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Digital Authenticity and Media Literacy Integration in Vietnam's Social Media: Influencer-Endorsed Verification and Audience Critique

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Abstract

The advent of social media has fundamentally altered the ways in which information circulates, positioning influencers as informal media educators who guide audiences in applying critical evaluation skills. This study examines how social media influencers contribute to the development of media literacy and uphold digital authenticity within Vietnam's online information ecosystem, with particular attention to periods of public health crises and national policy debates. Employing a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative surveys with in-depth qualitative interviews, the research investigates the processes by which influencers and their followers assess content credibility, engage in fact-checking practices, and counteract misinformation. Findings indicate that influencers support media education by modelling verification techniques and prompting audiences to adopt rigorous evaluation criteria. Interactive feedback channels between influencers and followers further consolidate these verification routines, thereby strengthening public trust. Nonetheless, the persistence of unsubstantiated personal opinions and unclear source attribution continues to challenge content integrity. The study underscores the imperative for collaborative interventions among governmental agencies, social media platforms, and influencers to embed media literacy principles within content-creation guidelines and platform policies. Implications for policy and practice include recommendations for structured media education initiatives, the formulation of clear verification standards, and the adoption of platform features that encourage audience engagement in critical evaluation. These measures are essential to fostering an informed, discerning public capable of navigating the complexities of the contemporary digital communication landscape.

Keywords: digital authenticity, media literacy, digital identity, social media influencers, information accuracy, media education, fake news, digital literacy, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

In the face of an escalating “infodemic” during public health emergencies and national sovereignty debates, media literacy serves as a vital scaffold enabling Vietnamese audiences to critically appraise influencer-generated content.

This study applies these frameworks to Vietnamese social media influencers, exploring how they embed verification cues, such as explicit source attributions, interactive fact-check prompts and hashtag-driven information trails, into posts addressing public health, sovereignty and social

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advocacy. Through the positioning of influencers as informal media educators, the research elucidates how media education principles can enhance audience-led evaluation processes, refine content quality and mitigate the spread of misinformation in Vietnam's digital ecosystem.

Meanwhile, the rapid expansion of social media has fundamentally altered the dynamics through which information is conveyed and received, endowing social media influencers with a particular power to influence public discussion. In Vietnam, a nation with extensive social media penetration – covering more than 72 % of its population as of 2023 (Statista, 2023) – this impact is especially profound. Influencers are now at the forefront of digital communication, using their media to disseminate information, sway public opinion, and advocate for causes. However, with growing concerns about the validity of information presented by such influencers, it has led to significant discussion within popular and scholarly discourse. It is particularly relevant given the ability of misinformation to quickly proliferate in a highly connected digital sphere (Nguyen, Dang, 2020). The Vietnamese state, aware of such issues, has applied regulatory mechanisms like the Official Dispatch No. 874 and Government Decree 72/CP of the Ministry of Information and Communications that attempt to provide standards for moral social media conduct (Ministry..., 2021). These measures point to the increasing significance of creating a responsible digital environment.

The contribution of celebrity social media personalities to the construction of social norms and popular discourse has attracted considerable scholarly interest. Pioneering research, including that of Nguyen (Nguyen, 2011) and Nguyen (Nguyen, 2015), considered the expanding social roles of celebrities amidst Vietnam's fast-evolving media environment. The studies shone a light on how social media has blurred traditional boundaries of influence, enabling celebrities and influencers to reach out and engage with diverse audiences in new ways. Examining through the lens of cultural and communication theories, the research drew attention to the powerful role played by public figures in shaping societal norms, values, and behaviors, thus opening up avenues for further investigations into the far-reaching implications of influencer culture.

More recent research has explored the profound influence of online personalities on consumer behavior and societal attitudes. Dang (Dang, 2021) examined the effect of influencers on consumers' buying habits, while Le et al. (Le et al., 2023) researched the influence of Instagram celebrities on the fashion decisions of Generation Z in Ho Chi Minh City. The research highlights the dual role played by influencers, both as brand representatives and as opinion leaders in shaping consumers' decisions, particularly in the youth segment. The research also provokes interesting questions regarding the authenticity of content produced by influencers and therefore the need to scrutinize them critically against their impact on public discourse (Le, Hutchinson, 2022).

The problems posed by misinformation are by no means unique to Vietnam but instead have a universal appeal. Empirical research has consistently shown that the infectious nature of social media exponentially boosts the spread of false information, often with influencers placed at the center of these trends (Vosoughi et al., 2018). This phenomenon calls for a direct need for enhancing digital literacy among audiences as well as for making influencers accountable for the content they spread. The Vietnamese experience provides a microcosm for understanding these global forces as the country grapples with weighing the benefits of social media connectedness against the threat of disinformation.

Thus, this research tries to explore the credibility of the information provided by social media influencers in Vietnam. By conducting content analysis of the postings of ten Vietnamese popular Facebook influencers from 2019 to 2022, the research aims to identify trends in information sharing and to look for ways of supporting digital authenticity. This study adds to the vibrant discussion regarding the use of influencers in contemporary communication, providing insightful guidance on how their influence can ethically be used to build a more informed and interested audience.

1.1. Aims, Objectives and Research Questions: This study seeks to examine how Vietnamese social media influencers function as informal media-education agents, fostering audiences' digital media literacy and reinforcing authenticity and trust within the nation's online information ecosystem. Focusing on critical junctures, public health crises, national sovereignty issues and social advocacy campaigns, the research applies media-education frameworks to analyze influencers' deployment of verification cues (such as source attributions, interactive fact-check prompts and hashtag-driven information trails) and their capacity to model critical evaluation techniques for followers.

The investigation is structured around three principal questions:

1. *Verification and Validation:* In what ways do Vietnamese influencers employ

media-education strategies to embed verification and validation processes into content related to public health emergencies, sovereignty debates and social advocacy initiatives?

2. *Audience Credibility Assessment*: Which media-literacy-informed methods do Vietnamese social media users adopt to evaluate the credibility of influencer-generated information, and how do these methods shape their interpretation and consumption of digital content?

3. *Presentation as Pedagogy*: How do presentation formats, such as hashtags, visual elements and narrative tone, operate as pedagogical devices that influence audience reception of posts addressing sensitive topics (for example, non-heteronormative identities, child abuse and international conflicts), and to what extent?

The specific objectives are to examine the authenticity markers present in the digital information environments curated by prominent social media figures; and develop enhanced, media-education-based verification protocols aimed at refining content quality and mitigating the propagation of misinformation.

1.2. *A Study of the Literature – “The Concept of Information”*: Content shared on social media encompasses a spectrum from impartial news coverage to individual commentary and opinion. “Information” is generally understood as data or content that enhances knowledge and understanding. Information encompasses “facts, events, concepts, and judgments which are the causes of human understanding” (Phe, 2003; Phe, 2006: 45), according to Phe (Phe, 2006). Similarly, Doan Phan Tan (Doan, 2006) highlights its multi-faceted function in describing reality and facilitating informed decision-making.

Information has great significance in influencing societal knowledge, decision-making, and cultural and political discourses. With time, information has been explained from a fundamental data transmission viewpoint to a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The Vietnamese Dictionary by Phe (Phe, 2003) and Hoang Phe’s definition point out that information comprises facts, events, concepts, and judgments that contribute to human knowledge. This aligns with the Law on Access to Information, 2016, which highlights the multidimensional nature of information, especially in a constantly changing digital society where it is both a resource and a tool for empowerment. The ability to access and decipher information is crucial for active participation in society, particularly in democratic and digitally integrated systems.

In the modern information era, the quantity and velocity of information dissemination have distorted the boundary between credible and non-credible sources. Floridi (Floridi, 2018: 42) coins the phrase “infosphere” to refer to the space where information is produced, disseminated, and used, which is now filled with true and false information. The growing ecosystem has necessitated a shift in the understanding of information to encompass not just the message content but also the source, delivery method, and presentation context. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the overwhelming influx of information highlighted the critical importance of verifying the accuracy and reliability of shared data, particularly if it is supported by influential figures (Cinelli et al., 2020).

The social media implications here are extensive. Social media outlets such as Facebook and Instagram have turned into default channels for information dissemination, with influencers serving as the ultimate intermediaries. Influencers tend to bridge the gap between traditional media gatekeepers and peer communicators, thereby extending both the reach and influence of the information they disseminate (Khamis et al., 2018). Yet, their impact brings up fundamental issues regarding the accuracy of information, considering that their motivations can be shaped by commercial or personal interests. This dual function works to highlight the challenges in delineating and managing information in the context of the digital environment.

Empirical data highlights the widespread influence and contribution of social media influencers in the spread of information. Statista (Statista, 2023) indicates that the global number of social media users totaled 4.9 billion as of 2023, with more than 60 % of them depending on such media for news and information content. In Vietnam, where the rate of internet penetration was estimated at around 75 % in 2023, social media became a primary source of information (We..., 2023). The dependence on influencers for information, insight, and opinion introduces another level of complication into the notion of information, since audiences conflate popularity with credibility – a relationship that is not necessarily true.

Besides, theoretical models offer insightful understanding of the notion of information in online discourse. In McQuail’s (McQuail, 2010) communication theory, information is pivotal to

societal operations, shaping public opinion and behavior. Likewise, Castells' (Castells, 2013) networked communication theory stresses the decentralization of information in today's digital age, where individuals and groups, such as influencers, possess unmatched influence in narrative construction. The evolution of social media in controlling the flow of information presents a significant challenge in maintaining the originality of content posted. This necessitates the need for enhancement of digital literacy and the instituting of strong information check processes to guarantee public trust in a progressively complicated information environment.

1.2.1. Authenticity of Information: In today's world, where social media plays such a huge role in our daily lives, being genuine and authentic has become essential for building and keeping trust in online interactions. With so much information coming at us all the time, it is more important than ever to have a way to sift through it all. Authenticity is that filter, helping people figure out which sources they can really trust and which ones spread misinformation. According to Ilicic and Webster (Ilicic, Webster, 2016), being authentic is key in influencer communication; audiences are much more likely to trust those who come across as real and relatable. Likewise, Balaban (Balaban, 2022) and Wassberg (Wassberg, 2019) examine the complex layers of authenticity, pointing out the difference between how influencers see their own authenticity and how their audience perceives it. This gap shows that influencers need to strike a balance between how they present themselves and what their audience expects from them. As noted by Moore (Moore, 2018) and Balaban (Balaban, 2019), authenticity, along with being likable and knowledgeable, creates a strong foundation for effective influencer marketing, which in turn boosts audience engagement and loyalty.

That said, determining what is authentic on social media is not always straightforward. Tandoc (Tandoc, 2018) talks about how people increasingly rely on their own judgment and various tools to verify the truthfulness of news content. This becomes especially challenging in situations where people's digital literacy varies greatly. Liu (Liu, 2020) adds that individuals with less education often place more importance on the social connections that information offers rather than its credibility, making the fight against misinformation even tougher. To tackle this issue, Pourghomi (Pourghomi, 2017) suggests innovative tools like 'Right-click Authenticate,' which let users verify the reliability of content before they share it. This mirrors the findings of Ismail (Ismail, 2013) and Chatterjee (Chatterjee, 2016), who emphasize the essential role of content quality and trustworthiness in encouraging meaningful interactions online. Chatterjee (Chatterjee, 2016) also introduces a structured approach for evaluating credibility, considering factors like how reliable the source is, its relevance, and how clearly the information is presented.

Besides, the conversation about authenticity brings up ethical concerns surrounding using social media platforms. Both Papadopoulos (Papadopoulos, 2016) and Gaden (Gaden, 2014) look into the ongoing challenges of trust and ethical behavior in digital spaces. Papadopoulos (Papadopoulos, 2016: 124) emphasizes the tension between user-generated content and the accountability of platforms, while Gaden raises questions about whether these platforms truly uphold democratic values in their algorithms and policies. Ghaisani (Ghaisani, 2017) complements this discussion by detailing various factors that impact information credibility such as providing links to trustworthy sources and the audience's genuine interest in the topic. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that securing authenticity, and thus trust, demands a holistic strategy incorporating technological safeguards, ethical guidelines, and comprehensive user education.

1.2.2. The Role of Social Media: The impact of social media on shaping how we behave and make decisions is truly major, especially in our digital world. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have changed the way we access information, connect with others, and decide on various matters. As Truong et al. (Truong et al., 2023) emphasize, social media plays an essential role in influencing travel intentions for domestic tourists in Vietnam, acting as key tools for sharing information and aiding decision-making. Similarly, H.T. Nguyen et al. (Nguyen et al., 2021) examine how social media particularly affects Generation Z in their travel planning, showing how these platforms promote interaction and improve the decision-making process. These insights underline the wider importance of social media in contemporary communication and its role in shaping behaviors across numerous fields.

Kaplan and Haenlein (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2010) define social media as internet-based platforms that allow users to create and share content, fundamentally changing how we connect and share experiences. The massive reach of these platforms is reflected in Facebook's reported user base of 2.99 billion as of May 2023 (Data Reportal, 2023). This enormous number emphasizes

how social media can sway public opinion, build communities, and drive societal trends.

What is more, the ever-changing nature of communication on social media not only promotes connections but also drives changes in behavior. Son (Son, 2011) effectively describes this process as the exchange of information, emotions, and experiences that shape awareness and influence decisions (as cited in Thieu, 2022: 84). The Vietnamese Ministry of Information and Communications' Decree No.: 72/2013/ND-CP acknowledges social media as essential for storing, providing, and sharing information in various formats (Government... 2013). This perspective is reflected globally, where social media is a platform for digital activism, community building, and cultural preservation. The complex role of social media as both a connector and a disruptor emphasizes its major influence on individual and collective behaviors, making it an important area for scholarly exploration.

1.2.3. Influencers on Social Media: Social media influencers have quickly become key players in shaping opinions, behaviors, and consumption patterns in today's online environment. As noted by Williams et al. (Williams et al., 2023), these influencers hold considerable sway over their followers by creating and sharing digital content that resonates deeply with their audience. Their impact comes from their knack for blending genuine authenticity with aspirational lifestyles, building both trust and relatability among their followers. Ao et al. (Ao et al., 2023: 4) define a social media influencer as "someone who has a major and active following on social media platforms, which one would not know unless one follows them." This definition emphasizes the relational aspect of influence the digital interactions on social media break geographical and cultural barriers to form global communities.

However, the authenticity that influencers project creates a complicated energetic. Scholars like Abidin (Abidin, 2016) and Hund (Hund, 2019) point out that when influencers commodify their authenticity, it raises important questions about the genuineness of their engagement. Hund (Hund, 2019) explains that the carefully curated personas and sponsored content of influencers often blur the lines between personal expression and commercial motives.

What is more, brands and marketers strategically select influencers based on factors like credibility, reach, and reputation. Ong (Ong, 2022) points out that influencers who align with a brand's values are more apt to build trust and encourage lasting engagement within digital communities. Francalanci et al. (Francalanci et al., 2021) further note that an influencer's credibility is often assessed through engagement rates, follower demographics, and content quality, rather than sheer follower count. This practice has sparked the rise of micro-influencers in Western contexts – individuals with smaller but highly engaged audiences who frequently outshine celebrity influencers in cultivating authentic connections. The interaction among influence, credibility, and trust reveals the detailed role of influencers within digital marketing ecosystems and underlines their growing importance in shaping consumer behavior worldwide.

A research team from the Faculty of Journalism and Communication at the University of Science, Thai Nguyen, Vietnam comprising Phuong T. Vi, Ha Hoang Ngoc and Mai Hoang Nhat conducted survey (which lasted for eight months during the 2023–2024 academic year. The survey, which involved 10 social media influencers (see Figure 1), examined the content social media influencers shared on their Facebook pages. The study employed the message content analysis method to categorize the posts into distinct thematic categories. The identified themes included the well-known corruption case referred to as "the rescue flight" in Vietnam, social insurance-related issues, maritime sovereignty disputes, cases of violence against children, gender and non-heteronormative identities' rights, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict (Vi et al., 2024).

1.2.4. Influence of Social Media in Asia: The influence of social media on the cultural, political, and economic landscapes in Asia has caught the attention of many scholars. These platforms have played a crucial role in shaping collective identities and political connections throughout the continent. Researchers like Chan (Chan, 2018) and Lei (Lei, 2020) point out how social media encourages community interactions and collective action by allowing users to share their experiences and rally around common issues. A clear example can be seen in Hong Kong, where the protests in 2019 were primarily organized through channels like Telegram and Facebook, highlighting how vital social media can be for political activism. Their studies emphasize that social media has a dual nature: it can empower people, but it can also spread misinformation, which ultimately shapes public opinion and political outcomes.

When it comes to cultural identities, especially among young people in Asia, the influence of social media is just as significant. Researchers Chung (Chung, 2014) and Khalid (Khalid, 2018)

have looked into how platforms like Instagram and TikTok serve as spaces for cultural expression and transformation. For instance, in Malaysia, Khalid's (Khalid, 2018) work shows that young individuals use social media to navigate between traditional values and modern lifestyles, often swayed by the global trends pushed by social media influencers. These influencers blend local customs with worldwide styles, reshaping cultural norms and behaviors. This trend highlights social media's role in cultural hybridization, where local and global elements come together to form new identities.

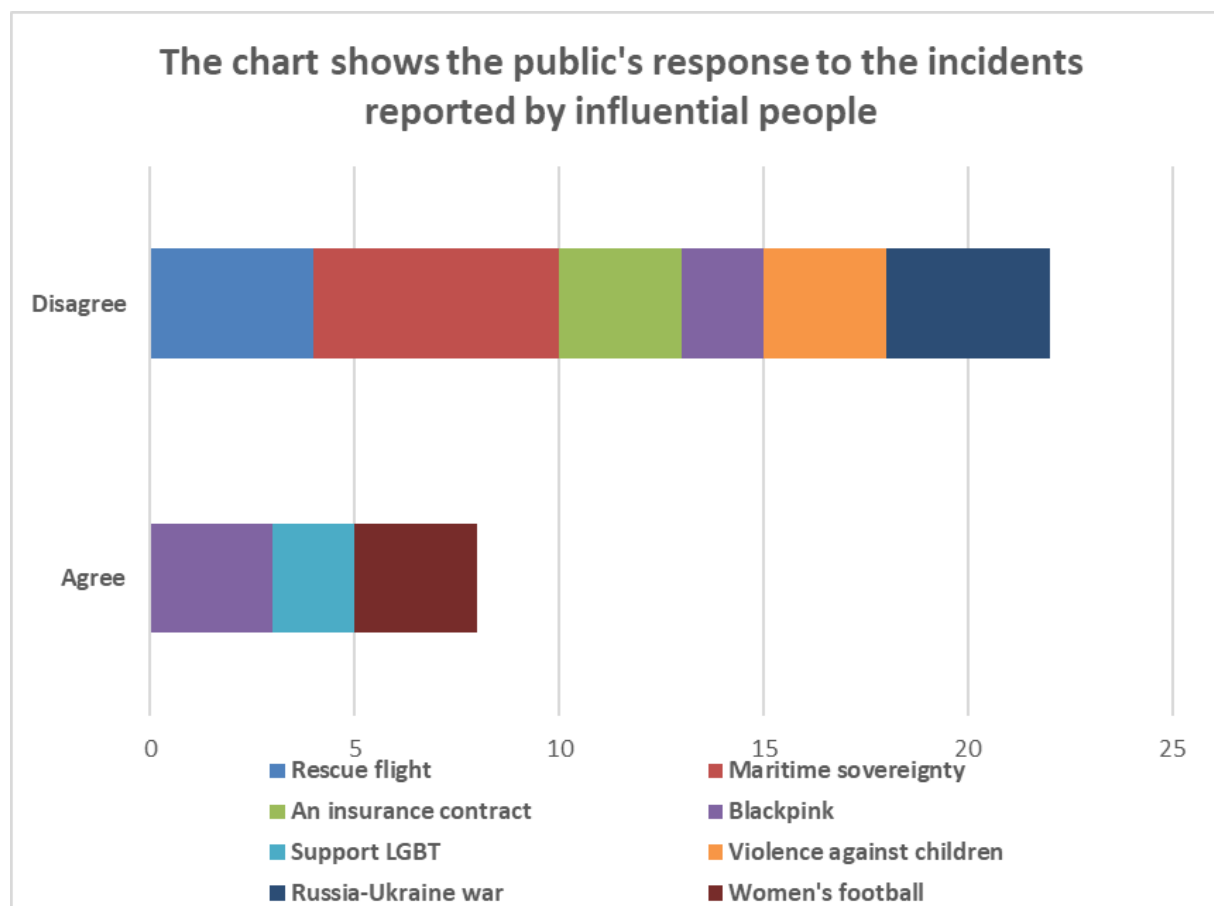


Fig. 1. Public attitudes toward information reported by social media influencers.
Source: Research results, March 2023, Vietnam

Additionally, insights into how influencers operate come from Rodprayoon (Rodprayoon, 2020) and Xu (Xu, 2024), who dive into the self-disclosure tactics used by micro-influencers and how these affect consumer behavior. By sharing personal stories, influencers can build trust and authenticity, which significantly impacts how audiences engage and make purchases. Xu's (Xu, 2024) research found that a whopping 68 % of surveyed consumers in China are more likely to trust product suggestions from influencers they see as genuine. Similarly, Mak's (Mak, 2022) exploration of social media credibility reveals how important social recommendations are in shaping public interaction with news content. Mak argues that influencers help bridge traditional media and digital audiences, making news more relatable through context. Together, these studies shed light on the intricate connections between influencer activities and audience reactions, offering a deep dive into social media's transformative potential in Asia.

1.2.5. Theoretical Framework – Framing Theory and Cultural Media Narratives: Erving Goffman's Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974) looks at how people and the media create meaning by emphasizing particular parts of reality. Framing assumes critical importance in cultural communication, given that media organisations often interpret issues such as migration, protest movements and religious identity through particular cultural perspectives (Guenther et al., 2020; Van Dijk, 2023). Additionally, framing theory is essential to political communication because it shapes public perceptions of national identity and policy choices.

1.2.6. Justification: The most pertinent theoretical framework for this study is Framing Theory. This theory, which was first put forth by Erving Goffman in 1974 (Goffman, 1974) and subsequently extended by academics such as Entman (Entman, 1993) in 1993, offers a strong framework for examining how influencers create digital authenticity, frame narratives on social media, and drive public conversation. Influencers are crucial in selecting and sharing information that appeals to their followers in Vietnam, where social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok are the main means of communication. Framing theory describes how these influencers create compelling narratives that mold public perception by selectively emphasizing, highlighting, or omitting particular aspects of reality. The manner in which influencers curate their personas, lifestyles, endorsements and perspectives profoundly shapes audience interaction, trust levels and perceptions of authenticity. Digital authenticity, or the extent to which followers view influencers as real and reliable, is a crucial component of this research. Framing Theory is crucial to comprehending how influencers use language, visual aesthetics, and interaction tactics to preserve credibility in digital settings, where authenticity is mostly a created and performative quality. Influencers could, for example, present their material as “aspirational” by presenting an idealized lifestyle or as “relatable” by presenting uncensored parts of their lives. This deliberate framing impacts the credibility of the audience and shapes public opinion on topics like cultural values, political engagement, and consumer behavior.

Furthermore, Framing Theory aids in the explanation of how influencers manoeuvre across Vietnam’s digital landscape in a media ecosystem influenced by cultural sensitivities and governmental rules. The idea makes it possible to examine how influencers present politically and socially sensitive subjects while striking a balance between audience expectations and state-imposed limitations and authenticity. The study can also investigate if influencers use counter-framing strategies to subvert prevailing narratives or if their content serves to uphold pre-existing power dynamics. The idea of digital authenticity is further complicated by the growing marketing of influencer culture. By examining how influencers balance sponsored content and personal branding, framing theory can help us understand how they make sure that promoted content fits with their perceived identity. This is especially important in Vietnam, where consumers are growing increasingly sceptical about the legitimacy of digital endorsements and influencer marketing is expanding quickly.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design: This study uses a mixed-methods approach to delve into how celebrities share information on social media and whether it is genuine. The research combines two key methods: in-depth interviews and content analysis. By using both techniques, the aim is to get a well-rounded view of how information is shared and consumed, capturing both personal insights and objective trends.

2.1.1. In-Depth Interviews: The first method we used was in-depth interviews. This qualitative approach is perfect for digging into complex perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors since it allows researchers to gather rich, detailed feedback straight from participants (Creswell, 2014). In our study, we interviewed a varied group that included celebrities, their fans, and social media experts. The goal was to collect thorough information about their views, experiences, and practices regarding the credibility of the information influencers share online. Choosing in-depth interviews makes sense because they help uncover nuanced viewpoints that you cannot easily capture with just numbers. This aligns with a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, which blends qualitative insights with quantitative analysis for a fuller understanding (Bryman, 2016). We purposely selected participants from key social media categories, including singers, actors, journalists, and content creators.

2.1.2. Content Analysis: The second method we employed was content analysis. This systematic approach involves examining textual, visual, or multimedia content to spot patterns, trends, and themes. As Krippendorff (Krippendorff, 2013) noted, content analysis offers a rigorous means of examining social media discourse, clarifying the construction of meaning, relational dynamics and representational strategies. Accordingly, we systematically analysed celebrity posts to identify recurring themes and patterns indicative of authenticity. Our methodology involved “coding the digital corpus to extract principal themes and episodes of misinformation” and emerging trends. Our focus was on understanding how these trends connect to participants’ perceptions of the credibility of content generated by celebrities and how they influence public

opinion. This analysis serves as an objective counterpart to the subjective insights gained from our in-depth interviews.

2.2. Participants and Sampling: Our study targeted a diverse group of 14 social media influencers in Vietnam, each with at least 10,000 followers on Facebook. We aimed for a range of professional backgrounds – including singers, actors, journalists, and content creators – to ensure that our findings were both diverse and meaningful. The selected participants are:

– *Singers:* ChiPu, Nguyen Tran Trung Quan, Amee, and Hariwon.

– *Actors:* Tran Thanh and Nguyen Xuan Bac.

– *Actresses:* Nguyen Ngoc Thuy Diem.

– *Beauty Queens:* Nguyen Thuc Thuy Tien, Miss World Peace 2021, and Nguyen Tran Khanh Van.

– *Journalists:* Truong Huy San, Hoang Nuyen Vu, Vo Duc Phuc, and Doan Bao Chau.

– *Content Creator:* Tran Chi Hieu.

By choosing these participants, we aimed to capture a broad spectrum of influence across various fields, recognizing their roles in shaping perceptions on social media. The insights gained from these participants provide significant contributions to understanding the social media landscape and its ties to credibility and information authenticity.

2.3. Some Brief Information about Some Influencers in Vietnamese Social Media: The information was obtained from the social media profiles/pages of the influencers.

1) *Chi Pu:* Chi Pu, whose real name is Nguyen Thuy Chi, was born on June 14, 1993, and she has become a leading figure in Vietnam. She is a multi-talented artiste – singer, actress, host, model, and record producer – who first gained attention by making it into the top 20 of Miss Teen Vietnam back in 2009. Chi Pu has built an impressive fanbase, with her personal Facebook page amassing 9.1 million followers. She stands out as the first Vietnamese artist to garner significant support and media attention in China. This achievement is a huge milestone in her career, solidifying her place as one of Vietnam's key influencers and cultural icons.

2) *Tran Thanh:* Tran Thanh is a beloved personality in Vietnam's entertainment scene, known for his versatility as a master of ceremonies (MC), actor, comedian, and film producer. His career is diverse, covering acting, scriptwriting, directing, and hosting, making him one of the most respected names in Vietnamese showbiz. Tran Thanh has attracted a whopping 18 million followers on his personal Facebook page, showcasing his significant influence in both entertainment and social media. On YouTube, he has nearly 5 million subscribers, further proving his wide reach across platforms.

As per Buzzmetrics' rankings from March 2021, Tran Thanh topped the list as the most influential figure in Vietnamese social media, with an impressive Buzzmetrics Social Index (BSI) score of 1,008,040. This score reflects his strong presence online, driven by regular posts and high engagement from his audience. His influence is also bolstered by his relationship with renowned singer Hari Won, whose own considerable following enhances their collective media impact. Tran Thanh's knack for engaging his audience and fostering lively discussions online cements his status in Vietnam's cultural and entertainment landscape.

3) *Nguyen Thuc Thuy Tien:* Nguyen Thuc Thuy Tien has firmly established herself as one of the most prominent figures on social media in Vietnam, especially after winning the title of Miss Grand International 2021, which is recognized as the fifth-largest beauty pageant worldwide. Her win was historic, making her the first Vietnamese woman to claim this esteemed title. Thuy Tien boasts around 2 million followers on her personal Facebook page, highlighting her broad appeal and cultural influence. Prior to this, she was a top 5 finalist in the Miss Vietnam pageant in 2018 and received the Beautiful Women for Humanity award, which further reinforced her status as a role model both in Vietnam and internationally.

The BSI (Buzzmetrics, 2023) measures social media impact using five main criteria: sentiment score, media coverage, mentions, user-generated content (UGC), and discussion volume. Thuy Tien's steady ranking in the BSI reflects her social media prowess. Impressively, she became the sole female star to reach an index of 33,197 in February 2023, showcasing her growing presence online. Her influence was reaffirmed when she made her fourth appearance in the BSI Top 10. In August 2023, Thuy Tien topped the Kompa list for influencers with high engagement, achieving a remarkable 16,615,676 interactions that month. Her emotional engagement index reached an astounding 99 % during this time, which demonstrates her widespread admiration and minimal public controversy surrounding her impact. These statistics highlight Nguyen Thuc Thuy Tien's exceptional charm and the effectiveness of her social media strategies, solidifying her position as

the leading female celebrity in Vietnam's online landscape.

4) *Nguyen Tran Trung Quan*: Born in 1992 in Hanoi, Nguyen Tran Trung Quan is a talented musician with a deep love for music. He is well-known as a versatile and appealing male artist, skilled in singing, music production, and teaching. Currently, his personal Facebook page has 1.2 million followers.

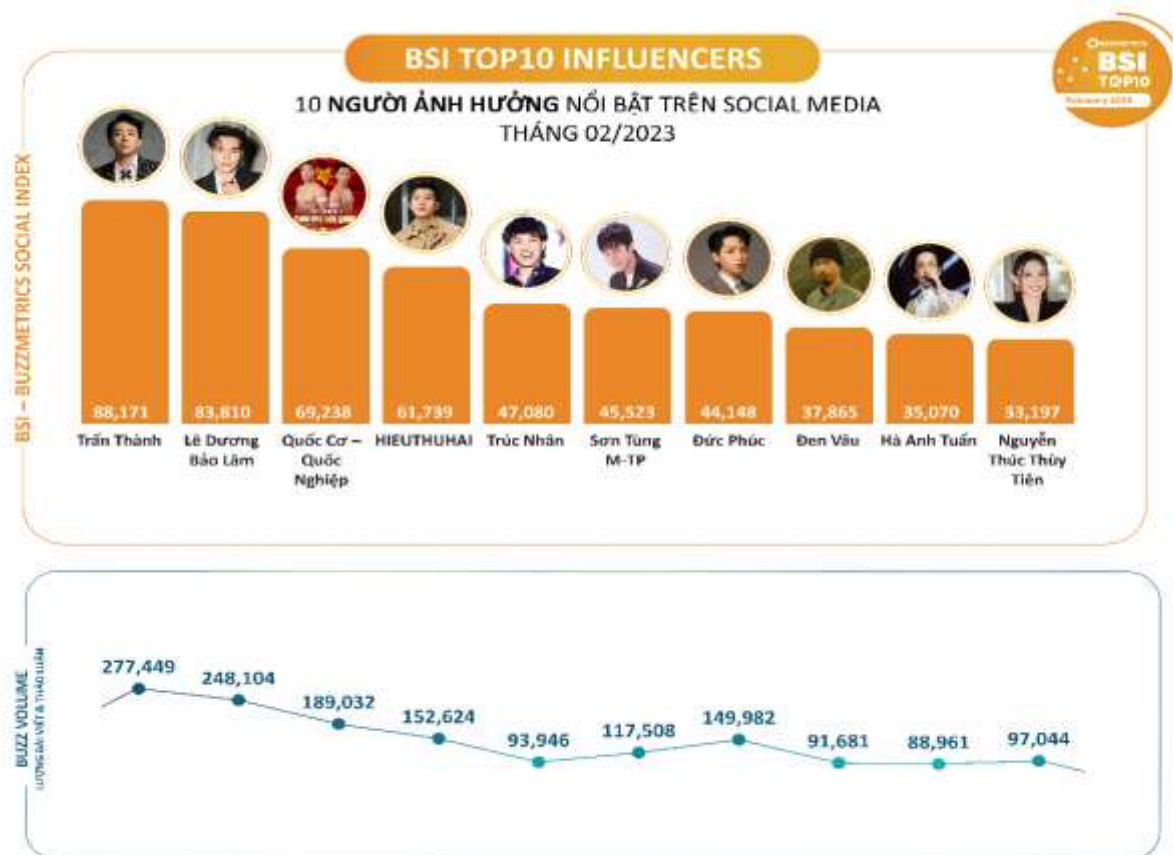


Fig. 2. BSI Top Influencers. *Note:* Thùy Tiên is in the top 10 prominent influencers on social media in August 2022. Nguyen Thuc Thùy Tiên is also the most influential female star on social networks. Thùy Tiên is in the top 10 prominent influencers on social media in February 2023
Source: [Buzzmetrics, 2021](#)

5) *Nguyen Xuan Bac*: Nguyen Xuan Bac is a famous MC, comedian, and actor from Northern Vietnam, boasting a Facebook following of 2.4 million. He received the Outstanding Artist title in 2016 for his contributions to the entertainment field. In 2021, Nguyen Xuan Bac took on the role of director at the Vietnamese Theatre and was awarded the third-ranked Labor Medal in 2022 for his exceptional service.

6) *Nguyen Tran Khanh Van*: Nguyen Tran Khanh Van is another notable name on social media, with a sizable following. She is not only a beauty queen but also a talented model, actress, and MC, attracting 2.8 million followers on Facebook. She studied Theatre and Film Acting at the University of Theatre and Cinema in Ho Chi Minh City and gained prominence after her success in the Miss Universe Vietnam 2020 pageant.

7) *Amee (Tran Huyen My)*: Amee, whose real name is Tran Huyen My, was born on March 23, 2000, in Hanoi. She studied English Language at Van Hien University and has 2.8 million followers on her personal Facebook page. In 2021, Amee appeared in the film *The Guardian Angel*, earning wide acclaim for her outstanding performance.

8) *Nguyen Ngoc Thuy Diem*: Nguyen Ngoc Thuy Diem is a celebrated actress and model born on July 8, 1986, in Vietnam. Her Facebook page has garnered 1.2 million followers. Thuy Diem began as a model, winning the Miss Sunplay title in 2007 before moving on to a successful acting career with numerous prominent roles in films and TV shows.

9) *Hari Won*: Born Lư Esther on June 23, 1985 in Seoul, South Korea, Hari Won is a famous Vietnamese-Korean singer, actress, model, and television host. Her personal Facebook

page boasts an impressive 11 million followers. As a popular MC and judge on various TV shows in Vietnam, she has achieved significant fame and received multiple awards, including Favorite Pop/Rock Song and Favorite R&B/Soul Song at the Zing Music Awards in 2016.

10: *Truong Huy San*: Known by his real name Huy Duc, Truong Huy San is a respected Vietnamese journalist and writer born in 1962. He gained nationwide fame for his reporting on the Duong Son Quan case in Thu Duc, which was published in Tuoi Tre and Thanh Nien newspapers. Nowadays, he is celebrated for his political and social commentary on his blog, Osin, along with a personal Facebook following of 361,000.

2.4. *Justification for the Methodological Approach*: The combination of in-depth interviews and content analysis fits well with international standards for mixed-methods research (Tashakkori, Teddlie, 2010). The interviews offered valuable qualitative insights into people's experiences and views, while the content analysis provided a structured way to gather empirical data about trends and patterns in social media content and its authenticity. This blend was crucial for cross-verifying findings and ensuring the reliability and validity of the research outcomes (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, these approaches allowed the study to identify not just the personal perceptions of influencers and their followers but also to thoroughly analyze the actual trends in social media content to evaluate whether information was authentic or misleading. This methodological framework created a well-rounded basis for addressing the research questions concerning how authentic and inauthentic information spreads and is perceived on social media platforms.

2.5. *Ethical Considerations*: Throughout the study, ethical research practices were strictly followed to protect the rights of participants. Informed consent was secured from everyone involved before any interviews took place, and participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Additionally, the data was handled responsibly, stored securely, and used exclusively for this research, all in accordance with established ethical standards (Creswell, 2014).

3. Discussion

Vietnam's rapid digital expansion, 67 % internet penetration and an average daily usage of seven hours per user, coupled with over 64 % social media adoption by late 2019, underscores the urgency of embedding media-education principles within the nation's online discourse. In this context, social media influencers emerge not only as framers of public opinion but also as potential informal educators, modelling verification strategies and critical evaluation techniques for their followers. Integrating media-education frameworks into the analysis of influencer practices enriches our understanding of how audiences develop digital-media literacy and negotiate authenticity.

Digital Participation and the Imperative for Media Education: High levels of digital engagement create fertile ground for both accurate information dissemination and the rapid spread of misinformation. Rojas-Estrada et al. (Rojas-Estrada et al., 2023) demonstrate, through a systematic review of Latin American curricula, that embedding media competence modules significantly enhances students' ability to critically appraise online content, reducing susceptibility to fake news. Translating such curricular interventions to Vietnam's informal digital spaces suggests that influencers who explicitly model source evaluation and fact-checking can serve as catalysts for audience learning (Rojas-Estrada et al., 2023). Complementing this, Shapalova (Shapalova, 2020) argues that targeted media-education initiatives, both formal and community-based, are effective in combating disinformation, as they equip individuals with heuristics for verifying message veracity (Shapalova, 2020).

Framing, Authenticity and Educator-Influencers: Framing theory (Entman, 1993) posits that actors shape public perception through selective emphasis and narrative construction. Our findings extend this theory by illustrating that influencers often incorporate explicit media-education cues, such as annotated infographics, clickable source lists and interactive polls, to bolster digital authenticity. Nguyen et al. (Nguyen et al., 2019) observed that contextualised updates during health crises increased civic engagement and trust; we further contend that when influencers transparently reveal their verification process, they transform framing from a persuasive tactic into a pedagogical demonstration.

Audience Agency and Critical Literacy Practices: The blurring of lines between official news and user-generated discourse demands that audiences possess robust evaluative skills. Kim et al. (Kim et al., 2020) emphasise that digital literacy underpins the capacity to distinguish well-framed facts from false narratives. Our study reveals that engaged followers frequently replicate influencers' verification methods, cross-referencing statistics, assessing source credibility and

scrutinising multimedia evidence, thereby co-constructing truth claims through communal fact-checking. T.T. Nguyen et al. (Nguyen et al., 2021) caution that an influencer's credibility hinges on consistent framing transparency; audiences rapidly penalise perceived bias or omission by withdrawing trust or publicly calling out misinformation. This dynamic reflects a participatory model of media education, where learners (audiences) and educators (influencers) engage reciprocally thereby advancing collective media literacy through social feedback loops.

Presentation Formats as Pedagogical Devices: Hashtags, visuals and narrative tone are not merely stylistic choices but function as tags (e.g., #VerifyTogether), layered infographics and conversational storytelling lower cognitive barriers to critical engagement. Through signalling the need for verification and modelling analytical pathways, influencers create affordances for audiences to practise deconstruction of complex messages. Rojas-Estrada et al. (Rojas-Estrada et al., 2023) argue that signalled learning objectives, in formal curricula, heighten students' metacognitive awareness; similarly, explicit "verification prompts" embedded within influencer narratives cultivate metacognition among followers, strengthening their media-education outcomes (Rojas-Estrada et al., 2023).

Challenges of Subjectivity and Ethical Imperatives: Despite these opportunities, the subjective nature of framing invites risks. Duffy and Tan (Duffy, Tan, 2022) report that engagement imperatives can lead influencers to prioritise sensational content over factual accuracy. Our findings corroborate this tension: when sensational framing overrides transparency, audiences report confusion and declining trust. Framing theory's emphasis on omissions underscores the ethical responsibility of influencers to maintain balanced coverage (Entman, 1993). Implementing media-education standards, such as routine disclosure of verification steps and transparent correction policies, can mitigate these risks. Shapalova (Shapalova, 2020) recommends that media-education interventions include ethics modules, ensuring that content creators internalise norms of accuracy and accountability (Shapalova, 2020).

Multi-stakeholder Collaboration and Media Education Programmes: A concerted, multi-stakeholder approach is essential. Government agencies, traditional media, social platforms and influencers each hold distinct leverage points for advancing media education. Van Aelst et al. (Van Aelst et al., 2018) demonstrate that coordinated actions, such as platform-hosted literacy toolkits and public-sector fact-checking partnerships, significantly reduce exposure to misinformation. Applying these insights, we propose the development of influencer-led "media literacy charters," co-authored by regulatory bodies and platform operators, which codify best practices for framing transparency and verification pedagogy. Such charters would institutionalise media-education benchmarks, enabling audiences to hold influencers accountable to recognized standards.

Technological and Human Centred Interventions: While algorithmic moderation tools flag potentially false content, they cannot substitute for human-centred media education. Automated solutions, though valuable for early detection, often lack contextual nuance and are prone to over-blocking legitimate discourse (Barlow, Shao, 2017). Integrating algorithmic alerts with audience-driven verification workflows, such as community-curated fact-check repositories, can combine technical efficiency with critical pedagogy. Duggan (Duggan, 2015) highlights the role of audience engagement as a corrective mechanism within social media ecosystems; fostering user proficiency in interpreting platform-generated warnings and prompts represents an extension of media literacy education. Through teaching audiences not only to question the content but also to interrogate the tools that govern content distribution, stakeholders can cultivate a digitally literate citizenry equipped to navigate automated moderation systems.

Ethical Framing and Cultural Contexts: Influencers' narrative choices around sensitive issues, non-heteronormative identities, child protection and international conflicts, carry significant ethical weight. Framing theory posits that omissions or selective emphasis can alter public sentiment (Entman, 1993). In the Vietnamese context, where cultural norms and regulatory constraints shape discourse boundaries, influencer-led media-education initiatives must carefully balance openness with cultural sensitivity. Rojas-Estrada et al. (Rojas-Estrada et al., 2024) note that context-specific media literacy programmes, tailored to local norms and values, achieve higher engagement and efficacy. Accordingly, we advocate for co-designed curricula that involve community stakeholders, ensuring that pedagogical framing respects cultural context while preserving rigorous verification standards.

Towards a Reflexive Digital Public Sphere: The cumulative impact of influencer-mediated framing practices and audience literacy efforts contributes to the emergence of a reflexive digital

public sphere – one in which content creation, critique and regulation co-evolve. This dynamic ecosystem contrasts with unidirectional broadcast models, offering richer opportunities for participatory learning. Castells ([Castells, 2015](#)) and Van Dijck ([Van Dijck, 2018](#)) emphasise the centrality of feedback loops in sustaining trustworthy information environments; our findings illustrate that when influencers transparently model verification and audiences actively engage in fact-checking, the digital public sphere functions as a living media-education laboratory, continuously refining collective competencies.

Implications for Policy and Practice: Policy interventions should prioritise the integration of media education into digital governance frameworks. Regulatory bodies might mandate minimum transparency disclosures for influencers, such as clearly documented verification processes, and incentivise platform enhancements (e.g., “verification badges” for posts that follow accredited fact-checking protocols). Simultaneously, educational institutions can incorporate casestudies of influencer frames into formal media-literacy curricula, bridging informal and formal learning environments. Shapalova ([Shapalova, 2020](#)) argues that such hybrid models, combining classroom instruction with real-world digital practices, yield sustainable improvements in critical thinking and civic resilience ([Shapalova, 2020](#)).

Limitations and Future Research: While this study elucidates the pedagogical potential of influencers, its focus on high profile personalities may overlook grassroots micro-influencers who cultivate niche communities. Future research should examine how smaller, locally embedded creators deploy media-education tactics within tight-knit follower networks. Additionally, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the durability of audience learning outcomes following exposure to influencer – led verification initiatives.

4. Results

4.1. Findings from Participant Recognition Rates: The data we gathered showed different levels of recognition among the influencers surveyed (see [Figure 3](#)). The results revealed that Miss Nguyen Thuc Thuy Tien was the most recognized influencer, boasting a recognition rate of 76 %. Close behind was actor Tran Thanh at 74.5 %, while singer Chi Pu and actor Nguyen Xuan Bac were recognized by 70.8 % and 67.4 % of the participants, respectively. Other notable names included singer Hariwon at 58.1 % and Miss Nguyen Tran Khanh Van at 53.2 %.

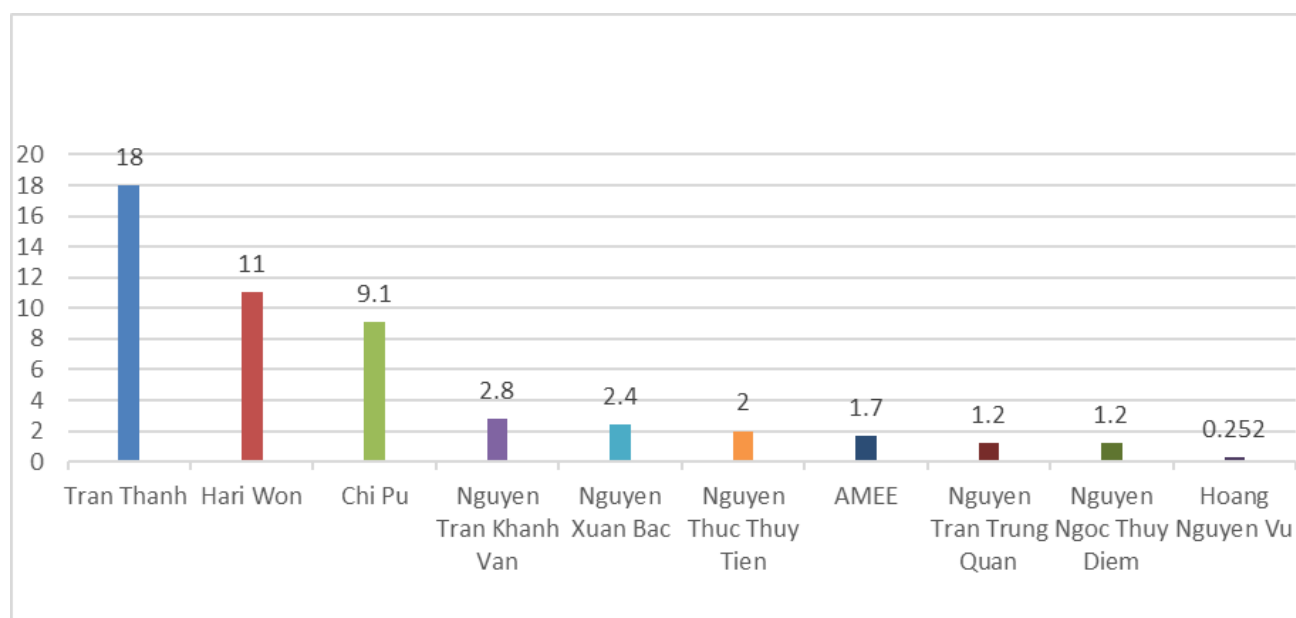


Fig. 3. Influencer Popularity Metrics. The graph depicts the number of Facebook followers of the survey subjects. *Note:* Number of people is in millions
Source: Research data

On the flip side, participants with lower recognition rates were actress and model Nguyen Ngoc Thuy Diem, as well as journalists Hoang Nguyen Vu, Vo Duc Phuc, Doan Bao Chau, Truong Huy San, and content creator Tran Chi Hieu. Their recognition rates ranged from 18 % down to

9.4 %, as illustrated in Figure 3. These numbers reflect the varying degrees of influence and public engagement among social media figures in Vietnam, showing that certain groups like singers and beauty queens, tend to resonate more with audiences, particularly the younger crowd.

The study outlines the proportions of different types of influencers, which include singers, actors, journalists, and content creators, as illustrated in Figure 4. These influencers were grouped based on their professional fields. Interestingly, celebrities make up 60 % of the respondents of the survey, with singers and actors dominating this segment, while journalists and content creators comprise the remaining 40 %.

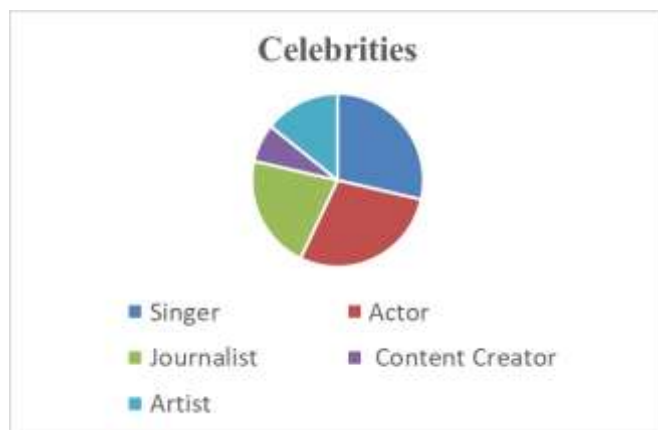


Fig. 4. Surveyed Influencer Demographics
Source: Research data

4.2. Information Regarding the Case of “Rescue Flight”: The “Rescue Flight” case is a tangled web of corruption and misuse of power that has infiltrated various government sectors, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This situation has garnered a lot of public attention, especially because it is linked to the surge in costs for repatriation flights during the COVID-19 pandemic. It raises serious ethical questions about accountability and the integrity of our public officials. In April 2023, Vietnamese media shed light on the results of an investigation by the Ministry of Public Security, which put forward charges against 54 individuals involved in this scandal. A number of these people hold high-ranking positions in government, showcasing just how widespread the corruption is.

Responses from the public have been mixed. Notably, figures like Mr. Doan Chau have voiced their frustration. Chau, known for his social commentary, pointed out the decline of ethics in crucial areas like healthcare and diplomatic services. His insights, sparked by extensive media coverage, sparked a lot of engagement online, with around 2.6 thousand interactions, including many shares and comments. This response clearly shows that people are deeply yearning for transparency and justice.

On a similar note, Mr. Truong Huy San and journalist Hoang Nguyen Vu have taken active roles in discussions about the “Rescue Flight” case on social media. Huy San encouraged the public to think about the ethical standards expected of Party members, while Nguyen Vu expressed his doubts through a series of thought-provoking posts. Both of these influencers generated considerable engagement, reflecting a shared demand for accountability and a restoration of trust in governance. Their efforts highlight how social media serves as a platform for public opinion and advocacy, tackling issues of political corruption and social justice.

4.3. Information Regarding the Case of “Sovereignty of Sea and Islands”: The sovereignty of the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos remains a crucial national issue for Vietnam, deeply intertwined with the country’s identity and pride in its history. The official position, outlined in directives from the Party and State, clearly upholds Vietnam’s steadfast claim to these territories. Yet, the debate surrounding the “cow tongue line” continues to spark public discussions, fueled by influencers and media narratives. Platforms like Facebook have become hotspots for engagement, with journalists and public figures such as Mr. Bao Chau and Mr. Vo Duc Phuc voicing their concerns about how Vietnam’s territorial claims are depicted in the media, particularly in films and stories that downplay these assertions. Their involvement has led to significant public response,

highlighting how social media can effectively mobilize opinions and strengthen national unity.

The artistic and entertainment sectors have also taken part in this dialogue, with figures like actor Nguyen Xuan Bac emerging as key advocates for the cause. Bac emphasizes the responsibility of artists, especially filmmakers, to raise awareness about territorial issues such as the disputes in the East Sea. His active support illustrates how influencers can engage the public, using their platforms to back causes that resonate with national pride and sovereignty. This case study showcases the vital role social media influencers play in addressing socio-political matters, particularly those tied to territorial claims and national identity.

4.4. Information Regarding the Case of “Contract with Social Insurance Company”: The situation involving actress Ngoc Lan and her experience with Aviva Vietnam Life Insurance is a great example of how influencers can shape public discussions through their personal stories. Ngoc Lan expressed her frustration after getting misleading information about her life insurance policy, which really caught people’s attention. Her livestream addressing the issue caused quite a stir, highlighting just how important influencers can be when it comes to advocating for consumers. After Ngoc Lan’s issues were resolved, other influencers like Mr. Hoang Nguyen Vu kept the conversation going, bringing attention to similar problems. This shows that influencers do not just share information; they also actively support consumer rights and shine a light on corporate ethics and accountability.

Data from this case clearly shows how influencers can amplify their personal experiences to tackle larger societal issues, helping to promote transparency and ensure companies are held accountable.

4.5. Information Regarding the Case of “BLACKPINK Music Group Returns to Vietnam”: The return of the internationally famous K-pop sensation BLACKPINK to Vietnam stirred up a lot of excitement across the country, especially among K-pop enthusiasts and Gen Z. The announcement sparked various reactions and ignited important discussions about cultural consumption, national pride, and youth identity.

Mr. Nguyen Vu, an influential journalist, took a deep dive into this phenomenon through a series of articles that examined the social and cultural impact of BLACKPINK’s comeback. His commentary, which was published right after ticket sales kicked off, garnered 2.9 thousand interactions, along with 113 shares and 196 comments, showcasing the high public engagement surrounding the event. Vu did not just stick to the excitement; he tackled larger societal issues like the youth’s connection to global pop culture and its socio-political implications.

Mr. Vo Duc Phuc also weighed in on the discussion, tying it to themes of national sovereignty and international cultural exchanges. His insights provided a critical take on how such worldwide events intersect with patriotic narratives, broadening the conversation around social and political issues. On the other hand, Mr. Tran Chi Hieu offered a more nuanced view, emphasizing the need to respect individual passions and personal circumstances within the context of these major global happenings. His balanced perspective revealed the range of opinions about how global trends interact with national identity, underscoring the diverse influence of social media figures. The case of “BLACKPINK returns to Vietnam” serves as a prime example of how social media influencers can not only reflect but also shape public opinion on cultural trends, while promoting deeper discussions about national identity, youth culture, and societal values.

4.6. Information Regarding the Case of “Supporting Non-Heteronormative Identities”: Support for Non-Heteronormative Identities’ community in Vietnam has gone through a remarkable change, especially during Sexual and Gender Diversity month, when there is more focus on visibility and advocacy for Non-Heteronormative Identities’ rights. Key figures like Miss Grand International 2021 Nguyen Thuc Thuy Tien, Miss Universe Vietnam 2019 Nguyen Tran Khanh Van, and Miss Vietnam 2018 Tran Tieu Vy have been crucial in pushing for equality, acceptance, and love for the Non-Heteronormative Identities’ community. By leveraging their platforms to share supportive messages, celebrate Sexual and Gender Diversity month, and champion Non-Heteronormative Identities’ rights, these prominent personalities have greatly enhanced awareness and fostered a culture of acceptance regarding gender identity and sexual orientation in Vietnam.

For example, Nguyen Thuc Thuy Tien’s post on June 3, 2022, which garnered over 54,000 likes alongside countless shares and comments, emphasized the increasing societal acceptance and support for the Non-Heteronormative Identities’ community. In a similar vein,

Nguyen Tran Khanh Van's message – stressing that love knows no boundaries and includes both heterosexual and Non-Heteronormative Identities' couples – struck a chord with many people, evident from the broad engagement it received. These public acts of advocacy illustrate the essential role that influential figures have in confronting deep-seated prejudices and nurturing a more inclusive and empathetic society in Vietnam.

4.7. Information Regarding the Case of "Violence against Children": Public outrage has surged in response to recent reports of child abuse that have made headlines. A particularly disturbing case reported by Thanh Nien newspaper on January 20, 2022, drew national attention to a suspect accused of a horrifying act: driving nine nails into the skull of a three-year-old girl in Hanoi. This shocking incident sent waves of horror throughout the country, intensifying concerns about the increasing rates of child abuse and the pressing need for a stronger societal response.

In response to these unsettling events, many social media influencers have stepped up to speak out against child abuse, leveraging their platforms to advocate for justice and protection for victims. One notable figure is Nguyen Thuc Thuy Tien, Miss Grand International 2021, who shared her sorrow and frustration over such violence in a post on December 29, 2021. Her emotional message struck a chord with many, earning 34,000 likes, 606 comments, and 470 shares – demonstrating the collective heartbreak and outrage from the public. This reaction underscored the urgent call for protective measures to prevent such crimes.

Additionally, Tran Thanh, a popular MC and comedian, highlighted the critical need for child protection in a post titled "Children Need Protection: Child Abuse Is A Criminal Offense." Released shortly after media coverage of these abuses, Tran Thanh's post received an impressive 242,000 likes, 530 comments, and 912 shares, indicating strong public support for decisive action against child abuse. This level of engagement emphasizes how social media influencers play a crucial role in raising awareness, mobilizing public sentiment, and pushing for stricter measures against offenders.

The stories of child violence have not only sparked public outrage but have also motivated influencers and their followers to push for systemic reforms focused on ensuring children's safety. By harnessing their extensive platforms, these influencers are pivotal in bringing attention to the struggles of victims, unifying collective action, and advocating for robust measures to combat child abuse and protect the rights of vulnerable children.

4.8. Information Regarding the Incident of "War between Russia and Ukraine": Amid the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, prominent figures in Vietnam have stepped up to advocate for peace and denounce the violence that comes with war. Miss Grand International 2021, Nguyen Thuc Thuy Tien, took to her platform to share a powerful peace message. She expressed, "No matter the reason behind a war, it brings destruction, and the biggest victims are always innocent people." This statement resonated deeply, garnering an impressive response with 45,000 likes, 831 comments, and 399 shares, reflecting a widespread desire for peace and harmony in these turbulent times.

Hariwon, the well-known Korean-Vietnamese singer, actress, and TV host, also voiced her opposition to the war through her influential platform. Her message of advocacy was met with considerable backing, attracting about 4,500 likes, 40 comments, and three private shares. This level of engagement showcases how public figures can unite their audiences around common beliefs, especially during unstable times.

Furthermore, journalist Hoang Nguyen Vu added his voice to the anti-war discourse by analyzing public reactions to the conflict. He remarked, "This isn't a joke; the extremely dangerous idea that invading another country should be seen as 'brother Russia - brother Ukraine' is alarming." His reflection on the serious ramifications of the conflict sparked considerable attention, with 4,800 likes, 187 shares, and 812 comments, highlighting strong public dissent against the war and a collective longing for peace. These influential individuals and their statements highlight the significant role that public figures play in shaping public opinion and influencing societal attitudes. Through their advocacy, they are nurturing a collective movement towards peace and stability, urging the international community to focus on non-violence and peaceful solutions. Their unified messages of solidarity and rejection of violence demonstrate how public figures can take the lead in tackling global conflicts and championing universal peace.

4.9. Information Regarding the Case of "Women's Soccer Champion SeaGames 31": The victory of the Vietnamese women's soccer team at the SEA Games 31 marked a historic moment that resonated throughout the country, showcasing the shared spirit and pride of Vietnam.

This incredible achievement highlighted the team's skill and determination while also serving as a significant step forward in raising the visibility of Vietnamese women's football on the world stage. The team's success – celebrated for securing their fourth straight SEA Games gold medal, winning two AFF Cups, and reaching the semi-finals at ASIAD – sparked a wave of nationwide celebration and inspired countless people. In light of this landmark event, various public figures and social media influencers took to their platforms to express their pride and congratulate the team on their remarkable success. One notable voice was Nguyen Tran Khanh Van, Miss Universe Vietnam 2019, who joyfully celebrated the women's achievements. Her post resonated with the wider Vietnamese public, amassing 27,000 likes, 310 comments, and 43 shares, showcasing the significant admiration and support the team garnered after their victory.

The impact of figures like Khanh Van in promoting the SEA Games 31 win is undeniable. Their vibrant presence on social media helped boost the celebration, creating a strong sense of national pride and unity. These influencers used their platforms to reach a large audience, sharing congratulatory messages while also emphasizing the importance of sports as a way to support gender equality, perseverance, and national identity. The SEA Games 31 women's soccer championship serves as a perfect example of how sports can unite people and the crucial role social media influencers play in amplifying these moments of success. These platforms not only help foster national pride but also widen the conversation around gender equality and sportsmanship in today's society.

4.10. Mechanisms of Information Dissemination and Verification on Social Media: In the fast-paced world of social media, influencers have a wide variety of strategies at their disposal to connect with their followers. They often use hashtags, compelling stories, and striking images to craft messages that really hit home. Widely adopted hashtags such as those marking “Non-Heteronormative Identities’ Sexual and Gender Diversity Month” or campaigning against violence, serve as powerful catalysts for mobilisation, drawing attention and support toward key social causes. The use of visuals like the iconic white dove symbolizing peace or the vibrant colors of the Non-Heteronormative Identities’ flag, adds an extra layer of engagement, making these messages stick in the minds of their audiences.

The emotional resonance woven into these posts is evident in the heartfelt appeals made by public figures like Nguyen Thuc Thuy Tien, as well as personal stories shared by Tran Thanh and Hari Won. This genuine emotional connection not only deepens their relationship with followers but also invites conversation and meaningful interactions. Similarly, stories that Nguyen Ngoc Thuy Diem shares about family themes tap into relatability, effectively bridging the gap between celebrities and their fans.

Platforms like Facebook are crucial in this context, assisting influencers with the verification of the information they share. Tools like the blue checkmark serve as visible signs of credibility, signaling to audiences that the content is coming from trustworthy and verified sources. This kind of verification helps build trust among users, pointing them toward reliable information. However, the verification process is not just on the influencers; the audience also plays a vital role. By actively engaging – through feedback, sharing insights, and participating in discussions – social media users help create a network that aims to identify misinformation and confirm what is authentic. This interconnected approach, blending influencers’ communication tactics with audience participation, underscores the shared responsibility in creating informed and credible online communities. Every share, comment, and post contributes to a bigger picture, impacting public opinion and shaping the digital landscape.

Moving from an examination of these mechanisms to addressing the study's core research questions, our findings show the ways in which Vietnamese social media influencers contribute to the verification of information during pivotal events, including health emergencies and national discussions. Our research suggests that influencers play a crucial role in sharing verified, trustworthy information, thereby enhancing levels of trust and credibility in the digital realm. We also looked into how users in Vietnam evaluate the authenticity of information from influencers. This exploration revealed that they engage in careful evaluation practices, considering the reliability of sources, the way content is presented, and the feedback from the wider community to navigate the complex online information landscape. This finding highlights the importance of digital literacy as an essential skill in today's information-driven age. Finally, we examined how different communication methods – like hashtags, emotional visuals, and storytelling techniques – affect the public's perception and understanding of crucial issues such as Non-Heteronormative

Identities' rights and child welfare. These findings offer valuable insights into how influencers strategically customize their communication styles to enhance engagement, establish connections with audiences, and create meaningful social change.

5. Conclusion

This study confirms that social media influencers occupy a dual position in Vietnam's digital ecosystem, acting both as framers of public discourse and as informal media-education agents. Viewed through the lens of Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), influencers do more than transmit content: they actively construct narratives that shape audiences' perceptions of social, political and economic issues. During crises, such as public health emergencies and national sovereignty debates, this narrative construction can bolster or undermine public trust, depending on the transparency of the verification processes modelled by influencers. Our findings underscore that when influencers explicitly demonstrate fact-checking techniques, cite source material and invite interactive dialogue, they help cultivate followers' critical evaluation skills and enhance digital authenticity (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, the study also highlights the intrinsic subjectivity of influencer-mediated framing. Individual biases, commercial interests and ideological leanings may skew narratives away from objective fact. Framing Theory posits that selective emphasis and omission can distort truth (Entman, 1993), and our data reveal instances where engagement-driven sensationalism eclipsed rigorous verification (Duffy, Tan, 2022). In this respect, influencers' pedagogical potential is contingent upon their adherence to media-education principles that prioritise transparency, accountability and ethical framing.

A key contribution of this research is the illustration of a dynamic feedback loop between influencers and audiences. Through comments, reposts and collaborative fact-checking, followers engage in communal verification, effectively co-constructing the veracity of narratives (Chong, Druckman, 2007; Duggan, 2015). This participatory model aligns with contemporary media-education frameworks, which posit that active learner engagement, rather than passive reception, is essential to developing durable media literacy competencies. In Vietnam, where the boundary between professionally verified news and user-generated content is increasingly porous, fostering such collaborative verification routines is imperative.

The pedagogical efficacy of framing formats also emerged as a critical insight. Hashtags signalling fact-checks (e.g., #VerifyTogether), layered infographics and conversational narrative tones function as learning scaffolds, lowering cognitive barriers to critical engagement and modelling deconstruction of complex messages (Chong, Druckman, 2007; Rojas-Estrada et al., 2024). Through embedding explicit verification cues within posts, clickable source links, visual annotations and step-by-step analysis, educator-influencers create micro-learning experiences that strengthen followers' metacognitive awareness and foster autonomous evaluation skills.

Despite these advances, challenges remain. Automated content-moderation tools can flag potentially false frames but lack the nuanced context that human-centred media education provides (Barlow, Shao, 2017). Moreover, the ethical responsibility of influencers to maintain balanced coverage is not uniformly observed, leading at times to audience confusion and trust erosion (Kim et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021). Addressing these gaps demands a holistic approach that combines technological safeguards with robust media-education initiatives.

Policy and Practice Implications: To capitalise on influencers' pedagogical capacities and mitigate disinformation, we recommend:

1. *Structured Media Education Programmes for Influencers:* Develop accredited training modules, co-designed by academic institutions, media regulators and platform operators, which cover ethical framing, fact-checking methodologies and pedagogical design. Such programmes can draw on models like the All-Russian Open Media School, which effectively integrates theory and practice.
2. *Platform-Level Verification Incentives:* Introduce "Verified Media-Education" badges for posts that adhere to documented fact-checking protocols. Algorithmic prioritisation of such posts will encourage influencers to incorporate transparent verification routines and signal to audiences which content has met established pedagogical standards.
3. *Multi-Stakeholder Media-Education Charters:* Establish formal "Media-Education Charters" co-authored by government agencies, social media platforms, traditional media and

influencer associations. These charters should codify best practices for framing transparency, correction policies and audience engagement, thereby institutionalising media-education benchmarks (Van Aelst et al., 2018).

4. *Community-Centred Literacy Campaigns*: Launch nationwide digital literacy campaigns that teach citizens how to interrogate the framing of online information, evaluate source credibility and navigate automated moderation prompts. Such campaigns should be culturally tailored and leverage influencer partnerships to extend reach and reinforce media-education messages.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research: While this study illuminates the pedagogical promise of influencers, it focuses primarily on high-profile personalities in urban centres. Future research should:

- Examine grassroots micro-influencers operating in rural and niche communities, to assess differential effects on media literacy practices.
- Conduct longitudinal studies measuring the durability of audience learning outcomes following exposure to influencer – led verification initiatives.
- Explore the interplay between algorithmic curation mechanisms and audience critical literacy, investigating how platform design influences the uptake of media education cues.

Final Reflections: Ultimately, the legitimacy and resilience of Vietnam’s digital public sphere hinge upon the integration of media education and media literacy principles within all facets of content creation, distribution and reception. Social media influencers, when equipped with ethical framing tools and supported by collaborative governance frameworks, can transcend their role as mere opinion leaders to become effective educators. Through modelling of transparent verification processes, fostering interactive feedback loops and championing media-education standards, influencers and audiences together can cultivate a discerning citizenry – capable of separating fact from fiction and sustaining a trustworthy, accountable digital information environment.

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