Bourdieu (1984) saw consumption as reproducing class distinctions, Birmingham School scholars reframed it as youth's active resistance against dominant ideologies (Hebdige 2002; Clarke et al. 2006). Music entertainment programmes crystallize these tensions,

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\* University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi;  
email: [ducdoanh@ussh.edu.vn](mailto:ducdoanh@ussh.edu.vn)

\*\* University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi.

functioning simultaneously as commercial products targeting youth audiences and ideological vehicles shaping national narratives (Gorfinkel 2018).

Yet youth culture exists only through media mediation. Scholars demonstrate the press does not merely report cultural phenomena – it constructs interpretive frameworks that legitimize or contest youth practices (Buckingham et al. 2015; Aligwe et al. 2018; Cohen 2011; Fitriyani et al. 2024; Mann and Ahluwalia 2010; Bekesan et al. 2016). Despite journalism's acknowledged role in norm formation (Phan Quang 2012; Truong Thi Kien 2021), entertainment journalism remains curiously underexplored academically, leaving a critical gap in understanding how press discourse actively constitutes “productive youth” alongside the professional dynamics shaping such representations. This article bridges that gap, analyzing Vietnamese press coverage of four landmark programmes – *Sao Mai Điểm Hẹn*, *Vietnam Idol*, *Rap Việt*, and *Anh Trai Vượt Ngàn Chông Gai* – to reveal how journalistic framing constructs productive youth identities while tracing the institutional and subjective forces guiding reporters' perspectives.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Conceptual Framework: Productive Youth

The concept of “productive youth” serves as the central analytical lens for this article, synthesizing the key themes established in the introduction. Cultural consumption through music entertainment programmes represents a key arena where youth identities are negotiated, while journalistic discourse actively shapes the interpretive frameworks through which these practices are understood. The “productive youth”

concept builds on these observations by referring to the discursively constructed figure of young people that emerges from press coverage. This figure is characterized by a dual logic: youth are represented as dynamic, creative, and culturally valuable participants, yet simultaneously positioned as subjects requiring guidance, discipline, and social legitimation. The “productive” dimension thus encompasses not only economic or commercial value, but also the capacity to engage in culturally meaningful ways that align with broader social norms and expectations.

This conceptualization is neither a pre-existing social reality nor a normative prescription, but rather an empirical observation derived from journalistic texts and professional perspectives. It therefore captures the tension between recognition of youth agency and the regulatory impulses of journalistic discourse. To systematically analyze this construction, the study draws on the following three interrelated theoretical traditions: *social constructionism*, which provides the ontological foundation for understanding reality as dialectically produced; *discourse theory*, which illuminates the power-knowledge dynamics embedded in journalistic texts; and *framing analysis*, which offers tools for dissecting how specific aspects of youth cultural practices are selected, emphasized, and evaluated. These frameworks collectively enable a nuanced reading of how the press participates in producing normative visions of youth in contemporary Vietnam.

### 2.2. The Dialectic of Social Construction of Mass Media

Social constructionism challenges essentialist assumptions about reality by arguing that many phenomena commonly treated as objective or natural are, in fact, products of historically and culturally

situated social processes (Berger and Luckmann 2006). From this perspective, reality is not a pre-given entity that exists independently of human beings, but continuously produced and reproduced through interaction, language, and discourse within specific social contexts (Berger and Luckmann 2006; Tran Huu Quang 2015).

Berger and Luckmann (2006) conceptualize this process through three interrelated moments: *externalization* refers to the projection of subjective meanings into the social world through communicative action, giving rise to shared norms, symbols, and institutions; *objectification* occurs when these meanings become stabilized through habitualization and institutionalization, acquiring the appearance of objectivity and inevitability; and *internalization* completes the cycle as individuals, through socialization, appropriate these objectified meanings as part of their own taken-for-granted understanding of reality (Berger and Luckmann 2006; Tran Huu Quang 2015). Within this dialectic, mass media constitute a particularly powerful institutional site: media texts externalize specific interpretations of social life, objectify them through repetition and institutional authority, and facilitate their internalization by audiences. This article therefore approaches journalism not as a neutral transmitter of information but as an active agent in the social construction of reality, playing a central role in stabilizing particular understandings of youth and cultural consumption while marginalizing alternative meanings.

### ***2.3. The Social Construction of Journalism as Discourse and Framing***

A social constructionist view of media is deepened by discourse theory, especially Michel Foucault's work on the entanglement of language, power, and knowledge.

Foucault (1988, 2004) conceives discourse not simply as text or speech but as regulated practices that define what can be said, by whom, and with what effects within specific historical formations. Discourse does not merely reflect reality; it actively constitutes objects, subjects, and social problems, making some ways of seeing the world thinkable and rendering others invisible (Foucault 2004). In this sense, journalism is a discursive practice that participates in defining what counts as an "event", how it should be interpreted, and which actors are authorized to speak. Power and knowledge are inseparable in this process: what is recognized as legitimate knowledge is produced within diffuse networks of power and, in turn, helps sustain existing power relations (Foucault 1988, 2022).

Building on and partly adapting Foucault, Fairclough (1992, 2013) proposes a three-dimensional model that links textual analysis to broader social structures: *text* (linguistic features and rhetorical organization), *discursive practice* (processes of production, distribution, and consumption) and *social practice* (the wider institutional and ideological context in which discourse is embedded) (Fairclough 1992, 2013; Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). This model allows researchers to trace how specific journalistic texts draw on and reproduce existing orders of discourse while also examining how newsroom routines, professional norms, and institutional constraints shape what can be written and how it is likely to be read (Handayani et al. 2018; KhosraviNik 2014). In this study, Fairclough's framework provides the main bridge between the close reading of press articles on youth cultural consumption and the analysis of the institutional and socio-political conditions under which those articles are produced.

Closely related to discourse analysis is framing theory, which offers more fine-grained tools for examining how journalists select and emphasize particular aspects of reality. Goffman (1974) first conceptualized frames as interpretive schemata that organize experience, enabling individuals to make sense of complex events. Entman (1993) then formalized framing as the process of selecting some aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicative text, thereby promoting a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. Because of their institutional authority and wide reach, journalistic frames do not simply tell audiences what to think about, but also shape how they think about it (Entman 1993). In the context of this research, framing analysis is used to identify how Vietnamese press coverage of music entertainment programmes defines the “problem” of youth cultural consumption, attributes responsibility, evaluates youth practices, and gestures toward implicit or explicit solutions. Combined with a discourse-analytic perspective, this approach treats journalism as a socially constructive practice in which meanings about youth, culture, and legitimacy are continuously produced, normalized, and contested.

#### ***2.4. Youth and Cultural Consumption Discourse in Vietnam***

Research on Vietnamese youth and cultural consumption increasingly portrays young people as active agents negotiating between national identity, globalization, and rapid digital transformation. Nguyen Minh Giang’s (2023) argues that Vietnamese youth construct a value system that combines dynamism, responsibility, and

patriotism with more ambivalent traits such as a preference for foreign devotion and pragmatism, indicating that youth identity is forged at the intersection of local traditions and global media flows. At the level of cultural industries, Le Hoang Kiet et al. (2025) argue that popular culture in post-Reform Vietnam has moved from the periphery to the center of national development, with youth-oriented cultural products becoming a key arena where cultural identity, soft power, and economic growth intersect. Within this broader context, Nguyen Diem Huong et al. (2025) show that hybrid musical works that fuse contemporary genres with folk elements can stimulate Generation Z’s curiosity about traditional culture, and facilitate cultural identity preservation through creative adaptation rather than through conservative protection of traditional heritage.

Fan culture and transnational media flows further complicate this picture. Phan Thanh Thanh’s (2017) ethnography of K-pop cover dance groups in Hanoi demonstrates that Vietnamese youth appropriate Korean pop music and aesthetics to build cultural capital, social networks, and cosmopolitan yet regionally grounded identities, highlighting youth agency in reworking imported styles rather than passively imitating them. At the same time, historical work on the emergence of “teens” in Vietnam under globalization documents how media and consumer culture have helped constitute youth as a new social and consumer category linked to fashion, music, and lifestyle rather than to traditional collectivist roles. More recent analyses of the Vietnamese entertainment industry underline that these formats function as key nodes where youth tastes, brand sponsorship, and digital fan practices converge, reinforcing television and online platforms as central infrastructures of youth

cultural consumption (Luu Duong Hoang 2024). Taken together, this literature frames Vietnamese youth as active cultural agents who appropriate, remix, and circulate cultural forms across media, while also revealing persistent adult anxieties about authenticity, foreign influence, and the erosion or commodification of traditional values.

### **2.5. Implications for Research Design**

The concept of productive youth synthesizes insights from social constructionism, discourse theory, and framing analysis to conceptualize Vietnamese youth not as a pre-given social category but as a discursively produced figure that emerges at the intersection of media, culture, and power. From the perspective of constructivism, journalistic texts are understood as institutionalized sites where interpretations of youth cultural consumption are externalized, stabilized, and gradually internalized. Foucauldian discourse analysis, combined with Fairclough's three-dimensional model, then allows these objectified meanings to be examined across textual, discursive-practice, and social-practice levels, foregrounding how journalistic routines, institutional constraints, and wider ideological formations shape what can be said about youth and how it can be said.

Following Entman (1993), press coverage of music entertainment programmes is approached as a site where youth cultural consumption is defined as a problem or opportunity, causally attributed, morally evaluated, and implicitly or explicitly linked to recommended responses. At the same time, empirical studies on youth and cultural consumption in Vietnam show that young people are active cultural agents who negotiate identity, heritage, and globalization through practices such as

hybrid music production, fandom, and multi-platform media use. This tension between youth agency and the regulatory tendencies of journalistic discourse underpins the study's focus on how the press both recognizes and delimits youth participation in popular culture.

These theoretical and empirical insights directly inform the research design. First, they justify the selection of 28 press articles from four landmark music entertainment programmes as a purposive corpus in which discursive constructions of youth cultural consumption are likely to be especially visible and consequential. Guided by framing analysis and Fairclough's three-dimensional model, qualitative content analysis is employed to identify recurrent labels, narrative structures, and evaluative patterns through which productive youth is constructed across these texts. Second, the constructivist and discourse-analytic orientation also motivates the inclusion of semi-structured interviews with journalists. By probing how individual beliefs, newsroom routines, and broader policy and commercial pressures shape journalists' perceptions of youth culture, the interviews make it possible to trace the dialectical movement between externalization, objectification, and internalization that underlies press perspectives on youth cultural consumption.

### **3. Methodology**

This qualitative approach was selected to allow for an in-depth examination of meaning-making processes, power relations, and discursive patterns embedded in journalistic representations of youth cultural consumption. Giang Nguyen-Thu (2018) argues that Vietnamese television entertainment discourse since the post-Reform period has undergone a profound

ideological shift, marked by ongoing tensions and accommodations among socialist values, national identity, individual identity, and market logic. This perspective inspires this article to examine how Vietnamese journalism covers four landmark music entertainment programmes, each embodying distinct entertainment philosophies: the purely native entertainment ethos in *Sao Mai Điểm Hẹn*, Western format importation in *Vietnam Idol*, the mainstreaming of peripheral subcultures in *Rap Việt*, and the national spirit revival in *Anh Trai Vượt Ngàn Chông Gai*.

First, qualitative content analysis was employed to examine journalistic framing practices across a corpus of 28 journalistic articles focusing in depth on youth cultural consumption through music entertainment programmes, selected via a purposive sampling method from the online editions of *Tien Phong*, *Thanh Nien* and *Tuoi Tre*. These outlets were selected based on their state-mandated missions to inform, educate, and orient adolescents and young adults (Vietnam Ministry of Science and Technology 2024). For each music program, 7 articles were selected from the first season to represent pivotal shifts in journalistic discourse regarding youth cultural consumption within the context of televised music entertainment.

Second, Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis was applied to the same corpus to provide a more layered understanding of discourse construction. At the textual dimension, the analysis focused on linguistic choices, framing vocabulary, narrative structures, and rhetorical devices employed in journalistic writing. At the level of discursive practice, the study examined stylistic conventions and tonal strategies in order to reveal implicit power relations between journalists or media institutions, the social actors represented in

the texts, and the intended readership. Finally, the social practice dimension contextualized these discursive patterns within the broader socio-historical conditions in which the discourse is produced, thereby situating journalistic representations of youth cultural consumption within existing ideological structures and institutional constraints.

Third, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to explore journalists' perceptions of youth cultural consumption as mediated through music entertainment programmes. The interview questionnaire was designed to probe journalists' awareness of various framing agents that shape their professional perspectives. These agents were examined at three analytical levels: micro-level agents, including personal beliefs and value orientations; meso-level agents, such as newsroom routines and workplace influences; and macro-level agents, encompassing policy frameworks, commercial contracts, and prevailing public opinion. This approach allows for the identification of patterns that may be unconsciously formed through reciprocal interactions among these agents, highlighting how journalists, as subjects, are positioned within networks of power that influence the perspectives articulated in press content.

Three journalists from three distinct media outlets participated in the in-depth interviews. These outlets differ in terms of institutional missions, journalistic purposes, and target audiences, thereby providing a comparative perspective on professional viewpoints. To ensure confidentiality and protect personal information, the participating journalists are anonymized and coded as NV1, NV2, and NV3. Relevant demographic details of the interviewees are presented in the table below.

**Table 1:** Demographic description of in-depth interview participants

Participant	Gender	Range of Age	Place	Career Age	Outlet Orientation	Target Audiences
NV1	Female	25-30	Northern	5 years	State-oriented	Mass
NV2	Female	22-25	Northern	3 years	State-oriented	Youth
NV3	Female	>30	Southern	>10 years	Mass-oriented	Youth

The interview sample was kept intentionally small (45 – 60 minutes per interview) as this component serve an exploratory, complementary role for triangulation rather than exhaustive population-level inference (Guest et al. 2006). To protect participants from potential professional repercussions, all identifying details regarding specific outlets were anonymized. Trustworthiness was maintained through rigorous transcription, member checking, and reflexive notes (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Shared professional habitus allows these insights to illuminate how organizational routines contribute to the textual practices observed in the corpus<sup>2</sup>.

Ultimately, this methodological design seeks to address two central research questions:

1: *How do journalistic texts construct the figure of "productive youth" through framing and discursive practices in coverage of four landmark music entertainment programmes?*

2: *How do journalists' professional habitus and institutional constraints (micro, meso, and macro-level factors) contribute to the discursive patterns identified in 1?*

<sup>2</sup> The interview data in this article was collected within the framework of the author's Master thesis, which was ethically approved by the University of Social Science and Humanities thesis outline review committee (Minutes of Decision no.153/QĐ-XHNV January 12<sup>th</sup> 2026)

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Journalistic Pattern-Making Mechanism

The press plays a central role in identifying, classifying, and categorizing youth and their forms of cultural consumption through the strategic deployment of terminology and labels, thereby transforming language into a subtle yet effective instrument of surveillance power. Through lexical choices, journalistic discourse does not merely describe youth participation in cultural activities but actively constructs categories that regulate how such participation is perceived, evaluated, and normalized. The evolution of labels – from “supporters” (*cổ động viên*) in coverage of *Sao Mai Điểm Hẹn*, to “fans” (*fan*), and ultimately to “fandom” and “*Gai con*” in relation to *Anh Trai Vượt Ngàn Chông Gai* – illustrates a progressive refinement in how youth engagement is framed and assessed. Each term carries not only descriptive meaning but also embedded social and cultural value implications that shape public understanding of youth cultural practices.

The term “supporters” evokes an image of enthusiastic yet deferential participants, positioning youth as emotionally invested but structurally subordinate to the cultural product and its producers. The shift to “fans” introduces a greater sense of personalization, intimacy, and affective

attachment, signaling a more active and expressive form of engagement. The concept of “fandom,” however, marks a significant discursive transition. It emphasizes organization, collective identity, and even a degree of professionalization, suggesting that youth cultural consumption has evolved into a structured social force with its own norms, hierarchies, and capacities for mobilization. The press’s adoption and normalization of “*Gai con*” – a term originating from social media to denote the devoted fan community of *Anh Trai Vượt Ngàn Chông Gai* – further reinforces this framing, highlighting cultural consumption as a group-based identity practice among youth rather than a series of individual preferences.

Through repeated usage, explanation, and evaluative commentary, the press actively stratifies youth cultural participants. These discursive practices implicitly determine which forms of engagement are worthy of recognition, which require guidance or correction, and which provoke skepticism regarding taste, judgment, or maturity. Language thus becomes a mechanism for sorting youth into categories of legitimacy and concern, subtly delineating boundaries between acceptable enthusiasm and excessive devotion.

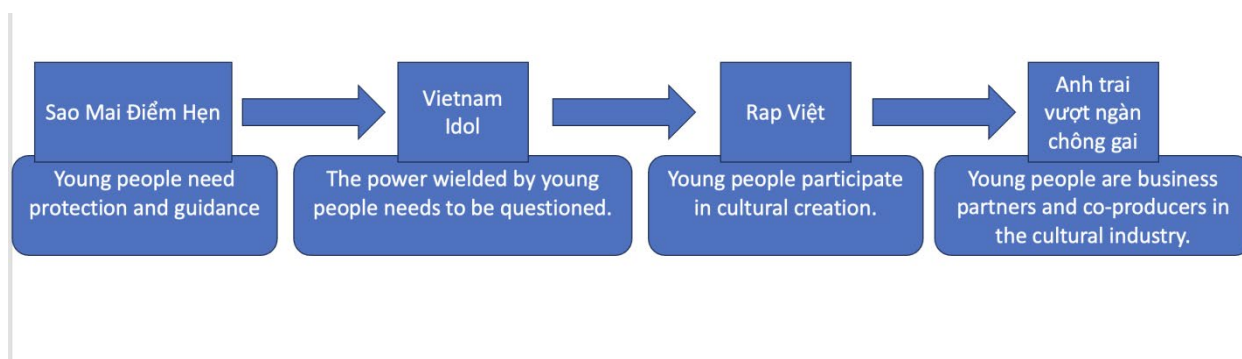
Beyond lexical classification, the press establishes broader discursive frames that place youth cultural consumption under continuous surveillance and demarcation. Surveillance manifests in recurring references to evaluative criteria such as artistic merit, social responsibility, and the transparency or legitimacy of selection

mechanisms. Such framing constructs an environment in which youth are encouraged to internalize predefined standards and regulate their own behavior accordingly. Simultaneously, the press’s demarcating gaze is evident in critiques of excessive commercialization in artistic production or anxieties surrounding illusory values generated by mass voting practices. By moving analytically from individual behavior to broader commercial trends and processes of cultural industrialization, journalistic discourse extends its regulatory reach from personal taste to collective cultural practices.

In doing so, the press subtly guides youth toward self-regulation: urging them to be passionate yet orderly, and creative yet restrained within acceptable limits. Through identification and framing mechanisms, journalism simultaneously controls and directs public perceptions of youth cultural lifestyles. Acting both as judges who distinguish right from wrong and as educators who prescribe normative conduct, the press constructs enduring templates of youth cultural consumption. Within these templates, youth are encouraged to participate actively in popular culture but remain bounded by discursive limits, celebrated for creativity yet ultimately contingent upon validation through officially sanctioned language and journalistic discourse.

## 4.2. Patterns Shift and Implicit Prejudices

**Figure 1:** The shift in journalistic discourse about youth across different stages of mass culture consumption



During the *Sao Mai Điểm Hẹn* era, the press constructed the youth template as “professional supporters” – a seemingly positive designation laden with complex layers. Affixing the adjective “professional” to fandom activities signals the press’s desire to “elevate” youth engagement, while implicitly stipulating that they must meet certain “standards” to gain legitimacy.

This template is reinforced by emphasizing the organized, disciplined, and “healthy” nature of cultural consumption activities. Youth are portrayed as conscious participants who adhere to rules and, crucially, “learn” from artists and the program itself. This clearly reflects a traditional educational model positioning youth as pupils requiring guidance and oversight.

For example, the article “*Nghề*” *cổ động viên* (“*Professional*” fan) on *Tien Phong* (2005) explores the story of fans who participate in cheering for shows as a form of work aimed at increasing their income, requiring adherence to work standards: “*Để đêm hội sân khấu hóa do báo S. tổ chức năm vừa qua thêm sinh động, các bạn trong nhóm của Hoàng phải chia thành nhiều nhóm, mỗi nhóm thực hiện một nhiệm vụ theo sự hướng dẫn của ban tổ chức: xuất hiện từ hướng nào, đi theo đội hình như thế*

*nào, vỗ tay ra sao... Với những buổi ra mắt sản phẩm mới của các công ty, các bạn có nhiệm vụ ngồi nghe và đặt câu hỏi để khơi gợi sự chú ý của những khách hàng khác...”* (“*To make the theatrical performance organized by S. newspaper last year more lively, Hoang's group had to divide into several teams, each performing a task according to the organizers' instructions: which direction to enter from, what formation to follow, how to applaud, etc. For new product launches by companies, their task was to sit and listen and ask questions to attract the attention of other customers...”*). Although approaching this cultural practice from a positive perspective, the article’s discourse strategy still aims to morally orient this type of fan activity by identifying positive social values and examining the extent of its influence on activities that were considered by societal perspectives at that time to be “normative” for youth, such as learning and “healthy” community engagement: “*Công việc vỗ tay theo yêu cầu không ảnh hưởng đến việc học của các bạn*” (“*Clapping on demand does not affect their studies*”), “*từ những lần đi cổ động, họ sẽ có cơ hội sinh hoạt giải trí, giao lưu cùng bè bạn*” (“*Through these cheering trips, they will have the*

*opportunity to engage in recreational activities and socialize with friends”*).

Another discourse strategy that appeared during the first season of *Sao Mai Điểm Hẹn* was emphasizing the differences in tastes among young audiences and the way artists choose their music. Through this, the press implicitly expresses a distinction between folk-inspired art and art influenced by the mass market, thereby highlighting the multifaceted and compromising interaction between the public and artists. This demonstrates the press’s effort to shape the taste standards of young people: “*dòng nhạc mang âm hưởng Việt chưa kịp phân hóa theo kiểu hip-hop hay R&B [...] Công chúng VN nghe rock hay hip-hop chỉ là một bộ phận ở bề nổi mà thôi. Nên chăng chương trình tạo thêm một đầu ra cho dòng nhạc “đang lên”: dân gian-đương đại*” (“*Vietnamese-influenced music hasn't yet diversified into hip-hop or R&B genres [...] The Vietnamese public listening to rock or hip-hop is only a superficial segment. Perhaps the program should create another outlet for the “up-and-coming” genre: folk-contemporary music.*”) (Tien Phong 2006).

*Vietnam Idol* marked a pivotal turning point, as the press acknowledged the genuine power of youth in determining program outcomes. However, this recognition was accompanied by profound concerns and skepticism. The phrase “*tuổi teen*” (“*teenagers*”) appeared with high frequency in articles from this period, often laced with implications of immaturity and susceptibility to manipulation.

The press during this phase forged a contradictory template: simultaneously validating youth power while persistently questioning its legitimacy. This tension is evident in skeptical analyses of voting mechanisms, worries over “*money dictating art,*” and particular concerns about teenagers’ aesthetic judgment capabilities.

The press clearly expressed this concern in the headlines of their articles: *Thành “sao” nhờ... tin nhắn* (*Becoming a “star” thanks to... SMS*) (Thanh Nien 2007), and *Thần tượng âm nhạc cũng phải giỏi truyền thông* (*Music idols also need to be good at media relations*) (Tien Phong 2008). This template mirrors the conflict between traditional conceptions of artistic authority and the emerging reality of democratic participation in cultural consumption.

*Rap Việt* ushered in a new phase where the press began acknowledging youth not merely as consumers but as cultural creators. The article *Rap Việt và ngôi nhà ngôn từ của giới trẻ* (*Vietnamese Rap and the Linguistic House of Youth*), published in *Tuoi Tre* newspaper on February 18th 2021, is a prime example of the positive perspective of journalism on a subculture often considered deviant and marginal to the mainstream, where artists and the public play equal roles not only in artistic creation but also in shaping lifestyles and cultural semiotics. Yet, even in this recognition, the press retained a controlling role through “*decoding*” and “*naming*” cultural phenomena. Articles dissecting youth slang via hip-hop cultural consumption – particularly *Rap Việt* or “*underground culture*” – position the press as an essential bridge between youth culture and broader society. One notable point is the appearance of articles that devote their entirety to analyzing “*trends*” created by the fan community, derived from the language used by the show's participants. For example, the article ‘*Ồ mấy zing gút chóp em’ là gì mà ai cũng nói?* (*What is ‘Ồ mấy zing gút chóp em’ which makes everyone say it?*) (Thanh Nien 2020). This inadvertently conveys that youth culture holds value only when “*translated*” and legitimized by mainstream social norms.

Although Rap Việt has brought a subculture into the mainstream, some articles still express caution. For example, the article MCK (Rap Việt) phát ngôn dung tục, thách thức antifan trước thềm Chung kết Rap Việt (MCK [Rap Việt] uses vulgar language, challenges antifans ahead of Rap Việt finale) (Tien Phong 2020) prominently features “antifan” in its headline, simultaneously emphasizing public outrage over MCK's remarks while evoking antifandom as a youth subculture. Notably, the term disappears entirely from the article body. Instead, “giới trẻ” (youth) denotes MCK's sympathetic supporters, while broader terms like “dân tình” (public) and “cộng đồng mạng” (online community) designate his detractors. This lexical strategy yields two discursive effects. First, it reinforces the stereotype that rap culture enjoys primarily youth recognition rather than mass appeal, positioning its perceived deviancy as the primary barrier to mainstream acceptance. Second, it collapses nuanced distinctions by equating “public” and “online community” with organized antifandom, despite their logically concentric rather than identical relationships. The verb “thách thức” (challenges) further constructs MCK as a defiant antagonist against mass cultural norms – a beleaguered yet aggressive figure confronting communal institutional power. Public cultural consumption appears through neutral phrases like “mất thiện cảm” (lose sympathy) alongside charged expressions such as “phản ứng mạnh mẽ” (strong reaction), “không khỏi ngạc nhiên” (shock and surprise), “gật gù đồng tình” (nodding approval), and “phân bua nảy lửa” (fiery defenses) – positioning journalism as neutral observer while amplifying artist-public antagonism. This discourse strategy maintains a journalistic perspective that

defines and guides norms in cultural practice and consumption.

The *Anh Trai Vượt Ngàn Chông Gai* phase witnessed the emergence of the most advanced template: youth recognized as official partners in the entertainment industry. The use of “fandom” terminology, tied to depictions of robust financial spending on fandom activities, signals acknowledgment of youth communities' professionalism, organization, and tangible economic value generation. Articles such as *Nghệ sĩ Việt và fandom (Vietnamese artist and their fandom)* (Thanh Nien 2025) or *Xây dựng văn hóa thần tượng nhìn từ những concert Việt đình đám (Constructing idol culture view through famous Vietnam's concerts)* (Tuoi Tre 2024) emphasize the professionalism and systematic nature of cultural consumption practices.

However, this new template introduces fresh challenges and contradictions. The rising portrayal of youth cultural consumption as commercial activity increasingly measures their value by profit generation potential. This can be seen through articles highlighting the “massive” revenue of the producers as well as the “willingness to spend” of the public supporting the show, such as “*show trăm tỷ*” (*hundred billion show*) or “*tích cực quảng bá cho thần tượng, mua vé concert và đưa nghệ sĩ lên top các nền tảng*” (*actively promote idols, buy concert tickets, and get the artist to the top of various platforms*) (Tien Phong 2024a). Furthermore, sponsorship deals can even be seen in the newspapers, through positive articles advertising the program's sponsors. The article *Constructing idol culture view through famous Vietnam's concerts* uses one-third of its final space to advertise Techcombank's sponsorship activities related to the program (Tuoi Tre 2024). This risks marginalizing or undervaluing non-

commercial cultural practices, engendering a novel form of bias regarding cultural worth.

Throughout all phases, a core latent bias persists subtly: youth require guidance, explanation, and direction in their cultural consumption activities. Even when acknowledging youth power and creativity, the press consistently assumes an “adult” role by providing context, interpreting meanings, and evaluating the value of these activities. This bias reproduction mechanism manifests through consistent pedagogical language and recurs frequently, establishing an asymmetrical relationship where youth remain perpetual learners despite generating the very cultural phenomena under discussion.

Another persistent bias involves dichotomizing culture into legitimate versus illegitimate forms, with youth-generated culture typically relegated to the latter. This is evident in the press’s frequent use of terms like “subculture” or “underground,” or enclosing youth terminology in quotation marks, implying they lack sufficient “official” status without explanatory scaffolding. This mechanism erects a subtle cultural hierarchy, positioning the press as arbiters of legitimacy. Youth cultural phenomena gain broader societal value only when endorsed and decoded by journalistic discourse.

The press also routinely interrogates the true motivations behind youth cultural consumption. From concerns over blind idolization in early phases to dissecting commercial drivers later on, journalistic discourse seldom validates the natural diversity of youth engagement motives. This imposes ongoing pressure on youth to prove the legitimacy of their activities rather than affirming their freedom to choose and participate authentically.

It is undeniable that the press’s frame construction has significantly elevated

youth's societal status. From “supporters” to “professional business partners,” it has charted a positive trajectory fostering greater societal respect and recognition. Nevertheless, this process sustains subtle control mechanisms. The press’s persistent interpreter role fosters dependency, whereby youth culture gains value only through approval and reframing by mainstream norms. Moreover, escalating commercialization in press approaches risks compelling youth to demonstrate the economic value of their cultural practices, potentially distorting the intrinsic freedom and diversity of cultural consumption.

### *4.3. Factors that Shape Journalistic Perspective*

In-depth interview findings reveal that journalistic perspectives on youth cultural consumption through music entertainment programmes are constructed via three primary agents: micro-level (the journalist as subject and their personal cognitive filters); meso-level (newsroom institutions, manifested in editing processes, content censorship, and unwritten rules); and macro-level (broader socio-cultural contexts and technological developments).

Each participating journalist brings distinct personal experiences and professional values to youth-related topics, serving as the initial filter shaping article content. NV1 shared that personal impressions of each program's quality and media image directly influence content framing: programmes delivering positive value receive laudatory language, while those linked to scandals or controversies face direct critique. This agency enables NV1 to clearly delineate phenomena and ground judgments in critically professional viewpoints. In contrast, NV2 prioritizes a balanced stance, emphasizing multifaceted coverage without undue praise or harsh criticism. For NV2, upholding journalistic

objectivity is a guiding principle, maintaining an even tone regardless of commercial elements or controversies. Meanwhile, NV3 stresses adapting perspectives to a young readership by employing approachable language aligned with social media trends, transforming personal experience into accessible reporting. Thus, personal experiences and values not only form the starting foundation but also dictate the degree of critique, praise, or linguistic adaptation. Individual templates – from sharp critique to neutrality or “friendliness” – permeate article wording, ultimately shaping press viewpoints on youth.

Beyond individual factors, the newsroom environment plays a pivotal role in content control and orientation. All three journalists described rigorous hierarchical editing processes – from copy editors and managing editors to editorial boards and editors-in-chief – each layer ensuring content propriety and alignment with overarching directives. NV1 noted that *“every draft undergoes two to three review rounds, with sensitive topics escalated to higher levels.”* NV2 highlighted the newsroom’s fact-checking via audio recordings, interview notes, and cross-verification with press releases or other agencies’ materials. For NV3, substandard articles receive direct revision notes from editors within the system. Beyond formal procedures, each newsroom enforces unwritten rules. NV1 admitted their outlet fixates on audience extravagance, headlining *“fans spend 100 million on tickets”* or *“rabid fans”* to boost readership and ads. NV2 revealed that the promotion of artists’ personal lives and histories serves as a proven clickbait formula, while spiritual or sensitive topics face absolute bans. NV3, at a more open outlet, cited implicit rules against LGBTQ+ discrimination and body-shaming biases: *“My newsroom has a fairly*

*open-minded approach to young people and issues that are often subject to prejudice, such as appearance and gender. While not explicitly stated, everyone understands that an open-minded and unbiased perspective is necessary when working, which is different from many other newsrooms.”* These control mechanisms forge dominant templates: youth cultural consumption viewed through lenses of “lavish spending” or “idol worship of the attractive.” They not only structure editorial practice but profoundly shape journalists’ perceptions, compelling them to embed these templates into their reporting.

Digital technology developments have fundamentally altered press-public interactions. Instant feedback features like emails and comments pressure journalists to rapidly adjust content. NV1 recounted receiving *“hundreds of emails demanding article removals for perceived negativity toward idols, forcing risk assessment and softened language to avert backlash”*. NV2 shared that *“while no formal sponsorship contracts exist, newsrooms accommodate producer requests to mention brand sponsors; non-compliance risks professional fallout”*. NV3 estimated that cultural trends and social media reactions influence *“about 30% of perspectives,”* which leads her to actively incorporate divergent youth sentiments to adjust tone in subsequent pieces for group representativeness. Thus, societal and technological pressures transform journalism into instant-journalism, where articles confront immediate public responses. This induces self-censorship among journalists, balancing objectivity against audience demands.

In-depth interview results further indicate that templates are not only consciously incorporated by journalists into articles but also represent the objectification of unconscious biases. Through journalistic

practices, recurrent societal conceptions of youth are perpetuated and disseminated.

Journalists do not merely reflect but confront social responsibility in constructing youth images. NV1 demonstrates comprehensive responsibility through self-analysis, balancing positive-negative portrayals, and proactively adding solutions to enrich discourse. NV2 approaches it formally, claiming “*awareness from the outset*” and advising “*generic writing*” to evade accountability, lacking concrete action. NV3 embodies action-oriented responsibility, willing to challenge leadership and recognizing long-term article impacts, viewing it as a professional cornerstone. These differences reveal social responsibility as non-uniform, contingent on self-critical capacity, intervention depth, and confrontational versus avoidance stances toward institutional pressures.

This entire apparatus forms an interactive network: personal experiences filter information, newsroom institutions control discursive frames, socio-technological pressures drive real-time adjustments, internalization recreates unconscious templates, and varying social responsibility levels dictate self-regulation degrees. Consequently, press pages consistently feature youth templates – from “supporters”, “fans”, and “fandom”, to “willingness-to-spend consumers”, “business partners”, or “cultural innovators.” These are not mere reflections of reality but actively direct societal perceptions of youth capabilities, values, and roles.

#### 4.4. Power Relationships

In-depth interviews also unveil a power relations system shaping journalistic perspectives on youth cultural consumption via music entertainment programmes, involving five key actors: political

organizations, newsrooms, sponsors, journalists, and the public.

Political organizations wield ultimate editorial oversight, dictating informational boundaries on artists and programmes. NV1 revealed that “*controversy-plagued artists may face broadcast bans*,” directly constraining coverage and prompting preemptive avoidance of “*unsafe*” topics. Communication policies from overseeing agencies mandate prioritizing youth philanthropy according to NV2. When youth and artists engage in charitable drives, newsrooms repetitively amplify these across articles, transforming journalism into propaganda rather than critical analysis. Operating within rigid policy confines while serving as official state media, the press predominantly frames youth through policy lenses over multifaceted cultural dimensions.

Newsrooms function as internal gatekeepers: all articles undergo multi-tier reviews to ensure policy compliance and avert infractions. NV1 described stringent hierarchical vetting, NV2 emphasized verification via recordings and press releases, and NV3 detailed Content Management System-based direct approvals. Newsroom cultures also harbor unwritten rules: NV1 noted preferences for “lavish spending:” audience stories, reinforcing extravagant consumption templates; NV2 highlighted the exploitation of artists' personal histories for drama and engagement; NV3 credited conscious bias avoidance for fostering open youth discourse. Newsrooms thus frame topics, wielding directive power to align journalist output with institutional templates.

Sponsors hold economic leverage, embedding advertising requests into press conferences. NV2 noted that producer prompts to mention sponsors compel brand insertions. NV1 summed it up: “*Don't*

*criticize those who pay!*” as a professional principle. Sponsorship demands force balancing audience, journalist, and producer interests. Once contracts are signed, journalists weigh relationship preservation for program/artist access, tempering harsh critiques. Sponsor power distorts or amplifies commercial angles, spawning templates like “youth consumption driven by commercialization,” sometimes overshadowing cultural value analysis.

Though constructors, journalists are simultaneously subjects shaped by internalized templates, yielding unconscious manifestations in articles. Their directive authority amplifies these into societal norms shaping perceptions of youth cultural consumption.

As the terminal actor in press-mediated social construction, the public receives templates molded by the above power relations. Yet the public not only absorbs but exerts pressure via content feedback and shapes coverage through cultural consumption acts like voting or fandom events. Journalists incorporate voting data and fandom depictions as article evidence, rendering the public “co-authors” in framing press perspectives through interactive and co-constructive power.

The construction of journalistic perspectives on youth cultural consumption emerges from continuous interactions within a power chain: *political policies* → *newsroom controls* → *sponsor interests* → *journalistic expertise* → *public feedback and co-construction*. This sequencing reflects power scales from macro to micro levels; however, power actors do not engage in unidirectional causal relations but through reciprocal, overlapping networks. Identifying this structure elucidates the persistent replication of youth cultural consumption templates in press coverage across music entertainment programmes,

while suggesting pathways toward more open, balanced, and transparent media environments.

## 5. Discussion

This article set out to examine how journalistic discourse constructs youth cultural consumption through music entertainment programmes in Vietnam, and how such constructions are shaped by intertwined networks of power operating at discursive, institutional, and ideological levels. The findings suggest that the press does not merely reflect youth cultural practices but actively participates in producing a particular model of “productive youth” through discursive identification, framing, and normalization. In this sense, journalism functions as a key site where youth culture is rendered intelligible, governable, and evaluable.

First, the findings reinforce the constructivist assumption that youth cultural consumption is not a pre-given social reality but an object continuously constituted through processes of externalization, objectification, and internalization. Journalistic discourse externalizes journalists’ internalized assumptions about youth, taste, creativity, and responsibility into textual representations. Through repetition across articles, these representations become objectified as common-sense understandings of what youth cultural consumption is and ought to be. Over time, such objectified meanings are internalized not only by audiences but also by journalists themselves, as evidenced in the interviews, where dominant frames were often reproduced reflexively rather than consciously articulated as editorial choices. This dialectical circulation confirms Berger and Luckmann’s argument that social reality is sustained precisely because it appears

natural and self-evident once institutionalized.

Second, the study highlights the centrality of discursive labeling in governing youth cultural participation. The progressive shift from “supporters” to “fans,” “fandom,” and “*Gai con*” illustrates how lexical choices serve as classificatory tools that both recognize and regulate youth engagement. These labels are not neutral descriptors; they embed evaluative judgments regarding legitimacy, intensity, organization, and social value. By adopting and stabilizing such terms, the press effectively stratifies youth audiences, distinguishing between acceptable enthusiasm and excessive devotion, between creativity and irrationality. This finding aligns with Foucault’s notion that discourse operates as a technology of power, producing subjects by naming, categorizing, and situating them within normative grids of intelligibility.

Third, the framing analysis reveals that journalistic discourse consistently places youth cultural consumption under a dual logic of encouragement and surveillance. On the one hand, youth are celebrated as creative, dynamic, and central to the vitality of popular culture. On the other hand, their participation is repeatedly evaluated against criteria such as artistic value, social responsibility, moderation, and economic rationality. Through Entman’s framing functions, youth cultural consumption is defined as a phenomenon that requires explanation, moral assessment, and, at times, corrective guidance. This ambivalent framing produces what can be described as a “bounded participation” model: youth are encouraged to engage actively in popular culture, but only within discursively sanctioned limits.

Importantly, this dual logic reflects broader tensions within Vietnam’s contemporary media environment, where

commercial imperatives, cultural policy orientations, and public expectations intersect. Journalists interviewed in the study acknowledged the influence of macro-level agents such as policy frameworks and public opinion, as well as meso-level factors including newsroom routines and editorial orientations. These influences contribute to a form of anticipatory framing, in which journalists pre-emptively align their representations with perceived normative expectations. As a result, journalistic discourse becomes a space where cultural consumption is simultaneously commodified and moralized. By positioning journalists as subjects simultaneously playing both the roles of creator and the created within the dialectic of social cognitive construction, the results of in-depth interviews also partially address the need for sociological research in analyzing the discourse practice dimension often overlooked in many discursive studies.

From a discourse analysis perspective, the findings also underscore the relevance of Fairclough’s three-dimensional model in explaining how power operates through journalism. At the textual level, evaluative adjectives, metaphors, and narrative structures subtly encode normative judgments. At the level of discursive practice, professional conventions and genre expectations constrain how youth culture can be discussed. At the level of social practice, these discourses resonate with broader ideological concerns about productivity, discipline, and social order. Together, these dimensions demonstrate that journalistic representations of youth cultural consumption are shaped by structural conditions that extend beyond individual authorial intent.

The study further contributes to youth and media scholarship by challenging romanticized notions of youth agency in cultural consumption. While youth are often

portrayed in cultural studies as resistant or subversive actors, the findings suggest that their agency is discursively circumscribed. Youth participation is acknowledged and even celebrated, but only insofar as it aligns with dominant cultural and moral frameworks articulated through the press. In this respect, journalism functions less as a platform for amplifying youth voices and more as a regulatory mechanism that channels youth expression into acceptable forms.

At a broader level, the construction of “productive youth” through journalistic discourse reflects shifting socio-cultural priorities in contemporary Vietnam. Productivity here extends beyond economic contribution to encompass cultural taste, emotional discipline, and responsible participation in public culture. Music entertainment programmes become symbolic sites where these expectations are negotiated, contested, and normalized. By framing youth cultural consumption as both opportunity and risk, the press contributes to the governance of youth not through overt coercion but through subtle discursive guidance.

This study acknowledges several limitations inherent to its design. First, the corpus focuses exclusively on 28 articles from three major youth-oriented outlets (*Tien Phong*, *Thanh Nien*, *Tuoi Tre*), potentially limiting generalizability across Vietnam’s diverse media landscape, including regional papers and digital-native platforms. Second, while journalist interviews provide rich insights into discursive production, direct youth voices and producer/sponsor perspectives remain unexplored, constraining analysis of reception and economic influences. Finally, the emphasis on high-profile music programmes may not fully capture everyday youth cultural consumption.

Future research could triangulate findings with audience reception studies, expand to digital/social media discourses, or examine less commercialized cultural forms, further illuminating the co-construction of productive youth identities in contemporary Vietnam.

In sum, this study demonstrates that journalistic discourse plays a crucial role in constructing youth cultural consumption as a socially meaningful and governable phenomenon. Through discursive labeling, framing, and normalization, the press shapes not only how youth culture is perceived but also how youth are encouraged to perceive themselves. Understanding this process is essential for critically engaging with the power relations embedded in contemporary media representations of youth and popular culture.

## 6. Conclusion

This study explores the intersection of journalism, entertainment media, and youth social behavior in Vietnam. Through discourse analysis and insights into journalists’ personal perceptions, it clarifies the press’s role as a constructor of social cognition while delineating the complex dynamics of contemporary mass media surrounding entertainment cultural consumption amid globalization and digitalization.

Grounded in a constructivist paradigm, the methodology integrates three core theories – social constructionism, discourse theory, and framing theory – to demonstrate that journalism not only reflects facets of reality but actively participates in constructing social perceptions and objectified templates of it. Through the analysis of 28 articles from exemplar music entertainment programmes, combined with

interviews probing the perceptions of three culture-entertainment journalists, the study multidimensionally uncovers the formation of social understandings of Vietnamese youth cultural consumption via press discourse.

Findings identify recurrent templates in journalistic discourse on youth cultural consumption through music entertainment programmes, through which the press simultaneously reflects, directs, monitors, promotes, and validates youth activities. Additionally, reciprocal power relations within public discourse spaces on this topic are illuminated, wherein political, organizational, commercial, individual, and group actors continuously maneuver power, forming a dynamic ecological network.

The research reveals embedded societal biases imposed on youth and their cultural consumption practices via music entertainment programmes. These biases do not originate unilaterally from journalism but are generational preconceptions absorbed from society's collective knowledge reservoir and reproduced in press discourse. Thus, identifying these biases in journalistic discourse underscores the imperative for media outlets and relevant socio-political organizations to foster more open, balanced, and transparent media environments in reflecting and shaping youth culture.

### Declaration of AI Use

AI-assisted tools (e.g., Perplexity, Elicit, and Connected Papers) were used to provide language assistance. All outputs were critically evaluated and revised by the authors to ensure accuracy and academic integrity.

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