

# THE CONSTRUCTION AND PERFORMANCE OF YOUTH IDENTITY THROUGH RAP: A CASE OF RAP VIET

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Received 12 June 2021

Revised 28 August 2021; Accepted 18 November 2021

**Abstract:** This research is placed within a critical discourse analysis perspective that assumes an entangled relationship between discourse and its underlying social meanings. In recent times, rap has gained a stable position in mainstream media, and along with it comes the appearance of vibrant youth subculture onto the screen. Rap music makes it possible for people to tell their stories and others', as well as take on a persona or an alter ego (Sciullo, 2019). Employing Fairclough's framework (1989), together with Kress and van Leeuwen's framework (2006), we study the discourse of Vietnamese rap through its linguistic and visual elements. The study is an attempt to answer the following question: how has rap music contributed to identity construction and performance among Vietnamese youth? The study suggests that Vietnamese youth have constructed and performed their identity as patriots, individuals with dreams and aspirations, and children of their parents. These themes are closely connected and reflect the youth's compliance with the social expectation of mainstream rap.

*Keywords:* rap, multimodal discourse analysis, youth identity

## 1. Introduction

In the 1970s in Bronx, New York, rap music appeared with the development of Afro-Americans' hip-hop subculture. While hip-hop refers to culture, language, lifestyle, and behavior, rap music "is the musical form that emerged from this culture" (Myer & Kleck, 2007, p. 142). Rap is one of the four constituents of hip-hop, namely emceeing or rap, DJing, graffiti and breakdancing (Sciullo, 2019). In that way, rap combines linguistic expression, visual representation, movement, and sound, among other elements (Adroutsopoulos, 2009).

Rap is considered as a Western music genre in Vietnam and has been modified to adapt to the context of

Vietnamese society and culture. In 2002, XLIM, a Vietnamese rapper, formed a rapper community Da Rap Club, also known as RC, on the Internet (Kami, 2020). Since then, Vietnamese youngsters following rap have established a number of rap organizations in the underground communities throughout the areas in the nation, namely Northside, Midside, Southside and Westside. No matter how vigorous these organizations were, because of its common correlation to violence, gang, racism, misogyny and profanity, rap has remained almost invisible in mainstream culture. The year 2012 marked a milestone for the underground community as the number of underground rappers went mainstream and achieved awards, for

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<https://doi.org/10.25073/2525-2445/vnufs.4743>

instance, Karik, who won the best music video in Vietnamese MTV. From this time, more and more Vietnamese underground rappers emerged in the mainstream music industry, collaborated with pop-music singers or signed contracts with major music corporations, thereby gaining more achievements and acceptance from the mass audience. In 2020, two TV mainstream programs started to feature rap music, namely Rap Viet and King of Rap. Within three first episodes, Rap Viet has broken the record of the most-viewed video on Youtube streaming platform with approximately half a million views (Nguyen, 2020).

Rap music is part of Vietnamese modern youth culture. It was increasingly common for Vietnamese youth under twenty-five to produce rap music at home, beatbox or perform breakdancing (Brown, 2014). Doan (2015) suggested that both mainstream and underground rap could stand as a manifesto for youthfulness, creativity, bravery, and rebellion to the conforming society. Jones (2017) also found that Vietnamese youth was testing the cultural boundaries in their rap songs, which deviate from the norm of singing about heterosexual love and nationalism. However, the strict rule of censorship and the expectation of the music industry poses a challenge to young rappers, as any extreme ideologies as well as profanities are filtered. Nonetheless, rap continues to be an instrument for the young Vietnamese to express themselves. Rap is not only about rebellion, but also transformation (Chang, 2005). Through rap, the youth have portrayed themselves as people who have a desire to express their personality and confront the bulk of existing customs or conventional opinions. This inherent characteristic can be observed in rap music in any culture. Through rap, the Vietnamese youth have portrayed themselves through the reference to the culture, life stories, and youth crisis. Yet, currently, there is a dearth

of studies on the development of Vietnamese rap music with relation to youth identity.

To address this gap, this research studies Vietnamese youth identity construction and performance through rap performances in Rap Viet, a Vietnamese music TV program on HTV2 channel, based on the framework of visual grammar of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) introduced by Fairclough (1995).

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1. *Identity Construction and Performance Through Rap*

Both Bamberg, De Fina and Schiffrin (2007) and Taylor (2015) define personal *identity construction* or sense of self as the “talk” in which a person negotiates, sustains, and modifies through discursive activities. Identity construction can be viewed through not only discourses, but also the metalinguistics, gestural and bodily characteristics (Bamberg et al., 2007). Rap provides language for talking about a way of representing knowledge about a particular topic, at a particular time in Foucault's term (Jenkins, 2013). In rap, the “text” itself is rap music which constitutes the rapper's voice and performance as well as the song's lyrics. The rapper's voice denotes the perspective, the right to express it for not only the artist themselves but also the listeners. Hence, rap's lyrics can construct identity.

The position in identity construction can give rise to the performance of discursive activities that culminates in an act of identity (Bamberg et al., 2007). Klein, Spears, and Reicher (2007, p. 30) defined an *identity performance* as an identity-salient strategic action, the “purposeful expression of (or suppression on) behaviors relevant to those norms conventionally associated with a salient social identity.” Music, emotional, social, and cognitive ties can imply the

construction and enactment of a social identity and a social memory where the individual and society are linked (Lidskog, 2016). Identity performance through rap is often a way to destroy stereotypical notions of a specific culture, solidify the local communities, as well as empower members of that culture. For example, Perullo (2005) concluded that Tanzania youth constructed their cultural identity as heroes who made rap songs with *ujumbe mkali* (strong messages or criticism of social and political conditions).

## 2.2. Youth Identity Through Rap

Studying the voices of local youth identity through Chinese local-language rap music, Liu (2014) stated that the relocalization and globalization of hip-hop culture and rap music have been ramified continually through the distinguished languages of youth all over the world. In the study of youth subcultural activities and digital media through the cases of protest rap and illegal graffiti in Portugal, Campos, Nunes and Simões (2016) concluded that the digital media is a useful tool for the visibility and identity performance of the Portuguese youth through these subgenres of hip-hop. Rap is indeed a tool for the youth to project their voices and demonstrate their identity.

The subgenre of rap which is represented the most in the media is mainstream or popular rap (Androutsopoulos, 2009). In mainstream rap, any socially conscious and political-oriented lyrics which is the inherent character of hip-hop was shunned. This happened because of the involvement of major music companies with the rappers. Rappers who are in contract with those companies are expected to produce songs that could appeal to as many people as possible and provide them with entertainment instead of political ideologies. This emergence on mainstream music places rappers in a dilemma in which the adherence

to popularity puts them at an economic advantage, yet supposedly leaves them symbolically disadvantaged as it labels them as capitalism followers and not artists anymore.

Pope (2005), and Kadioğlu and Özdal (2020) also added that the popularization of rap is supported by the development of communicating platform such as digital media, and it must have gone through a mass reconstructive filtering system such as the company's policies or the government's censorship. It can be concluded that mainstream rappers may become the victims of capitalism and globalism which diminish their capability to express themselves. This generated a heated question about the authenticity of hip-hop referring to rebellion against social norms in mainstream rap (Pope, 2005; Oware, 2014). Pope (2005) viewed mainstream rap as unauthentic and the death of hip-hop culture and pointed out that only underground rap is "pure". On the contrary, Oware (2014) pointed out that the authenticity of both mainstream or underground rap was controversial as underground artists manipulated the border between these two spheres of rap to better their economic condition instead of being driven by the urge to speak up. To avoid controversial issues in the process of rap popularization, it is recommended that rappers put politics aside and rely on their personal experiences (Kadioğlu & Özdal, 2020) and habitus (Oware, 2014). With the media globalization and commercialization in rap, this art form of hip hop has incorporated both "co-option and rebellion in a creative amalgamation" (Almeida, 2013, p. 320). Moussa (2019) concluded through his study of online rap in Morocco that the interplay of rap and media such as online communication reflected youth aspiration and identities. However, the question of whether or not the commercialization of rap has influenced the personas that young rappers assume, remains open.

There has so far been no qualitative research on youth identity through rap, especially in the Vietnamese context. The above-mentioned previous studies have dealt with identity construction and performances heavily based on linguistics rather than semiotics. This leaves a gap in studying identity through rap as it contains not only lyrics, but also visual elements which involve clothing items, accessories, stage decorations. These elements could make a contribution to identity performance.

### **2.3. Theoretical Framework**

To analyze the linguistics and other semiotic modes in the performances of Rap Viet, we have adopted the framework of visual grammar by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) introduced by Fairclough (1995), the lyrics of the performances are investigated simultaneously with the visual elements.

#### **2.3.1. Principles of CDA**

Fairclough (2013) considered discourse as a social practice. CDA seeks to show the implicit involvement of language in social life, including power and domination relations, as well as in ideology, suggesting possibilities for changes. Unlike some other linguistic approaches, CDA does not confine its research questions within a single discipline but works in a transdisciplinary way: it strives to shed light on the dialectical relations of discourse with other social factors (Fairclough, 2013). Van Dijk (1970) also opined that “CDA is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (p. 352).

This study uses CDA to explore identity construction and performance of Vietnamese youth through rap in Rap Viet show for some reasons. First, rap lyrics are an effective instrument to voice out the

conflicts, hidden messages from the oppressed against the oppressors. This gives rise to exercising the power relationship between the social classes in which individuals could negotiate, sustain and construct identities through interaction. In the context of Vietnam, although rap is not correlated to any political ideologies, it holds an important position in Vietnamese youth movements. Rap music can give significant insight into how Vietnamese youth construct and perform their identities through their struggles with social norms. Another reason as to why CDA is suitable for studying youth identity through rap is the relocalization of rap in many countries in the world. The distinctive combination depends on that nation’s culture and socio- economy, and it is essential that rap is modified to be more appropriate to the context. This can be observed in the rap lyrics in Vietnam as the youth utilize metaphors, ironies and word plays with filtered vernacular of hip-hop creatively to express themselves. In other words, to interpret the youth’s identity through rap, it is essential that both textual and semiotic characteristics be put into consideration. For these reasons, CDA is an ideal instrument to study identity through rap.

#### **2.3.2. Fairclough’s Three-Dimension Framework of CDA**

This study draws on Fairclough’s three-dimension framework of CDA, namely description of the text, interpretation and explanation. The first dimension focuses on three aspects: vocabulary (wording), grammar (transitivity, passivization) and text structure (thematic choice, turn-taking system). The second one concerns the relationship between text and interaction. Textual features, context and background assumption of the text need to be taken into consideration when interpreting. The last stage involves the relationship between interaction and social context with the social determination of the processes of production

and interpretation of their social effect, in which the underlying ideological perspectives are exposed.

### **2.3.3. Kress and van Leeuwen's Framework of Visual Grammar**

To make in-depth understanding of the visual elements, the framework by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) can be a useful tool. Adapted from Michael Halliday's metafunctions, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) has glossed the three metafunctions, namely the ideal metafunction, the interpersonal metafunction and the textual metafunction to apply for all the semiotic modes.

Ideational metafunction refers to the patterns of representation or how the experience is visually coded. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) compared two terms in representations, namely conceptual and narrative. While the conceptual ones are concerned with the "represent of participants in terms of their class, structure or meaning", the narrative ones are served to "present unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements" (p. 59). The interpersonal metafunction concerns the relationship between the producer and the receiver of the sign. A number of participants are involved in visual communication, namely represented (depicted) and interactive (real). At this level, the interactive meanings can contain three dimensions called image act, social distance and point of view. The first dimension has a positive correlation to the eye direction of the represented participants which can be directed at the receiver (demand) or not (offer). While demands are likely to find the imaginary relationship with the viewers by facial expressions and gestures or the 'gaze', offers are bound to picture the viewers impersonally as objects for contemplation. In terms of social distance, the varied sizes of frame are taken into consideration, ranging from close-up,

media to long shots which indicate the level of relation between the producer and receivers from intimate/personal, social and impersonal. Lastly, as far as the perspective or point of view is concerned, it involves two sections of images, namely the subjective and objective. The former aspect presents everything from a particular perspective, delivered by the image-producer, and objective depicting all there is known about the subject (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The depiction of participants at different angles may give rise to the indication of varied relations. The images can be photographed from frontal and eye level angles which imply the involvement and equality among participants. For instance, the horizontal angle can be frontal which may indicate involvement and show detachment. On the other hand, the vertical angle with high angle can cultivate a sense of assigning power to the participants; the low angle may bring the participants a more powerful representation or the same with the eye level leads to the equal relation.

The textual metafunction refers to the meaning of the text and different compositional arrangements can have different textual meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). It is established by these following systems, namely information value, salience and framing. In terms of the first system, it is positively correlated to the three main visual realms: left and right, top and bottom and centre and margin. The different values can be attributed to the information following varied alignments namely, horizontal axis along with left and right, vertical axis together with top and bottom and centre-margin with the centre. The other essential system in this metafunction is salience which can compare the elements on the ground that some of them may be more appealing than others. The indication of the visual clues are size, sharpness of focus, tonal and colour contrast, placement in the visual field, perspective and

specific cultural factors (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). For the last system, framing makes a connection between the representational meaning to interactive one. This involves frame lines, discontinuity of shape or empty space.

This study focuses on both linguistic text and visual text, with the latter including *clothing items, accessories, stage decorations*. The reason why these factors are chosen in analyzing the rappers' performances is that the rappers can consciously and purposefully make decisions about these factors when presenting themselves on stage. This is in line with the view we subscribe to in this study: *identity performance* is a conscious and purposeful process of showing one's self in a social interaction. The visual text is considered and analyzed in its relations with the three metafunctions in Kress and van Leeuwen's framework of visual grammar (2006).

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Data Collection

The data of the study consists of 39 performances which were aired during Rap Viet from September to November in 2020. Each performance lasts from four minutes to five minutes. The performances feature the rappers and the stage. The 39 performances are numbered and coded arbitrarily from PD 1 to PD 39 (e.g., PD 1: performance number 1). The list of the synopses of all performances are presented in the appendix of this study.

#### 3.2. Data Analysis

To analyze the linguistics and other semiotic modes in the performances of Rap Viet, we adopted the framework of visual grammar by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) introduced by Fairclough (1995), the lyrics of the performances are investigated simultaneously with the visual elements.

This research follows this integrated framework with three levels as follows:

**Discourse description:** The first layer draws on how the discourse is designed and depicted linguistically and visually simultaneously. As for linguistic elements, this step analyzes grammar, vocabulary, and textual structures with lists of questions proposed by Fairclough (1989) for textual analysis. Regarding visual elements, this level focuses on clothing items, accessories, stage decorations.

**Discourse interpretation:** this section explores how youth identity is constructed and performed through rap. In this stage, discourse processes are analyzed based on background common-sense assumptions (Fairclough, 1989). Textual features have social meanings only when they are embedded in social structures, produced and interpreted based on common knowledge.

**Social explanation:** this section attempts to uncover how youth identity through rap is influenced by social structures. This stage illustrates how discourse "is determined by social structures, and what reproductive effects discourses can cumulatively have on those structures, sustaining them or changing them" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 135). In this study, this stage explains how rap as discourse is part of the youth's social struggle.

The procedure to inspect a rap performance includes two main steps. Firstly, each rap performance is analyzed on the two frameworks of Fairclough's CDA model (1995) and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) meta-functions of visual images. The results will be categorized into themes based on latent thematic coding.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1. Youngsters as Patriots

A recurrent theme in terms of how the young rappers represent themselves is patriots. It is immediately obvious that four young rappers in three performances (PD 15, PD 22, PD 33) dressed themselves in traditional clothes or had imprinted cultural patterns on a piece of clothing. A prime example of this is that in PD 15, their rap song is a modified version of a well-known Vietnamese legend *Sơn Tinh Thủy Tinh* (*The spirit of the Mountains and The Spirit of the Seas*). In this performance one of the young rappers was dressed in modernized *áo dài* and the other in a shirt with patterns of Vietnam's mountains. This new application of traditional costumes demonstrates how the young and dynamic Vietnamese generation has appreciation for their culture. Moreover, the stage with the image of *trống đồng* (*the bronze drum*) refers to the thriving era of *Văn Lang* (*the first national name of Vietnam*), which held an important position in ancient Vietnamese people's spiritual life. Another cultural icon, *nón lá* (*the Vietnamese conical hat*) can also be seen in PD 22. In this performance, the rapper had

added two strings to the hat to be more suitable for his stage name *Đế Choắt* (*The Little Cricket*). *Nón lá* is not only a common object in Vietnamese households, especially in the countryside, but also an artistic symbol in Vietnamese literature and music. Therefore, the use of this significant object has shown the young's respect for the nation's cultural values. The performance with the most prominent cultural features that can be seen from the show is PD 33. In this performance, the rapper wore the traditional male *áo dài* and sat on the bamboo bed while all the children who were back-up dancers were dressed in *áo bà ba* (*Mrs. Ba shirt*) and black wide pants surrounding him. This can be interpreted that the rapper was the teacher and the dancers were the students in the feudal time in a rural area. In addition, not only is bamboo a common tree for the manufacture of handicrafts or furniture in Vietnamese villages, but its durability also reflects Vietnamese resilience. This stage arrangement also indicates a deep-rooted Vietnamese tradition named *tôn sư trọng đạo* (*honoring the teachers and respecting their teaching*), which shows the young's acknowledgement and commendation for the Vietnamese customs.

**Figure 1**

*The Traditional Male Áo dài*



Linguistic evidence of young rappers as patriots also can be seen in data as well. What stands out the most is the use of idiomatic expressions such as *rồng rắn lên mây* (follow my leaders) in PD 19, *có chí thì nên* (there is a will, there is a way) in PD 29, and *vạn sự khởi đầu nan* (the beginning is always the hardest) in PD 23. These idiomatic expressions have highlighted some Vietnamese cultural values such as resilience and solidarity. To be specific, the idiom *rồng rắn lên mây* in PD 19 refers to the children's game which the first person or the leader on the queue has to protect the people behind him or her against the opponent while chanting, and the people behind need to cooperate with the movement of the leader to avoid being caught. This implies the cooperation between a group of people to the same goal which is one of key features in Vietnamese collective culture. This culture fosters a strong bond between members in the group, be that a family, an extended family, or an extended relationship; moreover, it likely puts community concerns in priority. These latter two idioms convey a positive message which encourages people to make efforts to overcome hardship and obstacles. It is also noticeable that implicit speech acts are used in the performances through the use of folk tales, legends, and modern literary works. This can be seen in PD 15, the well-known legend *Sơn Tinh Thủy Tinh* (the Spirit of Mountains and the Spirit of the Seas) was retold by the rappers who mentioned Vietnam's famous geographical features such as Ha Long Bay or Vietnam's major historical events such as the historic Bach Dang Battle. Likewise, PD 29 presented the historical tale of Tran Quoc Toan crushing the orange in the debate before a foreign invasion of Vietnam. Meanwhile, PD 36 told the story of the national hero *Gióng* protecting the country. These references indicate the admiration of the young rappers for the natural scenery and the history of

Vietnam, as well as the strength, intelligence and patriotism of the Vietnamese.

Rap came to Vietnam through the exposure of Vietnamese youngsters to the Internet. It has affected Vietnamese youngsters in many aspects ranging from outfits to perspective, such as wearing baggy outfits, heavy golden chains and having distinct individuality. That may hold a different ideology from a collective country like Vietnam. Therefore, youngsters who are influenced by a western culture such as Hip-hop culture are often labelled as people who are westernized and lose their roots (Thi, 2014). However, the analysis of the rap performances above suggests otherwise. The rappers have also tried to include the Vietnamese cultural or national features in their song and their stage. In addition, according to Nguyen (2020), every musical genre is highly likely to be modified to easily blend in a new culture; therefore, rap is adjusted to be welcome in the social context of Vietnam. That is why the young Vietnamese rappers for several generations have made great efforts to make rap more Vietnamese.

#### **4.2. Youngsters as Individuals With Dreams and Aspirations**

A recurring theme that can be seen from the data is individuals with dreams and aspirations. It is apparent from the data that the young rappers dressed in signature extravagant hip-hop outfits such as spark jersey (PD 11), high-end trainers (PD 11, PD 2), heavy golden or silver necklace (PD 11, PD 31, PD 3, PD 6), and luxurious watch (PD 8, PD 16) or the accessories such as heavy chains (also known as bling bling) (PD 1, PD 2, PD 3), oversized suits (PD 16), high-brand sneakers (PD 1), baggy pants (PD 19), sparkle jackets (PD 3) and sport-wear clothes or jerseys (PD 26). Each of these garments and accessories expressed not only the individuality of the young rappers, but also their desire for an opulent



life. It also cultivates a sense of edgy and highlighted appearance for the rappers which complements the expressions and attitudes of hip-hop. This usually seems to be considered unbridled creativity in the face of challenge, outfighting the opposition. What should also be noticed is that some rappers have visible tattoos such as sleeve arms tattoos in PD 8 and PD 19 and even face tattoos in PD 22. This type of body painting commonly holds a negative connotation in Vietnamese society as people associate them with violence, gang and crime. However, in the realm of progressive rap, the majority of that body or face painting indicates an unforgettable individual story or rigorous endeavor to their dream. It is also worth noticing that the majority of the performances were in red stage light (PD7, PD 25, PD 28, PD 23) or had a segment red color in the stage screen (PD 6, PD 9, PD 16, PD 19, PD 23). This significant color can be interpreted as the positive attitude of the young towards challenges and hardships, since it is said to

### Figure 2

*Sleeve Arm Tattoos and Baggy Pants*

correlate closely to courage, determination, passion (Cerrato, 2012). Notably, their unshakeable self-confidence together with the solemn face expression in the performances also indicates their determination in the pursuit of their dreams. Going mainstream, rappers have their skin attached for self-expression, rebellion against the oppressors, artistic freedom, or a visual display of personal narrative in contrast to the tattoos related to criminality in the past. Notably, the rappers in most of the performances are gazing directly at the camera, mostly in frontal and medium shots, which allows them to gain more power, facilitate direct communication, and put them in a position to engage with the audiences. Moreover, the scenes not involving the rappers such as viewing the judges, or the audiences are taken through “offer” which is long shots. These scenes can be considered as a symbolic attribute for the ideals of ambition, prowess, and exclusivity.



Linguistics of individuals with dreams and aspirations also can be noted in the data. The figure of speech that most of the rappers used is metaphors. For example, in PD 11, the rappers have used several metaphors to talk about their dreams as follows:

*Đường dài và còn ngàn vạn trùng đẽ  
một ngày trong tương lai khao khát vẫn còn  
cháy nồng*

(There is a long way with hardships, one day in the future, his ambitious is still on blaze)

*Càng ngày càng lên cao hơn rồi một  
ngày chạm đỉnh Pentagon*

(Each day he reaches higher then one day he reaches Pentagon peak)

While *đường dài và còn ngàn vạn trùng* implies the long future with multiple obstacles, “Pentagon,” the highest position of shapes, refers to his yearning for success. The classic motif of utilizing metaphors to talk about aspiration and challenges is reiterated in PD 23. In this performance, the rappers also employed the metaphors, *ngàn vết xước* (a thousand cuts) and *câu chuyện* (the story).

*Để khiến ngàn vết xước của ta*

(Let my thousand cuts)

*Sẽ viết nên câu chuyện*

(Write a story)

Although the rappers talked about their dreams to be successful, wealthy, and renowned, they also mentioned how these materialistic aspects can corrupt people. For instance, in PD 11, after the young rappers had stated their dream to be renowned rappers with an opulent life, they mentioned how that life made people lose themselves in fame and money by using the opposite metaphors. In that scenario, the properties that they owned would be useless: *Khi mà ta đã vượt xa ở dưới đáy thì mới thấy tiền là giấy có mà lấy chỉ để không* (When I was far away from the bottom, I would see that

*money is just papers that just stays still*). Another similar notion can be seen in PD 28 through the phrases *bộ đồ Louis V* (Louis V clothes), *người đàn ông tham vọng* (the ambitious man), *lên TV* (being on TV), *nụ cười fake* (fake smile), and *từ bỏ lí trí* (lose his mind).

Being conscious of that materialistic life, the young have made a statement that as long as they work for their dreams because of passion, not of the comfort and opulence brought by money and fame, it would be meaningful. For example, in PD 16 the rappers have made it clear that their goal is to produce great art which has good influence on people: *sống để cống hiến chứ không để rũ bỏ sự bần hàn* (live to devote not to leave poverty). What should also be noticed is the contradiction between the high-end clothing items and the anti-materialism ideology in their lyrics. Almost half of the performances in the Rap Viet show hold this ideology, at the same time, they state how the opulent lives change people. This paradox may have a positive correlation to how rap is represented in the mainstream media. Generally, one of the “ghetto” characteristics, bling-bling materialism is a common topic of rap in the mass consumption market (Pope, 2005). It refers to the glamorous appearance with high end outfits and lavish accessories, extravagant lifestyle and how rappers boast about their success through excessive financial fortune. This evidences the succumbing to the capitalism of mainstream rappers which seems contrary to the authenticity of rap-rebellion to the social norms. Moreover, the key function of mainstream rap is to provide entertainment; therefore, it is crucial that rappers appear as ostentatious as possible. It can be seen from the data analysis that the young rappers tried to fulfill the mainstream rap’s requirements of providing entertainment, but still maintain the authenticity of rap. They voiced their dream or passion of doing the unordinary job

as a rapper with determination and a critical perspective, and they also expressed their disagreement towards materialistic life. In response to the commercialization of rap, Vietnamese young rappers have struggled to portray themselves as individuals with aspirations, dreams, and critical views on life.

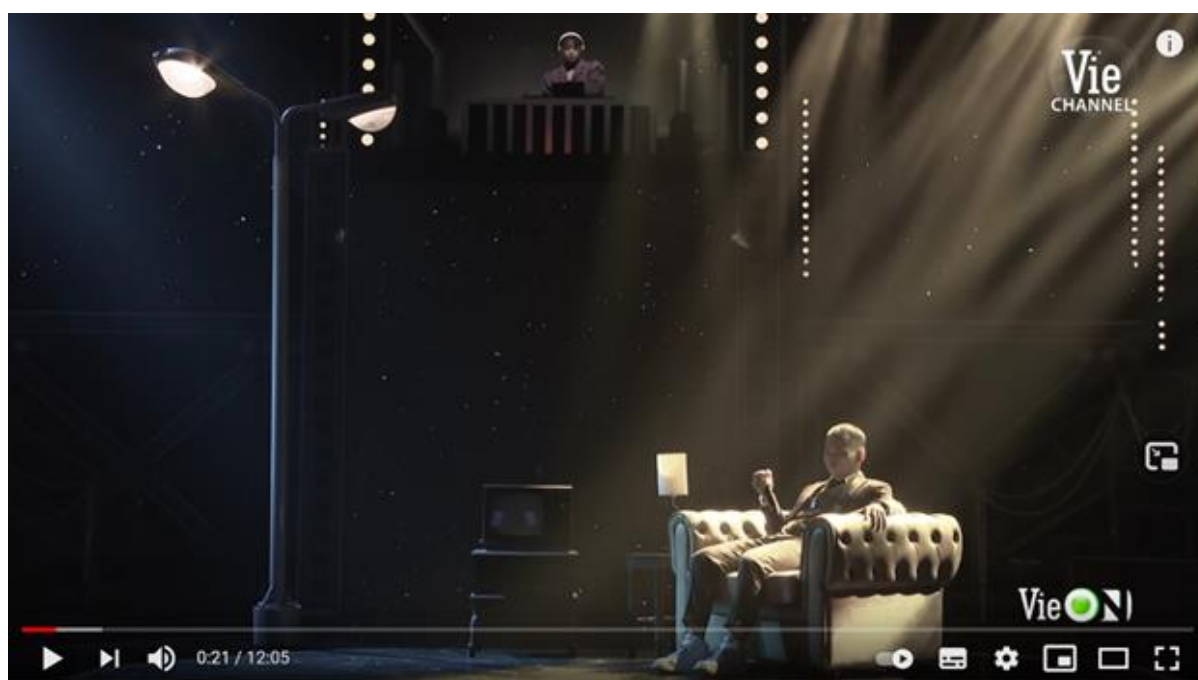
#### 4.3. Youngsters as Children of Their Parents

Another theme in terms of how the young rappers represent themselves as children of their parents. It is clear that the rappers performed with a formal look by wearing suits (PD 1, PD 16, PD 27, PD 28, PD 38). This represents the wish to be more

mature and responsible of the young towards their parents. What should also be noted is that stage arrangement reflects the memory of the rappers' family. To illustrate, in PD 27, there was an old black-white TV, a sofa which represented the home of the rapper. Another highlighted stage arrangement is that in PD 38, where the stage screen was the video of his own mother holding him when he was a toddler, and an oil lamp throughout the performance. The lamp represents the sacrifices of the mother for her child. These particular arrangements cultivate a sense of intimacy and a strong bond between the young and their family.

#### Figure 3

*Suit, Old Black-White TV, and Sofa*



Linguistic evidence of how the rappers represent themselves as children of their parents can be observed from the data as well. The speech act type in four out of seven performances includes a representative speech act, which told stories from their memory about their beloved parents, particularly mothers. This implied their love for parents. For instance, in PD 27,

the rapper told the audience his childhood story:

*Con nhớ những chiều ăn ốc với mẹ ở quán Cây Me*

*(I remember the time eating snails with mom under shop Cay Me)*

*Nhờ chiếc xe Cánh Én, người ôm bà già bộ say xe*

*(By the bike Canh En, I hugged  
grandma pretending to be bike sick)*

*Nhớ ngày đầu bên bếp, mẹ dạy con  
nấu thay mẹ*

*(Remember the first day in the  
kitchen, mom taught me how to cook for you)*

*Nhớ những bài nhạc cổ điển*

*(Remember the classical music)*

*Mà hai ba con mình vẫn hay nghe*

*(That my father and I used to hear)*

*Con từng ví mình là ngọn cỏ, còn ba  
mẹ là cả rừng cây*

*(I compared myself to a small herb,  
and parents are like a forest)*

*Xem mình là một chú chim nhỏ, được  
bao bọc giữa lưng chừng mây*

*(See myself as a little bird being  
protected by the cloud)*

*Chiều ăn ốc (eating snails in the  
afternoon), xe Cánh Én (Canh En bike),  
ngày đầu lên bếp (the first day in the  
kitchen), classical music (âm nhạc cổ điển)*  
are the special memories that helps to create  
a strong bond between the rapper and his  
family. Moreover, in this performance, there  
is a metaphor *ngọn cỏ* (a blade of grass)  
referring to himself, together with *rừng cây*  
(a forest) referring to his parents to talk  
about how the parents loved and took care of  
him when he was young. Similarly, the  
metaphors in the next sentence *chú chim nhỏ*  
(a little bird) and *đám mây* (the cloud) refer  
to himself and the love that he received,  
respectively. In the next verse, he expressed  
his love for his parents explicitly: *thì con biết  
ông trời đang cướp hai người con yêu nhất  
đi từng giây (I know God tried take the two  
people I love the most day by day)*. Another  
same motif by which offspring showing  
appreciation towards the parents was in PD  
36, *con muốn đứng trên tất cả ôm chặt  
những người con yêu (I want to hug the  
people I love)*.

It can be seen from the data analysis

that the young rappers' identity as children  
of their parents holds a positive correlation  
to their identity as patriots. To justify, filial  
piety is considered prominent in Vietnamese  
culture. Moreover, the metaphor *quê hương*  
(home) in PD 2 can have double meanings.  
One of which can be the nation while the  
other is likely to be home or the place where  
their beloved lives. The practice of  
Vietnamese culture or the love for the nation  
of the young rappers was also nurtured in the  
family through the stories, folktales, and  
historical facts. The fact that the rappers  
followed and voiced their dream despite the  
likely objection from their family evidenced  
their identity as people with aspiration.

However, it appears that young  
Vietnamese rappers, instead of swimming  
against the current as expected, conform to  
social norms, especially the theme  
*youngsters as patriots* and the theme  
*youngsters as children of their parents*  
which have a positive correlation with each  
other as they both suggest the compliance  
with the social expectation of popular rap in  
Vietnam. This is consistent with findings of  
Oware (2014) and Kadioğlu and Özdal  
(2020) who stated that it is possible that rap  
critically undergoes a heavy filtered system  
to be welcome in mainstream culture. This  
system eradicates any extreme ideologies or  
languages due to the expectation of the mass  
music industry to provide recreation. This  
restriction can also be explained by the fact  
that in the context of Vietnam, rap has been  
adjusted through this system as being noted  
in the data that no profanities emerged.  
Instead, the young rappers use metaphors  
with major relation to cultural stories,  
legends to voice their narratives about life  
crisis or young love. In other words, they are  
conforming to traditions and cultural values.  
This is contradictory to what the people  
commonly think of rap as a rebellious genre  
with rappers being framed as gangsters and  
rapping being a taboo. This assumption  
perhaps is because the exposure of

mainstream rap is majorly the “ghetto” features that highlight the drug industry encouragement, materialism, gangsterism and misogyny (Oware, 2014). It is also because of how rappers dress in extravagant hip-hop clothes, boast about fame and money while pointing their hands like a gun or throwing their fists in the air like aggressive people (Pope, 2005). In the context of Vietnam, the fact that the rappers perform in accordance with all the commonly exposed features of mainstream rap not only contributes to attracting the viewers, but also signifies themselves as rappers. In other words, they have performed their identity through outfits and body movements which are lineaments of hip-hop culture. This result confirms the definition and function of identity performance that are reported by Klein et al. (2007).

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Summary of Major Findings

This study set out to examine the construction and performance of Vietnamese youth identity through rap. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is how Vietnamese youth have utilized Vietnamese cultural stories, social phenomena together with hip-hop terms and vernacular to express their appreciation to their nation. The second major finding is how Vietnamese youth have constructed and performed their identity as individuals with dreams and aspirations. In this theme, Vietnamese youth have shown their determination and confidence in their competence and what they have undergone to pursue their goals through multiple narratives. This may imply the empowerment of Vietnamese youth in general. One of the other significant findings of this study is how the young rappers have constructed their identity as children of their parents. This shows their strong bonds with their family members, especially mothers

who wielded ideologies such as anti-materialism. This ideology establishes a close connection between the third theme *children of their parents* and the second theme *individuals with dreams and aspirations* because these themes help to portray Vietnamese youth as young people with ambitions and social consciousness. Meanwhile, both the first theme *patriots* and the third theme *children of their parents* suggest the youth’s compliance with the social expectation of mainstream rap.

In summary, rap music is a manifestation and embodiment of youth non-social movement and culture. In this movement, art expression and multiple communication have interwoven to produce new discourses that reflect youth identity.

### 5.2. Limitations

A main limitation of this study is that it did not consider other important aspects of a stage performance such as the rappers’ voice, music, gestures, and choreography, which are critical to the construction and performance of their identity. It is also limited by the lack of information on official Vietnamese rap information. Besides, another major drawback of this study is viewing youth’s identity in an entertainment show which puts priority on attracting an audience instead of giving the artists freedom to express themselves. This could put a limit on how the youth construct and perform their identity, as well as the diversity of identities that are salient in the show. It is advisable that further research be carried out in order to validate how the young construct and perform their identities through rap in Vietnam.

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### Appendix

No	Name of the song and the artist	The link to the song	Upload time
PD 1	Colorless (Không màu) - VVSIX vs Tony D	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAxToNdc_YY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAxToNdc_YY</a>	13/09/2020
PD 2	And me (Và tôi) - JBee 7 vs Lăng LD	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nn9Ib5hHXMs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nn9Ib5hHXMs</a>	21/09/2020
PD 3	Shine (Tỏa sáng) - R.I. C vs F	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Qr_Qw2dCIA&amp;t=126s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Qr_Qw2dCIA&amp;t=126s</a>	21/09/2020
PD 4	This earth (Trái đất này) - Đế Choắt vs B: Okeh	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zeMs88qA74">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zeMs88qA74</a>	22/09/2020
PD 5	Stay (Ở lại đây) - Gill vs Yang	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6y_gkW4OuUE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6y_gkW4OuUE</a>	20/09/2020
PD 6	Run (Chạy) - GDucky vs Tez	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3jXY2YZ-wM&amp;t=114s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3jXY2YZ-wM&amp;t=114s</a>	20/09/2020
PD 7	Don't (Đừng) - Nul vs Hydra	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBI_LQY8oop4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBI_LQY8oop4</a>	20/09/2020
PD 8	M. A. Y - RPT MCK vs Yuno BigBoi vs Duy Andy	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivZj4iHtjWI&amp;t=75s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivZj4iHtjWI&amp;t=75s</a>	20/09/2020
PD 9	The modern moon boy (Bòm hiện đại) - Bad BZ vs Đạt Dope	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2AEWhs4uOM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2AEWhs4uOM</a>	27/09/2020
PD 10	Traffic congestion (Kẹt xe) - Kuboss vs Lor	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CopCcofY9Yc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CopCcofY9Yc</a>	27/09/2020
PD 11	Triangle world (Thế giới tam giác) - Tage vs Gừng	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzDbHeeFgg4&amp;t=148s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzDbHeeFgg4&amp;t=148s</a>	27/09/2020

PD 12	Love...Weather (Tình... hình thời tiết) - Tling vs Ak49 vs Hà Quốc Hoàng	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mx0FRw66ir0&amp;t=270s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mx0FRw66ir0&amp;t=270s</a>	27/09/2020
PD 13	Meeting each other is Skrrtt (Gặp nhau là Skrrtt) - 16 Typh vs Lee Boo	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lr2TR7YNAS4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lr2TR7YNAS4</a>	04/10/2020
PD 14	Pay back (trả nợ) - Mac Junior - Lil. Cell - Hành Or	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obqSpBJ66SI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obqSpBJ66SI</a>	04/10/2020
PD 15	Mountain spirit and sea spirit (Sơn Tinh Thủy Tinh) - R.Tee vs Ricky Star	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkcfxZXQ3bg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkcfxZXQ3bg</a>	04/10/2020
PD 16	Sand and gold dust (Hạt cát bụi vàng) - RPT Gonza vs Thành Draw	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBXEB5G0W4I&amp;t=315s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBXEB5G0W4I&amp;t=315s</a>	04/10/2020
PD 17	Step (Bước) - Đạt Dope	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ng-Zo6e3_cM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ng-Zo6e3_cM</a>	11/10/2020
PD 18	The real picture - Ak49	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwo8yAMkOJg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwo8yAMkOJg</a>	11/10/2020
PD 19	Follow-my-leader (Rồng rắn lên mây) - Thành Draw	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34d9de_S4vw&amp;t=183s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34d9de_S4vw&amp;t=183s</a>	11/10/2020
PD 20	Duong Qua is too stretching, the martial arts festival (Duong Quá căng, Đại hội võ lâm) - Hydra	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1qFi4bWr9o">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1qFi4bWr9o</a>	11/10/2020
PD 21	Who is that? (Người ấy là ai?) - 16 Typh	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r65cn_GA1oU&amp;t=185s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r65cn_GA1oU&amp;t=185s</a>	11/10/2020
PD 22	The adventure (Phiêu lưu ký) - Dế Choắt	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0qHfB5gvIo&amp;t=116s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0qHfB5gvIo&amp;t=116s</a>	11/10/2020
PD 23	The beginning is always the hardest (Vạn sự khởi đầu nan) - Duy Andy	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLD4SFzRUxw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLD4SFzRUxw</a>	18/10/2020
PD 24	Have an iron constitution (Mình đồng da sắt) - TEZ	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckWumGMZvdY&amp;t=402s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckWumGMZvdY&amp;t=402s</a>	18/10/2020



PD 25	Don't lower your head when looking down (Đừng cúi đầu khi nhìn xuống) - Tony D	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWgaLzKwDQM&amp;t=113s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWgaLzKwDQM&amp;t=113s</a>	18/10/2020
PD 26	There is too much work in the house (Nhà bao việc) - RTee	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRebHB3d6is&amp;t=193s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRebHB3d6is&amp;t=193s</a>	18/10/2020
PD 27	If it is love, say so (Yêu là phải nói) - Lor	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLDiXYIwzoo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLDiXYIwzoo</a>	18/10/2020
PD 28	What to do with much money (Tiền nhiều để làm gì) - GDucky	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_3fbvQgyzA&amp;t=199s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_3fbvQgyzA&amp;t=199s</a>	17/10/2020
PD 29	Where there is a will there is a way (Có chí thì nên) - Hành Or	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_mrzRXDG5c">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_mrzRXDG5c</a>	25/10/2020
PD 30	Seeing is believing (Trăm nghe không bằng thấy) - F	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRXYJT6YTDI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRXYJT6YTDI</a>	25/10/2020
PD 31	T.A.O (The ambitious one) - Tage	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQnXu16JhaY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQnXu16JhaY</a>	25/10/2020
PD 32	Let it be (Mặc sự đời) - TLinh	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_liyxYIKQA&amp;t=63s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_liyxYIKQA&amp;t=63s</a>	25/10/2020
PD 33	Teacher Nam (Thầy Nam) - RPT Gonzo	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7gU3vbq7OI&amp;t=637s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7gU3vbq7OI&amp;t=637s</a>	25/10/2020
PD 34	Rich because of friend, luxurious because of wife (Giàu vì bạn, sang vì vợ) - RPT MCK	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHpNIZjxzsY&amp;t=47s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHpNIZjxzsY&amp;t=47s</a>	25/10/2020
PD 35	Modest (Nét na) - JBee 7	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0V5cCvZpMA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0V5cCvZpMA</a>	01/11/2020
PD 36	Sweep it all (Quét sạch hết) - Gill	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5papBnyA-g">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5papBnyA-g</a>	01/11/2020
PD 37	Future (Tiền đồ) - R.I.C	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NI7QMC00smw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NI7QMC00smw</a>	01/11/2020

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PD 38	Just leaving from the hometown (Ở nhà quê mới lên) - Lãng LD	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K76fy5IxU08">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K76fy5IxU08</a>	01/11/2020
PD 39	The good kid from other family (Con nhà người ta) - Ricky Star	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DC_VWW_S2M">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DC_VWW_S2M</a>	01/11/2020

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## SỰ HÌNH THÀNH VÀ THỂ HIỆN CĂN TÍNH NGƯỜI TRẺ THÔNG QUA NHẠC RAP: NGHIÊN CỨU ĐIỂN HÌNH VỀ CHƯƠNG TRÌNH RAP VIỆT

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**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu này liên quan đến lí thuyết về phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán của Fairclough (1989). Trong thời gian gần đây, nhạc rap đã chiếm được vị trí ổn định trong truyền thông chính thống và mang đến màn ảnh truyền hình một văn hóa giới trẻ đầy sôi nổi. Nhạc rap là nơi để người trẻ kể câu chuyện của họ và người khác, cũng như để họ vẽ lên một chân dung khác của mình (Sciullo, 2019). Áp dụng khung lí thuyết của Fairclough (1989) cùng với khung lí thuyết của Kress và van Leeuwen (2006), chúng tôi nghiên cứu diễn ngôn của rap tiếng Việt thông qua các yếu tố ngôn ngữ học và hình ảnh. Nghiên cứu là một nỗ lực để trả lời câu hỏi: nhạc rap đã đóng góp như nào đến sự hình thành và thể hiện căn tính của người Việt trẻ? Nghiên cứu gợi ý rằng người trẻ Việt đã xây dựng và thể hiện căn tính của mình như là những người yêu nước, những cá nhân với ước mơ và hoài bão, và những đứa con của bố mẹ họ. Những chủ đề này có liên kết chặt chẽ với nhau và phản ánh sự tuân thủ của người trẻ Việt với những kì vọng xã hội về nhạc rap chính thống.

*Từ khóa:* rap, phân tích diễn ngôn đa phương tiện, căn tính người trẻ