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Trends in Movie-Watching Decisions of Vietnamese Youth through Celebrity-Based Communication

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Young Vietnamese audiences encounter film promotions through a dense mixture of actor profiles, director reputations, influencer videos, online reviews and peer discussion. Celebrity visibility may attract attention, but its relationship to ticket choice is shaped by credibility and the film itself.

Objective: This article examines the roles of celebrity-based communication in moviegoing decisions and constructs a framework for analysing campaigns in Vietnam during 2021-2025.

Methods: A qualitative integrative synthesis combines foundational endorsement and consumer-persuasion research, scholarship on social-media influencers and movie word of mouth, and documented Vietnamese cinema-market examples.

Results: The synthesis identifies four linked considerations: attention and symbolic recognition, trustworthiness and expertise, endorser-film fit, and social validation through reviews and conversation. It distinguishes directors, actors, external celebrities and specialist reviewers by communication function, and proposes the FAME framework: Fit, Authenticity, Multistage activation, and Evaluation. Conclusion: Celebrity-based communication can support discovery and consideration, but the available secondary sources do not establish its independent causal contribution to ticket sales in Vietnam. FAME is a conceptual management framework requiring campaign-level testing.

KEYWORDS: celebrity endorsement, Vietnamese cinema, young audiences, source credibility, influencer marketing, moviegoing intention, electronic word of mouth.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cinema marketing in Vietnam has been reorganised by platform-based communication. Trailers, short videos, premieres, behind-the-scenes material and discussions circulate simultaneously, while members of the audience may act as both consumers and distributors of content. For younger viewers, a cinema ticket is often considered after repeated exposure to several sources rather than after a single advertisement. The same film may appear first through an actor's personal account, subsequently through a reviewer and finally through friends who have attended an early screening. These interactions complicate the familiar assumption that a prominent name automatically produces ticket purchases.

The Vietnamese theatrical market recovered following the disruptions of the pandemic. Box Office Vietnam figures reported in Tuoi Tre (2025) put total national box-office receipts for 2024 at nearly VND 4.7 trillion. A later VietnamPlus (2026) report attributed approximately VND 6.14 trillion in 2025 receipts to the same tracking platform. These are platform-reported market totals, not audited measures of celebrity-campaign impact; industry reporting can use different coverage and accounting methods. Nevertheless, the market expansion makes the relationship between film identity, public personalities and audience conversation an important object of communication research.

A distinctive feature of the Vietnamese case is that a film can be promoted by several types of public personality. Directors such as Tran Thanh and Ly Hai are associated with recognisable production styles and recurring screen brands. Actors introduce characters through interviews and publicity appearances. Musicians and entertainment personalities can open routes to audiences outside existing film communities. Film reviewers and platform-specific creators offer assessment, explanation and online discussion. These figures differ in the reasons viewers follow them and in their potential ability to influence evaluations of a film.

Three research questions guide this article: RQ1, which mechanisms link celebrity-based messages with attention, consideration and prospective moviegoing? RQ2, how do directors, casts, influencers and reviewers occupy different communication roles in the Vietnamese cinema environment during 2021-2025? RQ3, what design and evaluation principles follow for responsible promotional practice? The contribution is an integrative conceptual model connecting source qualities to stages of film choice. It is not a survey of Vietnamese youth, a campaign experiment or an estimate of the revenue produced by particular celebrity endorsements.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Celebrity, endorsement and meaning transfer

Boorstin (1961), Rojek (2001) and Turner (2004) examine the public construction and circulation of celebrity. Their accounts help distinguish fame as visibility from the particular meanings audiences associate with a person. In advertising, Friedman and Friedman (1979) demonstrate that endorser effectiveness depends partly on product type, and Erdogan (1999) reviews the potential benefits and risks of celebrity selection. Consequently, fame should not be treated as a uniform input that produces the same response for every film genre or target audience.

McCracken's (1989) meaning-transfer model provides a more specific mechanism: culturally established meanings move from the endorser to a product and may subsequently be appropriated by consumers. A director recognised for emotionally intense family drama can therefore supply expectations that precede the release of an individual film. Yet such associations can constrain reception when a new project differs from established images. In movie promotion, a director or lead actor may also be part of the cultural product being endorsed; the distinction between product identity and external endorsement must therefore be maintained.

2.2. Credibility, attractiveness and the problem of fit

Ohanian (1990, 1991) conceptualises perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise as distinguishable properties of an endorser. Goldsmith et al. (2000) similarly show that source credibility and the credibility of the advertised organisation can affect consumer responses differently. Attractiveness can increase visibility and favourable initial impressions, whereas an audience's judgement of whether the speaker knows cinema, has evaluated the film and offers an honest account may become more important during consideration. These are general mechanisms inferred from prior studies, not measured coefficients for Vietnamese ticket buyers.

The relationship between a personality and a film is a further condition. Schouten et al. (2020) compare celebrity and influencer endorsements and show that identification, trust and product-endorser fit matter for advertising outcomes in the product categories they studied. Their experiments do not concern cinema, but they suggest examining the fit between a personality's recognised expertise, the film's genre, the message and the intended audience. A highly visible public figure who lacks a credible connection to a film may deliver reach without persuasive value.

2.3. Digital influencers, peer relationships and movie word of mouth

Digital creators may build influence through perceived similarity, repeated interaction and specialised knowledge rather than mass celebrity alone. Lou and Yuan (2019) find that informative value, trustworthiness and perceived similarity support trust in influencer-generated brand content. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) connect perceived credibility and parasocial interaction with purchase intentions in studies of fashion and beauty influencers. De Veirman et al. (2017) caution that large follower counts do not always improve responses when the promoted product is incongruent. These findings support distinguishing audience size from audience relevance when selecting cinema reviewers or platform creators.

Film-specific research adds a dynamic component. Liu (2006) finds that online word-of-mouth volume helps explain box-office outcomes, particularly around release, while Duan et al. (2008) identify feedback between word of mouth and ticket sales. Elberse (2007) reports that star involvement can affect expectations about theatrical revenue, without establishing that a prominent cast inevitably generates net returns for the studio. Together these studies indicate that endorsement, viewer conversation and observed sales are interdependent. A review published after a premiere may be a consequence of viewing activity as well as an antecedent of subsequent attendance.

2.4. Advertising recognition, authenticity and disclosure

Promotional communication can weaken its own credibility if viewers identify a recommendation as a poorly disclosed or implausible commercial message. Friestad and Wright (1994) explain how consumers use knowledge of persuasive tactics when interpreting advertising. Evans et al. (2017) show that disclosure language alters recognition of influencer advertising in an Instagram experiment. Accordingly, undisclosed paid promotion, uniform praise across accounts and recommendations unsupported by concrete film experience may produce scepticism. Disclosure alone does not establish the truth of a review; it creates a clearer basis for the audience to interpret the speaker's interests.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Research design and scope

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive integrative review with illustrative analysis of the Vietnamese theatrical market in 2021-2025. It examines published endorsement theory, empirical scholarship concerning influencers and film word of mouth, and publicly reported cinema-market examples. The analytical unit is a communication function in a potential audience decision sequence, not an individual cinema customer. The review is purposive rather than systematic, and does not claim comprehensive database coverage or quantitative pooling.

3.2. Source selection and comparative procedure

Foundational publications were retained for concepts that explain celebrity meaning, source credibility, product fit and persuasion knowledge. More recent studies were selected where they examine digital influencers, disclosure or film-specific online reviews. Vietnamese sources were used to verify the broad 2024-2025 box-office context and provide illustrative director- and franchise-related examples. For each source, the analysis identified the setting and design, the communication mechanism relevant to moviegoing, and the boundary within which its conclusion could be applied. Documentary claims were grouped into four questions: which figure speaks, what the figure contributes, when the message occurs and how the response can be evaluated.

The synthesis compares four communicator categories: director as production brand, film cast, external entertainment personality, and specialist reviewer or digital creator. It then relates them to recognition, active evaluation, ticket choice and post-screening conversation. Cross-cutting tensions were identified between reach and relevance, commercial coordination and authentic commentary, temporary attention and cumulative reputation, and reported engagement and attributable sales. The resulting operational sequence is described as the FAME framework.

3.3. Evidentiary limitations

No interviews, audience survey, platform-data extraction, sentiment analysis, experimental assignment or campaign expenditure audit were conducted. The named films are contextual illustrations, not an exhaustive comparative sample. The 2024 and 2025 market totals are secondary estimates compiled under platform-specific conventions. The study consequently does not assign measured causal effects to individual celebrities

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or claim to identify the most influential personality among Vietnamese young viewers. Statements about likely mechanisms are theoretical propositions whose local applicability remains to be tested.

4. RESULTS

4.1. The Vietnamese cinema market as a context for celebrity communication

The film market's recovery gives additional visibility to the relationship between a film title and the public figures attached to it. Tuoi Tre (2025) reported nearly VND 4.7 trillion in total receipts for 2024, while VietnamPlus (2026) reported a 2025 total exceeding VND 6.14 trillion, based on Box Office Vietnam tracking. These figures are useful as broad market context, not as an independent time series demonstrating the return on influencer spending. Film supply, holiday schedules, distribution arrangements, pricing and film quality may all contribute to the observed totals. Director-linked film brands illustrate how recognition can accumulate over releases. The original Vietnamese manuscript draws attention to the public image of Tran Thanh through Bo Gia, Nha Ba Nu, Mai and Bo Tu Bao Thu, and to Ly Hai through successive Lat Mat films. The relevant analytical observation is the continuity of a recognisable creative identity across releases. A director's name can function as a heuristic by which a viewer anticipates theme, tone or entertainment value. That inference is consistent with meaning-transfer theory (McCracken, 1989), but whether specific viewers purchased a ticket because of a director remains unmeasured.

4.2. Distinct communication functions of public personalities

The synthesis distinguishes the communicative role of the people involved, rather than classifying them only by number of followers. A director can frame expectations of story and creative identity, a cast member can offer intimate knowledge of characters and production, an external celebrity can extend initial reach, and a reviewer can provide comparative evaluation. A digital creator can perform more than one role; what matters is whether the audience recognises the purpose of a particular message. Table 1 identifies the likely contribution and the evidence that would be needed to assess it.\

Table 1. Communicator roles in the Vietnamese film-promotion ecosystem

Communicator	Principal function	Likely persuasive resource	Main qualification
Director / film-maker	Establishes recognisable style and project identity	Accumulated reputation and meaning transfer	Loyalty cannot be equated with individual ticket conversion
Actor / film cast	Introduces character, story and production experience	Authentic participation and audience affinity	Cast promotion may be confused with independent appraisal
External celebrity	Opens access to neighbouring fan communities	Visibility and social attention	High reach may have little genre or audience fit
Reviewer / specialist creator	Compares films, explains merits and limitations	Perceived expertise and consistency	Commercial links must be identifiable
Platform influencer	Adapts messages to video, live or community formats	Similarity, familiarity and repeated engagement	Metrics may reflect controversy rather than interest

Source: Author's synthesis of McCracken (1989), Ohanian (1990), Lou and Yuan (2019), and Schouten et al. (2020).

4.3. Four mechanisms between awareness and intended attendance

First, attention and symbolic recognition make a film visible in an overcrowded information environment. Names, personal style and an established audience can increase the chance that a trailer or premiere clip is noticed. Attention is necessary for further evaluation but is not a decision. The difference matters where impressions or views are used to justify campaign expenditure despite uncertainty about relevant audience exposure.

Second, perceived credibility changes the weight given to a message. Trustworthiness concerns the belief that the speaker presents a sincere account; expertise concerns the perceived capacity to judge the relevant qualities of a film. Actors can be credible regarding their own production experience, while critics may be more credible regarding comparison across films. These are different bases of authority. A campaign becomes misleading when a sponsored personality is presented as a disinterested evaluator or when an audience is invited to treat visibility as expertise (Ohanian, 1990; Goldsmith et al., 2000).

Third, endorser-film fit determines whether the inherited image of a person helps viewers infer what a film may offer. Fit may involve genre, language, cultural associations, audience interests and the communication channel. A familiar entertainment personality may plausibly support a comedy release, while a specialised film reviewer may be more appropriate for discussions of narrative, cinematography or artistic form. The comparison is not a universal ranking: a small specialist audience may yield more relevant consideration than a much larger audience with little film interest (De Veirman et al., 2017; Schouten et al., 2020).

Fourth, social validation through online reviews, comments and peer exchange can reinforce or challenge a message after the first promotional encounter. Credible reactions may provide information unavailable from official trailers, but their persuasive effect depends on timing, community norms and the information users already hold. Evidence from film markets outside Vietnam indicates reciprocal relations between discussion and sales (Liu, 2006; Duan et al., 2008). The Vietnamese source material suggests similar communication pathways but does not supply observations that establish their magnitude locally.

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4.4. Four tensions in contemporary film promotion

The four mechanisms produce trade-offs that cannot be resolved by maximising follower counts. High reach may undermine relevance; tightly scripted endorsements may protect message consistency but reduce authenticity; a director's existing reputation may create expectations that conflict with an unfamiliar new genre; and high engagement may indicate criticism rather than a commercially favourable response. These tensions explain why evaluation should be connected to a stage of the decision process and to evidence about audience relevance.

Table 2. Communication tensions and associated decision questions

Tension	Potential failure	Management question
Reach versus fit	Large numbers of views among viewers unlikely to attend	Does the audience match the intended film segment and release location?
Coordination versus authenticity	Uniform praise signals scripted promotion	Can each participant offer a specific, clearly situated experience?
Reputation versus artistic change	Inherited expectations obscure a different film style	Are the creative promises aligned with the actual film?
Engagement versus conversion	Controversy increases interaction without ticket sales	What evidence links attention to consideration, booking and attendance?

Source: Conceptual comparison informed by Erdogan (1999), Friestad and Wright (1994), and the movie word-of-mouth literature.

4.5. The FAME framework for celebrity-based cinema communication

The combined analysis is organised as FAME: Fit, Authenticity, Multistage activation and Evaluation. Fit asks which public figure has a credible relationship to the film, the message and the audience. Authenticity concerns the specificity of what is communicated, the distinction between experience and scripted endorsement, and transparency about commercial participation. Multistage activation assigns different roles before release, around the opening and after audiences begin to react. Evaluation connects evidence to objectives while monitoring reputational and ethical risks. The four stages are iterative rather than a fixed linear recipe.

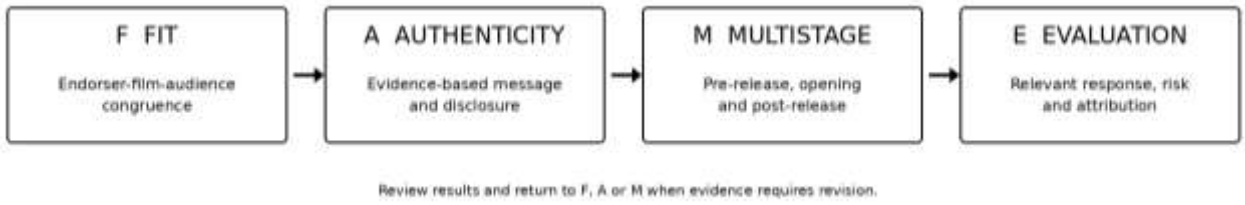

Figure 1. The proposed FAME framework for celebrity-based film communication
Source: Author-developed conceptual synthesis; the framework has not been empirically validated.

For a pre-release phase, the principal task is source selection and a credible statement of what the film promises; director or cast interviews may be appropriate here. During opening week, detailed interviews, specialist reviews and verifiable audience responses can help viewers assess uncertainty, while a distinction should be maintained between paid content and independent evaluation. After opening, an ethical campaign can allow discussion to develop through real experiences rather than repeatedly manufacturing the appearance of consensus. These applications are proposals, not descriptions of completed experiments or observed campaigns.

4.6. Indicators for future application and assessment

A stage-specific evidence system is needed to separate message delivery from behavioural outcomes. Awareness data include verified reach among relevant cinema audiences rather than total impressions alone. Consideration indicators include sustained viewing, visits to film-information or ticket pages and substantive questions. Behavioural indicators may include trackable bookings and attendance, while sentiment coding can distinguish interest, criticism and controversy. Because release timing, star involvement, media spending and film quality interact, campaign-level attribution would require comparable groups or a carefully structured quasi-experimental design.

Table 3. Proposed application evidence for FAME

Framework element	Suggested campaign evidence	Interpretive boundary
Fit	Audience-profile match; creator expertise; genre-relevance review	Follower count is not evidence of relevance
Authenticity	Recorded viewing or production experience; clear sponsorship disclosure	Disclosure is not proof that a recommendation is correct

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Framework element	Suggested campaign evidence	Interpretive boundary
Multistage activation	Dated content map; reviews across release stages; audience response	Post-release conversation may result from attendance
Evaluation	Qualified reach; ticket-page traffic; booking trace; risk log	Correlations do not isolate incremental sales

Source: Author's proposed monitoring design, informed by Liu (2006), Lou and Yuan (2019), and Evans et al. (2017).

4.7. Propositions for empirical assessment

Four propositions follow from the synthesis. P1: when audience characteristics and exposure are held constant, a well-matched film commentator will generate higher perceived relevance and stronger prospective attendance than a prominent but poorly matched personality. P2: the relationship between a promotional appearance and intention will be mediated by perceived trustworthiness and expertise rather than by familiarity alone. P3: identifiable first-hand commentary with an explicit commercial disclosure will affect the recognition of promotional intent and the credibility of the message differently from generic, uniformly positive endorsements. P4: the relationship between early publicity and later attendance will be conditioned by post-release reviews and peer discussion. These propositions are hypotheses for investigation, not results established for Vietnamese filmgoers.

One suitable design would use a factorial experiment presenting equivalent information about the same film with different endorser profiles and disclosure treatments. Measures should distinguish intention immediately after exposure from verified ticket booking or later attendance; follow-up should capture whether respondents encountered independent reviews. A complementary observational design could compare creator posts and booking events by date while controlling for release phase, advertising volume, screening availability and genre. Both approaches would need agreed data access, clear consent where participants are recruited and careful treatment of paid versus independent content. The proposed indicators would then test whether FAME identifies mechanisms beyond the descriptive trend that popular films tend to receive more publicity.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Celebrity influence as a contingent communication resource

The central analytical result is that celebrity-based promotion should be treated as a bundle of distinct communication resources, not a single independent driver of moviegoing. A director's name communicates creative continuity; a cast member can reduce distance between film and audience; an external celebrity introduces a broader network; and a specialist reviewer offers comparatively task-relevant judgement. McCracken's (1989) approach explains why these actors transfer different meanings, while source-credibility research explains why those meanings are more or less persuasive. The task for campaign design is therefore to match source, message and stage rather than to purchase as much visibility as possible.

The distinction between awareness, intention and attendance also changes how performance is judged. A person can notice an interview, share a trailer and still decline to purchase a ticket. A high-grossing film may receive extensive influencer content because it is already popular. Movie word-of-mouth studies show that public discussion and sales reinforce one another, making causal interpretation difficult without stronger designs (Liu, 2006; Duan et al., 2008). Box-office totals for Vietnam demonstrate market scale, not what fraction of revenue is attributable to a particular speaker, platform or campaign element.

5.2. Digital communities, trust and the credibility of review

The digital environment makes specialist creators important because their value may lie in familiarity and repeated interaction. A reviewer with a smaller but consistent audience could be more useful at the evaluation stage than a public figure whose followers have little interest in the advertised genre. Yet a reviewer's commercial participation changes the interpretive relationship with followers. Advertising recognition, information specificity and independent critical standards may affect the durability of credibility (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Evans et al., 2017; Shimp, 1997). Campaigns should not manufacture apparently spontaneous praise or expect reviews to remain persuasive when every creator publishes near-identical wording.

This point is especially important for young audiences, who can encounter promotional messages in multiple formats within a short interval. A fan community may generate visibility, but a reviewer may introduce counter-information, and friends may validate or reject both messages after seeing the film. These exchanges are not uniformly favourable and should be analysed as part of the decision process rather than labelled a promotional success solely because they increase engagement. The same platform may host official advertising, paid recommendations and genuine audience response, each requiring a different interpretation.

5.3. Practical implications and limitations

FAME translates these distinctions into four areas of practice: first, source selection grounded in credible fit; second, authentic, specific and transparent messages; third, different roles before and after opening; and fourth, evaluation that separates reach from action and keeps a record of reputational risk. An illustrative campaign for a family drama might feature a director explaining creative intentions before release, actors discussing characters during launch, and reviewers discussing strengths and limitations after seeing the full film. The example does not imply that any existing Vietnamese production followed this exact sequence or that it would raise sales.

The study is limited by its purposive literature base and illustrative market sources. Most endorsement experiments were conducted outside the Vietnamese film industry or concerned other consumer categories. The local material does not contain campaign budgets, verified cross-platform exposure, survey measures of young audiences or sales records attributable to creators. The analytical framework also does not account fully for differences in ticket prices, cinema access, household income, genre or independent film quality. Thus the synthesis identifies plausible relationships and operating questions rather than a validated causal explanation.

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Future research could compare matched messages from actors, cinema-specialist reviewers and general entertainment creators with comparable audience groups. Surveys could separately measure perceived expertise, trustworthiness, film fit, intention and actual attendance, while disclosed campaign data could connect exposure dates to booking traces. A preregistered experiment might test authentic first-hand commentary against standard promotional praise, holding the film and exposure channel constant. Such work would establish whether the proposed mechanisms function among different Vietnamese audience segments and whether the observed effects justify campaign expenditure.

6. CONCLUSION

Celebrity-based communication in Vietnamese cinema now includes film directors, performers, external entertainment personalities, reviewers and digital creators. Their influence cannot be reduced to celebrity status or follower numbers. The reviewed literature points to four relevant mechanisms: initial visibility, credibility, endorser-film fit and socially distributed validation. The market examples from 2021-2025 illustrate a setting in which personal brands and networked discussion are salient, but do not measure their independent effects on ticket purchase.

The FAME framework connects selection, authentic communication, multistage activation and evidence-based evaluation. Its value is to distinguish what a campaign intends to change from what its available metrics actually demonstrate. Without audience surveys, controlled comparisons and attributable transaction data, claims that celebrity endorsements caused particular Vietnamese box-office outcomes would exceed the evidence. Further empirical work should test the framework with identified films, creators and audience segments.

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