

# Media and (Im)mortality:

## **The Influence of Death on Popularity and Success**

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## **Abstract**

Musicians who die young often become more famous after their death and moreover, this popularity sometimes continues to exist years or even decades afterwards which consequently has a chance to turn these musicians into legends. Research has shown that the development of media and the growing celebrity culture have impacted the ways individuals perceive famous people. The fans may often view celebrities as a part of their personal lives which may be a reason for them to strive for maintaining the presence of deceased artists by, for instance, listening to their music or posting content connected to them on social media. This study aims to determine the ways in which individuals mourn and grieve over their idols, the role of media in this process and as a result, how the presence of deceased musicians is maintained in a long-term by the forces of fans, media or other heritage left after the artists. With this in mind, the research questions of this study cover such aspects as the extent to which fans' lives are affected by their idol, common practices of mourning and grieving over deceased musicians, the role of media in this process, and the role of the audience in the growing popularity of deceased musicians.

After exploring previous research and preparing the theoretical framework for the study, an online survey was distributed to the fans of the chosen deceased musicians. Respondents were asked questions about celebrities and their deaths, the ways in which the participants were coping with loss, the role of media in this process, and the reasons for them to continue getting back to the art created by those musicians. Analysis of the responses demonstrated that the development of media has made it easier for the fans to share their feelings, discuss difficult topics, and open up about their struggles online. Additionally, it turned out that despite a strong emotional connection with the late musicians, when listening to their music, the fans, in fact, were reconnecting not with the musicians, but with their own past that the music reminded them of. Given these points, it may be concluded that media performs an important function for individuals who have experienced loss through granting them a chance to speak openly about their feelings or struggles, connect with other adherents, and even more so, connect with their true selves.

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## Introduction and Background

The next day after the death of Tim Bergling<sup>1</sup>, who is mostly known by his stage name Avicii, his songs sales in the United States increased by over 6000% compared to the previous day (Caulfield, 2018). A few days after his death, 10 of Avicii's songs hit Spotify's "Global 50" chart while in Sweden, 8 out of 10 top tracks were Avicii's songs (Cain, 2018). According to Rachel Kupfer (2019), Avicii is "the most popular deceased EDM<sup>2</sup> influencer" and the number of his Instagram followers has increased by approximately 33% after his death (Kupfer, 2019).

This is not the only example of a celebrity whose popularity and sales rapidly increased after his/her death. As an illustration, I would like to describe a case of my friend Roman who was a member of a rather well-known band from Belarus. Shortly after he died in 2017, the band (with a new set of members) has become extremely popular in Russian speaking countries and suddenly started having stadium concerts for dozens of thousands of fans. In addition to this, Roman's Instagram profile is still getting new followers despite the fact that he is obviously not posting content anymore.

This situation is quite surprising since a deceased musician is not going to create music or produce any sort of new content. As a result, it creates a question regarding the reasons for the audience to be interested in something that is finished and not going to be renewed. In other words, it is not completely clear how the death of a famous musician is capable of increasing his/her album sales, positions in charts, streamings on Spotify, and numbers of followers on social media so drastically after the death announcement and moreover, make them remain high in a long-term. In order to understand the origins of this situation, it is important to take into account the dynamics of a relationship between a fan and a famous person; how it started and developed; what factors impact creating and maintaining of this relationship.

For a long time, celebrities, and musicians in particular, have been a part of life of ordinary people. By sharing their skills with the masses, musicians, in some way, open up a door to their lives (to a certain extent) and share it with people. It may be a tiny part of their lives, but it is enough to make fans feel as if they have full access to it and consequently, are a part of this life. The extent to which musicians' lives are open to the public varies but the development of media (particularly, social media) has made it especially easy to track events in celebrities' lives. Sometimes fans following a musician's Instagram profile, get a chance to know what one ate for breakfast, whom one met for lunch, where one works, goes to yoga or

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<sup>1</sup> according to BBC News (2018), Bergling died on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2018 at the age of 28

<sup>2</sup> Electronic dance music

buys coffee. There are even cases when following a celebrity (following directly and not just on social media) becomes the main activity and purpose of life of fans (Bates and Low, 2016). As a result, there is no surprise that any event happening in a musician's life, positive or negative, causes a reaction from the fandom. One such event is death.

First of all, premature death is not a rare occurrence among famous musicians. As Dianna T. Kenny and Anthony Asher (2016) state, representatives of the popular music industry are more likely to get involved in situations of risk-taking, substance abuse and subsequently, early death comparing to general populations. Additionally, taking into account the size of the audience of famous musicians, such an event is likely to touch rather big numbers of people which brings us to the conclusion that most of the fans had to experience the death of their idol at least once in a lifetime.

Regardless of whether it happened for the first time in the life of a fan or not, the announcement of the death of a famous musician usually receives a rather big response from the audience. In other words, this type of news is usually not something that the audience just consumes and forgets about right after. Instead, fans tend to take action, whether it would be giving increased attention to the news, researching the facts by checking different sources, being active on social media spreading the news and sharing emotions, expressing growing interest to the music of the deceased artist, etc.

According to Donald Allport Bird, et al. (1976), paying increased attention to the musicians who passed away is quite common when speaking about idol/fan relationships. As the authors state, fans tend to consider their idol as their property and therefore, even if s/he passed away, the fans are completely capable of not giving the discussions on the topic and the music of the artist fade away (Bird, et al., 1976). As a result, on the condition that the irreversibility of such event as death implies that there will be no events anymore connected to the musician, the audience has to put effort into sustaining the musician's presence.

Although, an interesting fact is that deaths of exceptionally famous musicians usually attract a lot of attention not only from the fans but also from general audiences. It might look as the bigger the artist is, the more important it becomes to be aware of the event of death as well as of the music that s/he has produced. As if being aware of the event becomes similar to common knowledge, something that everyone has to know. This situation may create pressure for individuals who are not familiar with the artist and oblige them to get involved into the experience.

In general, people tend to feel compassion and empathy when they hear the news about someone passing away without necessarily knowing him/her personally or being a fan of his/her

work when it comes to celebrities. Nowadays, in the era of ever-growing celebrity culture, grieving over a famous person oftentimes may be experienced similarly to a personal loss. Especially in cases when one has been following a celebrity's life on social media on a regular basis, not receiving new updates anymore can have a strong emotional impact on individuals.

In addition to this, increased attention may happen due to simple curiosity and fear. Death is terrifying but people still want to know more about it as if it is something that can be avoided. To some individuals, celebrities may feel as something above average people, something sacred and protected. That is why situations like this often make ordinary people wonder about their own destiny. It may feel as if something as frightening as death happens to such a powerful person, that means that no one is safe. As Charlton D. McIlwain (2005, p. 20) stated, "[t]his is especially true when we may increasingly have access to those with whom we closely identify and who, because of their impending death, speak specifically to and about a future that will someday be ours". As a result, this fosters even bigger interest in the event and makes individuals search for answers to know how it happened, what life the artist used to live, what s/he was thinking about while being alive, and what one can do differently to avoid this situation.

Another interesting aspect of the deaths of popular musicians is that oftentimes, the death itself gains a glorified and even heroic connotation. In order to understand how different the perception of a celebrity's death is comparing to a death of an ordinary person, it would be useful to compare the image of the death of a relative, friend, or acquaintance with one of a famous artist. In the first case, the death would probably be painful, difficult to experience, maybe expensive, and definitely far from being pretty while the death of a famous musician would probably have some symbolic or even heroic connotation. It can be painful and difficult to cope with too, but it would also have this glory and strange beauty in it. As if in this case, death gains a purpose and meaning. Death becomes symbolic.

All things considered, this symbolism and postmortem attention to deceased musicians oftentimes result in increased interest in the art produced by the musicians and in their personal lives. Namely, after the announcement of death, one's album sales, numbers of followers on social media, positions in charts, and streamings on Spotify tend to increase significantly and, in some cases, they remain high for years or even continue growing which subsequently make these artists true legends.

This situation creates a question about the reasoning of the audience to express increased attention to deceased artists which sometimes lasts years or even decades. What are the main factors that keep the audience attached to the art or the artist who passed away? I would assume

that it may be an emotional connection to the artist and attempts to prolong and maintain it by connecting through the music. Another hypothesis may be the desire to become a part of the shared grief and mourn the artist together with other fans and by doing this, get some sort of satisfaction from being a part of a union, a collective experience. It may also be connected to the idea that the event of death overshadows the negative sides of the musician and his/her art and leaves only the beautiful moments and therefore, makes it easier for the fans to get attached to. Or it can be something completely different from these hypotheses that will be discovered while conducting the research.

## **Previous Research, Objectives and the Purpose of the Current Research**

This chapter will include a brief analysis of the previous research connected to the topic of the representation of celebrities' deaths in media and the use of media by the fans in mourning; the ways in which the previous research can be applied while conducting the current research as well as the gaps that will hopefully be bridged with the results of the current study. After that, taking into account the missing points of the previous research, this chapter will describe the aim and purpose of the current study in order to fill the gaps and the ways of achieving it.

### **Previous Research**

Some aspects of the topic were previously researched, but the angles were usually limited to two main directions: the ways in which individuals use media to process deaths of people they used to know personally or the representation of deaths of famous people and important events in media. Even though these topics do not completely cover the theme of this study, they will be helpful in understanding the background of the topic and the aspects that need to be researched.

For instance, the book "Haunting Hands: Mobile Media Practices and Loss" by Kathleen M. Cumiskey and Larissa Hjorth (2017) will be especially helpful in this research since it explores the use of media and mobile technologies while experiencing loss. The authors focus on the emotional connection that individuals build with the ones who passed away through such medium as a mobile phone and how the feeling of the presence of a late person can be achieved within a mobile device. Thus, even though this work does not fully cover the aspects of this thesis' topic, it can still be applied for exploring similar concepts but in the idol/fan relationships.

Another example of the previous research on the topic of death and media is the article "#Funeral and Instagram: death, social media, and platform vernacular" by Martin Gibbs, et al. (2015) where the authors researched how death is being represented on social media as well as the practices of sharing and discussing death, mourning, and commemoration on Instagram. To do that, Gibbs, et al. explored the photographs posted on Instagram with the hashtag "funeral". As a result, they concluded that in most cases, those posts were selfies or photographs of people together; other commonly used categories were popular culture references, memes, and advertisements of burial services (Gibbs, et al., 2015).



The most surprising discovery was that the majority of cases did not include funerals themselves and instead, the photographs were often tagged with other popular hashtags, such as “likeforlike”, “sexy”, “fashion”, “followme”. At first, it was not clear how the posts could be tagged with this combination of hashtags, but the authors concluded that in fact, by doing this, Instagram users tried to communicate their presence and connect with others. As the authors state, “[c]ontemporary funerals are social experiences, and mourners are sharing photographs to create a sense of proximity, connection, and co-presence with friends, family, and acquaintances that may not be present” (Gibbs, et al., 2015).

Additionally, the use of social media in mourning experiences was explored by Anna J. M. Wagner (2018) in her article “Do not Click ‘Like’ When Somebody has Died: The Role of Norms for Mourning Practices in Social Media”. In the article, the author explored the rules (oftentimes, unspoken rules) that are common for certain types of mourning practices on social media. For example, those rules often focused on the use of social media when sharing mourning; different types of content used for this purpose; other forms of grief expression; reacting to others in mourning; and how these norms affect users’ behavior. She concluded that even though there are no official regulations (other than the platforms’ user agreements), there are still certain norms around mourning on social media that individuals have to follow (Wagner, 2018).

Another common area of exploration by researchers in connection to the subject is the representation of death of famous people and/or important events in media that was discussed in such works as “Representing Death in the News: Journalism, Media and Mortality” by Folker Hanusch (2010) and “Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death” by Susan D. Moeller (1999). These works focus mainly on the technical side of media representation, i.e. the use of images, visuals, language, frames, and other tools in creating and fostering emotions and reaction in order to achieve certain goals.

When considering the application of these two works as a part of the theoretical framework of this study, it becomes apparent that they are lacking the perception of celebrities’ deaths by the audiences which is one of the crucial aspects of this master thesis. Nevertheless, understanding the ways of communicating the news about deaths by media outlets is an important component of this research that needs to be explored prior to conducting interviews.

### **Statement of Purpose**

Based on the previous research, it may be concluded that there is insufficient amount of academic works that would focus on the perception of the representation of celebrities’ death

in media by the audience, the role of media in the experience of mourning and grieving as well as in the lasting popularity and success of deceased artists. The nature of this topic is rather complex and therefore, needs to be explored through the prism of multiple angles.

Therefore, this master thesis aims to understand the ways in which fans of deceased musicians use media when experiencing mourning and grieving over the artists. The goal will be achieved through researching the influence of specific attributes of media representation on the target audience, and the response that this influence fosters in the audience, i.e. feelings, thoughts, actions, and behavioral patterns directly after the death announcement as well as in a long-term. The study will be executed by conducting a brief research of the ways in which the musicians' death announcements were communicated to the audiences, and by interviewing representatives of the target audience – fans.

Covering the aspects mentioned above will help us understand connections between such concepts as popularity and death, art and commemoration, media and death, media and immortality. As a result, I hope to find an answer to the main question of this thesis which is how deceased musicians manage to achieve immortality (in some sense) through the music and the heritage left after them and how media and technological development have impacted this process.

In order to achieve a clearer understanding of the loss experience and the perception of death by the audiences, there is a need for including a comparative aspect into this study which will highlight the differences and/or similarities in the use of media as well as in death rituals and mourning practices in different locations and time periods. Due to this requirement, for the research, I have chosen three cases of famous musicians from three different locations and time periods: Sid Vicious (the 1970s, the United Kingdom), Viktor Tsoi (the 1990s, the Soviet Union), and Avicii (the 2010s, Sweden). More information about each of the research cases will be provided in the next chapter.

Including a comparative aspect into the study will give us the opportunity to understand the differences and/or similarities in the perception of deaths of celebrities and the role of media in mourning and grieving in different media environments. Due to the fact that media has gone through big changes during these time periods and moreover, taking into account that the chosen locations have very different cultures, norms, and media environments, the results will be rather diverse which will hopefully give us a clearer understanding of the subject by providing contrast and making visible distinctions and differences that otherwise would not be as obvious.

## **Research Cases and the Representation of Death in Media**

This chapter of the thesis will focus on the cases of three musicians who passed away 2, 20, and 41 years ago but are still not forgotten by their fans based on their album sales, positions in charts, mentions in media sources, and opinions of the audiences. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the cases chosen for this study represent three different time periods and locations. Each of the time periods (the 1970s, the 1990s, and the 2010s) showcases different stages of media development (including such a major factor as spreading of the Internet) as well as different extent of immersion of the audiences into the media environment. In addition to this, three chosen countries that the musicians were born and became famous in are characterized by rather different cultural backgrounds and traditions of mourning, expressing feelings, sharing thoughts and emotions with others which will also have impact on the perception of death by the audiences.

The second section of this chapter is called “The Representation of Death in Media” and contains a brief analysis of the publications of the death announcements of the three chosen musicians. This part of the study will help us understand better similarities and differences in how the news were communicated depending on an artist, location, cause of death, etc. and how it ultimately affected the ways in which the musicians were perceived by the audiences afterward. As a result, it will hopefully provide some clarity regarding the extent to which individuals’ opinions about the musicians and their art are dependent on and affected by the media representation of their lives and deaths.

### **Research Cases**

The first research case will focus on the example of the Swedish DJ Avicii who was mentioned at the very beginning of this paper. In addition to the figures of Avicii’s success after his death, such as extremely increased album sales, positions in charts, followers on social media, critical acclaim, etc., it can be noticed that a general opinion from media sources regarding his death nowadays is that it was a big personal loss for many people because Tim Bergling was a kind, sensitive and loving person who will be missed by his family, friends, and fans (NME Music News, 2018). Overall, many critics stated that it was also a loss for the whole electronic music industry and now, two years after his death, Avicii is already called a legend (Solis, 2020).

Another case study of this research focuses on Sid Vicious, the bassist of the English punk rock band Sex Pistols. The band split up in January 1978 (Perry, 2018) and Vicious died one year later at the age of 21 (Sommerlad, 2019). The artist was described as a controversial

and toxic figure even by his close friends and was extremely difficult to deal with according to the memories of people who knew him (Paytress, 2004). In addition to this, a couple of months before his death, Vicious woke up to find his partner Nancy Spungen stabbed with a knife. He was accused of her murder which he initially admitted, later denied, and then partly denied. In the end, he was released on bail (Monroe, 2020).

Despite these circumstances, four decades later, the Sex Pistols and particularly the bassist Sid Vicious remain a cult that was a beginning for the whole punk movement in the United Kingdom and throughout the world. The Sex Pistols' album "Never Mind the Bollocks Here's the Sex Pistols" is nowadays number 3 in the list of 40 greatest punk albums of all time according to The Rolling Stones (Dolan, et al., 2016). What is also interesting is that a few days after the publication of the article, the magazine gave its readers a chance to vote for the albums that in their view deserved to be in the list of the 10 best punk albums in which the Sex Pistols' album was ranked first (Greene, 2016). In addition to this, in 2018, a rare Sex Pistols vinyl record was sold on Discogs<sup>3</sup> for more than \$15000 which represents the most expensive single ever sold on the platform (Moreau, 2019).

During the times of the Sex Pistols' popularity at the end of the 1970s, their song "God Save the Queen" was banned from being played on BBC for "gross bad taste" and the U.K. Parliament threatened the band to ban all sales of the record (Fest, 2017) while nowadays, despite the questionable skills and quality of music, the Sex Pistols and Sid Vicious are widely considered absolute punk legends. Many of the fans admit that Vicious was a mentally sick and unstable person but, nevertheless, it does not make them stop admiring his art and personality (Paytress, 2004).

The third case study is dedicated to Viktor Tsoi, a Soviet singer and the leader of the band "Kino" which takes a special place in hearts and memory of many citizens of post-soviet countries including even younger generations of individuals who were born after his death. Tsoi died on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1990 at the age of 28 in a car collision. According to the experts, the collision happened because the musician has fallen asleep while driving and lost control of the car (Kurbov, 2019). The special feature of this case is that, as was mentioned in vast amounts of reports, the number of suicides significantly increased during the first days after Tsoi's death (Kabackis, 2019). When I asked my mother if she remembered the times around the date of the artist's death, she reminisced the news about "crazy fans" and the suicides taking place around the Soviet space.

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<sup>3</sup> The most well-known online marketplace for music rarities

Thirty years later, in many towns in the former Soviet Union, admirers of Viktor Tsoi's music still bring flowers to the memorials (usually constructed by the forces of the fans) and write on the walls their messages to the late idol who has abandoned his fans. "He was a revolutionary", says my mother reminiscing how Tsoi was the first one in such a closed-minded and overly controlled place as the Soviet Union to speak openly about the fears that every citizen could relate to. Probably this relatability of the artist was the main factor for Viktor Tsoi to continue being popular even decades after his death – the fans can still relate to his music.

During Tsoi's lifetime, his popularity was rather limited. He was well-known and respected but only within small circles. His songs were not played on radio and his fans did not fill the stadiums until the last several months of his life. After his death, many critics claimed that his art would be forgotten in less than a couple of years (Jazykov, 2017) but that was not the case. In fact, 30 years after Tsoi's death, his songs are known by the majority of people in post-soviet countries, even by the ones who were born after his death; festivals and events are being regularly organized to honor his music; documentaries are being filmed about his life and art (Jazykov, 2017). Even after his death, Tsoi keeps earning millions (of Russian rubles) according to Egor Aref'ev (2019). People still call him a human legend and the last hero of his times.

### **Representation of Death in Media**

Ideally, this chapter should have focused on specific media that covered the deaths of the chosen musicians at the time right after the deaths took place. Unfortunately, it was extremely difficult to find original sources that published this information since the Internet was not available for the general public when it comes to the cases of Sid Vicious and Viktor Tsoi. Nevertheless, I have found some information from those times that can be used together with post-mortem publications describing the deaths of the chosen musicians. Even though the articles that were published years after the events of death will not provide a full context of how the news were covered in media, they can still give us an idea of how they were communicated to the audiences, which keywords were most often used in the materials and what a general attitude was towards the deceased musicians.

As can be seen on the example of the article published in the New York Times the next day after Sid Vicious' death, there was quite a strong negative attitude towards the artist (Kifner, 1979). The author emphasizes the most extreme features of Vicious' death and the events that took place prior to it, such as the stabbing murder of his partner Nancy Spungen, cutting his wrists with broken light bulbs in a suicide attempt, drug addiction, violent outbursts, and other

kinds of unhealthy behavior. As an example, the author quotes one of the music reviewers who described Vicious as “a particularly rabid series of offstage carryings on” (Kifner, 1979). No signs of sympathy or at least, pity, are observed in the announcement. Even the notion about the possibility of suicide is communicated rather emotionlessly.

When exploring other articles about Sid Vicious’ death that were published afterward, the same tendency can be observed, although, not so strongly negative. It is noticeable that with the matter of time, Vicious’ unusual personality became more accepted and sometimes even appreciated by the media while the unpleasant nuances of his life were mentioned less often (Savage, 2009). At the same time, the most recent publications about the musician seem to focus more on the impact that Sid Vicious has made on the punk culture rather than on his personal flaws (Kreft, 2019). Nevertheless, his life and death are still associated with such notions as murder, suicide, overdose, mental illness, cult, icon, violence.

In terms of Viktor Tsoi, no publications dated close to the day of his death were found. Probably, this is due to the fact that Russian media do not usually digitalize older archives and therefore, they can only be accessed directly in local libraries. In order to still find some information available and understand how Tsoi’s life and death were covered in media, I have researched the articles about him that were published during the years after his death and found certain patterns in the publications.

First of all, Tsoi’s death is most commonly described with the keywords “tragic” and “unexpected” (Aref’ev, 2019). Additionally, there are quite a few mentions of the fans’ reaction, including an increased numbers of suicides in the first days after his death, as was mentioned earlier in this paper (Kabackis, 2019), and the camps organized in the proximity to the cemetery where the funerals should have taken place for the fans to be able to attend (Kurbov, 2019). There are also publications containing investigations and conspiracy theories regarding the death of the artist, such as suspicion on a murder, suicide or even a denial of his death at all (Menshikov, 2019). What is interesting is that most of the investigations were conducted within the last few years. It is not clear whether it happened because before, there were certain difficulties with arranging any investigative reporting (due to the lack of tools, censorship or control of the government, or other interested persons) or because the curiosity about it increased only recently.

Overall, praising Viktor Tsoi’s personal qualities seems to be a common feature of the majority of the articles about him. No publications were found that would focus on the death of the artist without mentioning long lists of his achievements, personal qualities, such as responsibility and kindness, and the fans’ feelings and actions, such as bringing flowers and

photographs to his grave and the place of the accident, constructing memorials in his honor, organizing events in his memory. It is worth noticing that Viktor Tsoi was also a rebel, if to compare him to Sid Vicious, who stood up against the regime and the norms that not so many dared to fight before. Nevertheless, this rebellion does not seem to be represented as negative or violent. Instead, Tsoi is associated with such terms as bravery and courage.

When looking at the example of Tim Bergling's death, the positive and very warm attitude towards him becomes obvious. Different websites in different countries described the artist's death by using such words as devastating, heart-breaking, shocking, unexpected, big loss, etc. For instance, when announcing his death, BBC News (2018) has compiled all the achievements of the musician together with the quotes and social media posts by world famous stars about his death. In my view, the authors of the article aimed to showcase the signs of Avicii's success and at the same time, the pain of losing him expressed by other celebrities to emphasize how big of a loss his death was for the whole world. It can also be noticed on some of the headlines of the articles, as, for example, "Avicii: chart-topping EDM star dies at 28" (Nevins, 2018) where his value is already set in the headline wording. Not to mention that no publications were found that would include any negative opinion about Tim Bergling or his music.

To summarize, it can be clearly observed that the ways in which the musicians' deaths were covered in media are completely different. The attitude of media outlets towards the musicians is rather obvious: Sid Vicious was represented as a violent and mentally sick drug addict and murderer, Viktor Tsoi – as a brave crusader for justice, and Avicii – as a kind and sensitive human being. Nevertheless, it is not clear if the image that the media are conveying has direct influence on the fans of the musicians and whether the fans perceived them the same way or differently. Therefore, there is a need for exploring the perception of the fans while conducting the surveys.

## **Research Questions and Theoretical Framework**

This chapter of the thesis will start with the list of the research questions of the study and continue with the theoretical framework applied in order to find answers to them. The theoretical framework is divided into five themes: Celebrity and Fan Studies, Mourning Rituals and Social Collectivism, Mediatized Grief, Afterlife Co-Presence, and Death Becomes Symbolic. Separation of the theoretical framework into sections is attributable to the complexity of the subject and therefore, the need for breaking it down into the themes. Exploring the topic through the prism of these five themes will not only be applied in the theoretical framework, but will also recur in the analytical model, interview guidelines, and analysis of the results which will hopefully give us a clearer understanding of the subject and its different aspects.

### **Research questions**

As was mentioned in the statement of purpose, the goal of this study is to understand different aspects of media use among the fans when mourning and grieving over deceased musicians. To have a clearer picture of the subject, the aim can be broken down into three main fields for exploration: the perception of celebrities' death by the audiences and the role of media in this process, the use of media while mourning and grieving over deceased musicians, and the ways in which media manages to prolong musicians' popularity after their deaths (if it does so).

In order to explore each of the aspects on a deeper level, the following research questions will be applied:

1. To what extent, fans' lives are connected to and affected by their idol?
2. What are the common practices of mourning and grieving over deceased musicians among the fans?
3. What role does media play for fans in expressing and/or sharing grief?
4. What is the role of the audience in the growing success and popularity of deceased musicians?
5. How can the results of the current research be applied in theoretical and practical fields?

### **Celebrity and Fan Studies**

Before moving forward to the main theme of the research which is the role of media in mourning and grieving experience of fans and its influence on the popularity and success of deceased musicians, it is crucial to understand the nature of such concept as a celebrity. Particularly, it is important to understand what one needs to represent or have in order to be



called so, how to distinguish a celebrity from an ordinary person, and what the requirements are for being called a celebrity.

At the very beginning of his article “Celebrity Studies Today” Peter A. Lawler (2010, p. 419) states that “[b]eing a celebrity is a sort of gift of public opinion, which is formed by no one in particular”. Even though later on, the author describes a few factors that can help distinguish a celebrity, such as revenue, achievements, involvement in public scandals, the extent of influence, etc. (Lawler, 2010), a general definition for the term “celebrity” is missing. This may happen due to the fact that it is a rather new term that may be applied to various industries and roles. In order to bridge this gap, when conducting interviews, it is important to understand the perspective of the fans on the whole idea of the term “celebrity” and its meaning in connection to their idols. Additionally, this theory will be helpful in understanding the factors that have made the researched musicians a cult or a legend and how their lives impacted the ways they were perceived after death.

In addition to celebrity studies, an important area to explore before conducting interviews is fan studies. Researching celebrity culture without taking fandom into account would not provide a full understanding of the relationships between a fan and an idol. To do so, this thesis will use the theories offered by Mark Duffett (2013) in the book “Understanding Fandom: An introduction to the study of media fan culture”. In his work, Duffett (2013) explored the origins of the term “fan” and different kinds of attitudes towards the ones who call themselves fans.

For instance, the author states that even in the mid-1990s, fans were not treated very well and were considered as the ones having “‘improper’ identity, a cultural identity based on one’s commitment to something as seemingly unimportant and ‘trivial’ as a film or TV series” (Duffett, 2013, p. 78). This is an interesting notion especially if to compare it to nowadays when expressing a fan identity and belonging to a certain fan group seems to be rather natural for the fans. Consider, for example, Taylor Swift’s fans who call themselves “Swifties” on social media or Justin Bieber’s fans labeling themselves “Beliebers”. That makes it necessary to designate a part of the interview to understanding the participants’ attitude towards the term “fan” and whether they consider themselves a part of the movement or not.

An important aspect of Duffett’s work was researching the differences in fans’ behavior online versus offline, such as ways of communicating, spreading information, creating content, and sharing negative feelings as well. The author stated that the development of media has made fans more visible and at the same time, granted them the opportunity to access information, increase their connections and therefore, get new ways of becoming closer to celebrities

(Duffett, 2013). These changes will be important to take into account when researching the differences in expressing grief and mourning depending on online versus offline types of communication.

While conducting interviews with the fans, one of the vital aspects of the research should be understanding the motives of the audience in choosing a specific idol and whether the art produced by the musician is the ultimate goal and reward or if it is something else. McIlwain (2005) described the purpose of art as fostering self-reflection, making a listener (since the subject of this work is musicians) to look inside of oneself and get a meaning within oneself and as a result, transforming both the listener and the work. Therefore, to understand fans' perception of the death of an idol, first and foremost, it is necessary to explore the reasons for one to become a fan of a certain artist, how this relationship starts and develops throughout his/her life.

### **Mourning Rituals and Social Collectivism**

After exploring the nature and dynamics of the idol/fan relationships, I will hopefully achieve a certain level of understanding of the extent to which such event as a death of a famous artist may impact fans' behavior and feelings. It is quite obvious that nowadays media is the main source for the audience to get informed about this kind of news. Even taking into account the fact that the case studies of this research took place in different time periods and different mediums were used for announcing the news about the deaths, media was still the source of information in most cases. For instance, in the case of Avicii, it can be assumed that the information about his death was spread on news portals and social media while in cases of Sid Vicious and Viktor Tsoi, the main sources of information were probably newspapers and television. Therefore, an integral part of this research will be to understand how the ways in which the news were communicated to the audiences affected the response they received.

Even though it may seem that a death announcement is not something to exploit, many researchers have mentioned that such news is able to cause significant attention from the audience and therefore, may be used to achieve certain goals besides just informing the public. For instance, Johanna Sumiala (2013, p. 100) stated that "mediatization of mourning rituals includes the power of the media to frame the meaning of different ritual activities and to manage public emotions and key actors related to these rituals" (Sumiala, 2013, p. 100). In other words, an announcement of the death of an important figure can have multiple purposes and actors involved, such as society, government, and other interested persons. That also means that a certain action must be expected from the audience in response to the news which makes it

necessary to discuss with the audiences their feelings and incentives after finding out about the deaths of their idols, such as specific actions, behavioral patterns, desire or need to do something.

This idea was also described in the book “Social tragedy: the power of myth, ritual, and emotion in the new media ecology” by Stephanie Alice Baker (2014) where the author researched the influence of tragedies depicted in media on social life. She described how tragic stories of famous people become moral issues for ordinary individuals and evoke feelings, such as compassion, pity, empathy, and fear for significant others. As she points out, such event as a death of a famous person may have no direct influence on an individual but it tends to gain additional meaning and, in the end, have an impact on the whole society (Baker, 2014).

Sumiala (2013) also emphasizes that the death of a celebrity is fully capable of performing two important purposes of media: provide order in individuals’ lives and inspire them at the same time. It is not completely clear though, how media is capable of organizing the lives of individuals, whether it motivates people to be more caring towards their families and friends, become more active citizens, or appreciate and value their lives after realizing that the life of someone whom they used to admire is ended. That is why an important aspect of the interviews should be understanding specific actions and behavioral patterns of fans after they found out about the deaths of their idols.

What is interesting about the death of a celebrity is that an individual does not have to be a fan of one in order to be deeply touched by the news. At the very beginning of her book, Sumiala (2013) describes the moment when she first found out about the death of Michael Jackson. It was a strange experience for her because as she states, she has never been a fan of Jackson or his music and had a rather negative impression of him due to all the scandals that he had gotten involved in. Nevertheless, she still felt heartbroken and shocked by the news (Sumiala, 2013).

Moreover, at that point, the author realized the extent to which her relationship with Michael Jackson was mediatized by and dependent on media. After that, she added “[h]ere I was grieving for a person who never before had had any real significance to me. On returning home I found myself browsing through the newspapers and surfing the net in search of stories and images of Jackson’s death and funeral” (Sumiala, 2013, p. 16). The last action is rather understandable and as Sumiala (2013, p. 118) explained herself later in the book, “[o]ne way of repelling the threat of death is to study the person’s death against the life they have lived”. This fact makes me assume that the participants of the interview probably also had incentives to research the lives of their idols after finding out about their deaths. Although, it will be

interesting to see if the fans of Sid Vicious and Viktor Tsoi will mention these ideas since it was much more difficult to arrange it before the Internet became available for public use.

When speaking about the fans, who are the main object of this research, the main reaction to such news will be, in most cases, mourning and grieving. As Wagner (2018, p. 2) states, “this includes coping with one’s own (disenfranchised) grief, engaging in collective mourning practices (...) and facilitating the (semi)public expression of emotions”. It is worth noticing though, that Christopher M. Moreman and A. David Lewis (2014) argue that grief and mourning are two different types of loss experiences where grief is associated with a private and intrapsychic reaction while mourning is more of a shared activity. Although, it will be interesting to see if this notion can be applied to the case of celebrities and whether fans tend to grieve by themselves and mourn the deceased artists together with other individuals or not.

Not to mention the fact that nowadays, with the continuous presence of social media in lives of fans, collective mourning practices are quite easy to perform but it was not the case in the 1970s and even 1990s which makes these cases especially interesting to explore to find out how the collective aspect of mourning was maintained when it required more effort from individuals. Additionally, it will be interesting to see how mourning behavior has changed for the ones who have lived through technological progress and have experienced both offline and online types of communication.

Moreover, according to Mervi Pantti and Johanna Sumiala (2009), this need for sharing grief is something that has been conveyed to us by our society since long time ago. The explanation to this is rather simple because such behavior fosters in us a feeling of community and social collectivism which are an integral part of a strong civil society where social collectivism of citizens is a widely accepted and desired norm of being (Pantti and Sumiala, 2009). In fact, rituals and symbols help individuals experience life together which also implies sharing hardships together. Therefore, in this study, there is a need for exploring what rituals are being followed after the deaths of famous musicians and what emotions these rituals evoke in the fans.

Additionally, it often happens that in a situation of the death of a famous artist, a media consumer sees that the announcement attracted the attention of big groups of people, and therefore, s/he may conclude that the event must be exceptional (Sumiala, 2013). Subconsciously, one becomes interested in the event trying to not miss out even if before, it could be not as significant. Sumiala (2013) also concludes that in the case of Michael Jackson, it was probably not the celebrity or the event that generated interest. Instead, it could be people’s fear of missing out or being left alone that makes individuals strive to be a part of a shared

feeling, even when the feeling is grief over someone one did not care about before (Sumiala, 2013).

### **Mediatized Grief**

The development of the Internet has affected mourning and grieving experience to a great extent by giving individuals new tools to express themselves and connect to others. As an illustration, it is worth mentioning the book “Representing death in the news: journalism, media and mortality” by Folker Hanusch (2010) where he explored the ways in which the Internet affects grieving behavior. In his opinion, the Internet granted ordinary people the opportunity to respond to the news, engage in conversations with others and express their opinions on events that subsequently affected the ways in which individuals use media when experiencing loss (Hanusch, 2010).

Consequently, access to the Internet and the availability of sources of information may be an explanation for growing attention to deaths of famous people (which implies attention to their personas as well as to the art that they have produced) due to all the discussions, comments, and posts about the death which simply make it known to a bigger audience. Additionally, it may create pressure for those who are not familiar with the artist and force them to pay more attention in order to become a part of the shared grief.

Overall, prior to the development of social media, the expression of grief used to be private and connected to a circle of close people while nowadays, it has become a public matter and subsequently, led to a “renewed acceptance and public discussion of death” (Hanusch, 2010, p. 144). Under those circumstances, while conducting interviews, it is important to understand the reasoning of the audience to share their opinions on the deaths of their idols online with a limited number of connections, share it publicly or not share online at all; their incentives and expectations.

Furthermore, current generations tend to have less experience with death than people used to have before and for this reason, they often lack knowledge and tradition of processing grief. As a result, they often tend to just go on Facebook, get the knowledge, and express themselves right there (Moreman and Lewis, 2014). Moreman and Lewis (2014, p. 46) also quote one of the participants of a recent study about the role of social media in memorialization: “it was just what you do because everyone else also seemed to be doing it”. Therefore, when one is learning about death from social media, this way of processing it becomes the norm that one continues to follow.

Moreman and Lewis (2014, p. 69) also noted that “[s]tandard practices include the posting of a picture of the deceased – either alone or with the person posting – as one’s status update or profile picture. This identifies the social media user, to those aware of the individual passing, as one who is in mourning”. The authors (Moreman and Lewis, 2014, p. 83) call this action “the spectacle of mourning”. As though, if one does not create this spectacle of mourning, it would mean that they do not care enough about the deceased or do not appreciate his/her art. That is to say, silence means not caring.

In fact, this situation cannot be labeled as solely positive or negative because according to Wagner (2018), expressing one’s mourning on social media has its purpose too, such as regulating one’s emotions, connecting with like-minded individuals in the same situation, finding emotional support and advice from others on the topics that are rather difficult to discuss openly in person and are oftentimes easier to speak about online (Wagner, 2018). One would probably assume that his/her parents or friends may not understand fully what s/he feels as other fans would and therefore, it becomes easier to find support from like-minded fans rather than from the close circle of family and friends. Therefore, there is a need for a deeper research of the expectations one may have when sharing something online, whether it would be personal connections or strangers; and the results of this action.

### **Afterlife Co-Presence**

Similarly to the idea of finding solace in the media created by or connected to the deceased artists, Cumiskey and Hjorth (2017) describe the concept of “afterlife co-presence” which implies “multiple forms of connection and haunting that move in and out of now and then, here and there, life and afterlife” (Cumiskey and Hjorth, 2017, p. 27). In other words, this idea implies using a certain medium in order to emotionally connect with someone who is not present in reality. When speaking about musicians, this may mean listening to the songs by the deceased artist, watching his/her music videos, or simply scrolling through the musician’s Instagram profile. By doing this, a fan has a chance to reconnect, in some sense, with the passed away idol. Taking into account the idea of user-generated content and the involvement of fans into spreading information, social media profiles of dead people may seem as alive as if they did not die.

As an example, it would be useful to mention again the case of my friend who was a rather famous Belarusian musician with dozens of thousands of followers on Instagram. After his death, the fans of his band became so active on the platform that they posted new photographs of him every day. Those were often the pictures that I have never seen myself,

despite the fact that we were rather close friends. Therefore, keeping following him on Instagram brought value to my life by providing me with new photographs of my late friend and gave me a feeling as if he did not die at all, as if he was still present.

In general, the experience of death is very different nowadays from what it used to be. Now, after death, deceased individuals usually do not disappear from our lives completely. They usually leave traces, such as photographs, videos, recordings, personal belongings, text messages, social media profiles, etc. In the case of celebrities and especially the ones who create something (for instance, paintings, movies, music, or any other objects), there can be found even more heritage that keeps existing after they are gone.

As an illustration, the authors of the book “Haunting hands: mobile media practices and loss” (Cumiskey and Hjorth, 2017, p. 29) touched the topic of celebrities and the feeling of connection to them by stating that “[w]hen people experience something as emotionally intense, they perceive a sense of closeness to the experience”. The content that an individual is consuming through media may have as emotionally intense and intimate impact as a real contact with someone whom one knows personally (Cumiskey and Hjorth, 2017). Additionally, the authors connected this to the idea of a ritual created in order to build and maintain a connection and companionship with someone who is gone (Cumiskey and Hjorth, 2017). After all, these factors contribute to the concept of afterlife co-presence when one does not exist anymore but is still present and available for those wishing to reconnect. In the research cases of this master thesis, music, social media profiles, photographs, music videos, and other heritage may represent for the fans the idea of afterlife co-presence.

However, in the case of musicians, music is usually the main medium left after them, or as McIlwain (2005, p. 213) describes it, “[r]ecords document and substantiate one’s being. To a large degree, they call into being one’s very existence”. This idea may be one of the answers to the question of why the music of the late artists becomes of such interest among the audience even after the artist is already dead – because it represents the only existing thing left after the ones who do not exist anymore. Adding here the notion about the changing approach to grief counseling mentioned by professor Tony Walter of the University of Bath that implies a transformation from “detachment achieved through the working through of feelings” to “the continued presence of the dead and a continuous conversation with and about them” (Moreman and Lewis, 2014, p. 151) as well as the fact that individuals tend to project their meaning onto the media they consume (Bird, Holder and Sears, 1976), it creates a perfect foundation for the next stages of this research by providing specific aspects of the fan/idol relationships that need to be explored while interviewing the participants.

## **Death Becomes Symbolic**

Another aspect that becomes especially noticeable in the case of deceased celebrities, is that oftentimes, the death itself acquires some kind of heroic, meaningful, and symbolic connotation. Despite the circumstances of the death, which are usually not so pleasant, the event of death itself often brings a special meaning to the image of the deceased. Sumiala (2013, p. 93) described Antonius Robben's ideas on this topic as "the trajectory from dying to afterlife can be achieved in social community by dramatizing belief in an eternal spirit or a surviving soul; a cycle of life and death; notions of reincarnation and regeneration, or a belief in a symbolic immortality; an extension of life through family name; and human achievement such as art, etc." (Sumiala, 2013, p. 93). In the case of musicians, music left after the death of an artist may represent a symbol of one's death and at the same time, the beginning of one's immortality.

It is difficult to describe in detail which symbolic meaning the death carries along the way due to the ethereal nature of it as well as the difference in perception based on a variety of factors affecting individuals throughout their lives. It may be more accurate to state that the symbol can be found in the relationship between an individual and a deceased idol; it originates from the relationship and represents the core of it. As Jean Baudrillard (2017, p. 281) stated, "[t]he symbolic is neither a concept, an agency, a category, nor a 'structure', but an act of exchange and a social relation which puts an end to the real, which resolves the real, and, at the same time, puts an end to the opposition between the real and the imaginary". In other words, the symbolic meaning of death is the entire spectrum of emotions and feelings that an individual may have towards the artist or his/her music multiplied by the realization of the end of his/her existence and at the same time, the beginning of his/her immortality.

## **Analytical model**

In the theoretical framework, there were described several concepts that need to be researched during the interviews in order to understand the perception of deaths of famous musicians by their fans and the role of media in processing and expressing their feelings of grief and mourning. Five main themes were selected in order to provide a full coverage for the researched subject which will reflect the sections of the theoretical framework: celebrity and fan relationship, mourning rituals as a part of society, mediatized grief, afterlife co-presence, and the symbolism of death. In this section, there will be provided a brief explanation of each



of the themes; and in the next chapter – a more detailed description of the aspects of each theme and how they are going to be covered in the interviews.

The first theme “Celebrity and Fan Relationship” represents a foundation for the interviews since it explores the point of view of fans on the topic of celebrities as well as their personal relationships with their idols. Consequently, moving towards the event of the death of an idol, the part “Mourning Rituals as a Part of Society” will focus on the perception of the deaths by the participants and especially, their behavioral patterns and specific actions. This theme overlaps with the theme “Mediatized Grief” as the latter explores similar ideas of mourning, grieving, and loss experience, but through the prism of media use. In other words, it will focus on the ways in which fans use media when experiencing these emotions, what effect they expect and receive from interacting with media.

Further on, in the next part, there will be explored the concept of afterlife co-presence which is a part of the mediatized grief experience but in a more long-term perspective. To explain it in detail, it would be correct to say that media itself often represents the afterlife co-presence of deceased artists by embodying the heritage left after them, i.e. social media profiles, music, music videos, photographs, etc. Ultimately, all of these artifacts may play for the fans a role of a symbol of death and at the same time, a symbol of immortality of the deceased which will be explored on a deeper level in the last section of the interviews that focuses on the symbolism of death. A more detailed explanation of the aspects of each theme will be provided in the next chapter “Methods and Materials”.

## **Methods and Materials**

This chapter will focus on a detailed description of the methods that are going to be applied in this study, such as the tools that are going to be used for conducting the interviews as well as an explicit explanation of each of the themes that were mentioned in the analytical model that will provide a clearer picture of the focus areas of the interviewing process. Additionally, the second section of this chapter will cover the description of the stages of the interviewing process, including sampling, searching for the participants, arranging the interviews, and processing the results.

### **Methods**

The study will be focused mainly on conducting interviews with the fans of the three chosen musicians and exploring the themes described in the analytical model. Later on, the results of the interviews will be combined with the analysis of the representation of the deaths of the chosen musicians in media, that was mentioned earlier in this paper, in order to find connections and correlations between the ways in which the musicians' lives and deaths were represented in media and the opinions of the fans about them.

Due to the current situation with the Covid-19 virus, it was decided to arrange the interviews online in order to avoid meeting in person. As a reflection, it is worth noticing that this necessity turned out to be rather beneficial for the study since searching for the participants online has given me a chance to find local fans immersed into the music culture of the deceased musicians and who could provide valuable insights on the subject.

On the condition of the requirement mentioned above, the interviews are going to be organized online by using Google Forms ([www.google.com/forms](http://www.google.com/forms)) which is a free tool that can be used for creating surveys, designing them depending on the needs and moreover, it allows the participants remain anonymous when answering the questions.

Speaking of the participants for the interviews, these individuals will be found on social media, in fan groups of the three researched musicians. For the fans of Sid Vicious and Avicii, Facebook will be used ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) and for the fans of Viktor Tsoi, the Russian social media website VK will be used ([www.vk.com](http://www.vk.com)) due to the lower popularity of Facebook in post-Soviet states, especially among the older generations. A more detailed description of the process of selecting fan groups and searching for participants will be provided in the next section "Materials".

Each of the three researched cases requires five interviewees. It was decided to limit the number of participants to a manageable amount in order to be able to conduct a deep qualitative

analysis of the responses and at the same time, secure the collection of different perspectives on the subject. The higher number of the interview participants would probably affect the results by providing a more quantitative conclusion and leaving me less space for researching the responses on a deeper level. It is important to remember that the latter was one of the goals of this study – to understand the nature of the emotional connection between a fan and an idol, how it grows and transforms with time. Therefore, under those circumstances, the decision on interviewing five respondents for each of the research cases will be the most appropriate solution.

When it comes to demographic limitations, due to the current situation with the Covid-19 virus and the necessity to organize the interviews online, there was a possibility to apply certain geographic requirements. Therefore, it was decided that the focus group of Sid Vicious' fans should be born and live in the United Kingdom, Viktor Tsoi's fans – in post-Soviet states and Avicii's – in Sweden. This limitation was necessary due to aiming at the fans' high level of immersion into the local cultures and their closeness to the artists (not only mental but also physical). In other words, I expect that the connection between a fan and an idol will be stronger in cases when an individual (a fan) has grown up in the same location with the artist and has been immersed into that culture for a significant amount of time. As a result, a local fan would potentially share deeper insights regarding this connection comparing to foreigners.

In terms of age requirements, all participants should have been adults (16 years old or older) during the time when the musicians were still alive. This requirement is set in order to ensure that the participants were old enough to have a full experience of being a fan of the musicians, following the musicians' lives as well as going through the experience of loss after the deaths of the musicians. Moreover, this age limit also helps us make sure that the participants remember these events and their thoughts and feelings at the time. No additional age limits will be applied.

The interviews will focus on the five themes described in the analytical model while each of the themes will cover several aspects. The interviews are going to be semi-structured where the interviewees will be asked open questions in connection to each aspect.

The first theme is celebrity and fan relationships which will focus on exploring the dynamics of the relationships between a fan and a celebrity. In the beginning, it is important to understand the reasoning of the fans to become so of a musician, whether it happened due to the art created by the musicians, their appearance or personality, pressure from media or peers, or something else. This question will be a starting point in understanding the role of a famous musician, an idol or a celebrity in the lives of fans and consequently, understanding the impact

that s/he has on the lives of the fans. As a result, this step will help us understand the extent of grief that a fan may experience after the death of an idol. The main keywords for this theme will be celebrity, idol, fan, fandom. An important aspect of this theme should also be exploring the differences in fans' communication (between each other and with an idol) online versus offline.

The second theme of the interviews is mourning rituals and the role that they perform for society. One of the aspects of this topic will be figuring out how mourning rituals unite individuals and contribute to the idea of social collectivism. In this part, the focus will be on the behavior that follows the announcements of death of the musicians, what incentives, needs, and desires the interviewees had at that moment. Understanding specific actions will give us an idea of a pattern or a set of actions (if one exists) that can be expected from a fan after the announcement of death of his/her idol and whether these actions are useful for the individual, his/her family or the whole society. The main focus areas of this theme will be the actions right after the announcements of the musicians' deaths, the need to share mourning with others or experience it alone (individual versus collective versus public mourning), sharing feelings and getting support online or offline.

The third theme of the analytical model is mediatised grief which implies the use of media in experiencing such emotional state as grief. This section will continue the previous one by exploring the actions of a fan after the death announcement but with a focus on the role of media in this process. The expected actions here could be responding to the news by commenting on the articles in order to express one's opinion, engaging in conversations with others, sharing one's thoughts and feelings on one's personal social media profiles, etc.

Each of these actions may have different variations. For example, sharing feelings on a personal social media profile may imply sending a private message, making a post to friends only or it may be sharing the news publicly using hashtags in order to attract even bigger attention. Here the goal will be to understand the actions as well as their purpose. In other words, it will not be enough to just see a behavioral pattern. Instead, it is crucial to understand what kind of response one expects to his/her action and how it is going to help him/her process the grief. Or the fact of sharing is the purpose by itself? Additionally, it will be important to understand how online grieving and mourning experiences differ from offline and why a fan chooses one over another.

The fourth theme is afterlife co-presence which focuses on the ways in which media represents a medium that helps fans connect to late musicians through their music, videos, social media profiles, etc. In this part, it will be crucial to understand the emotional side of the

process of building and maintaining this connection with the help of media and what meaning it has for the fans. A comparative aspect will be covered here by exploring how the concept of afterlife co-presence was represented in the times when media did not play such a significant role in the lives of individuals as it does nowadays.

The fifth and final theme of this study is the symbolism attributed to the deaths of famous artists and how it is cultivated through the art left after them. This theme develops from the previous theme of afterlife co-presence but has a broader focus on the associations and connotations that fans attribute to the event of death and how these symbols manage to continue existing long after the artists are gone. It will be interesting to see if the fans' attitude and feelings about the musicians' lives and deaths change with the matter of time and if they do, what initiates those changes.

### **Materials**

The process of preparation for the interviews has started with the selection of the social media groups for the search for participants. The choice fell on fan groups instead of the official groups of the musicians for the reasons that will be described further on. First of all, it would be difficult to publish a post in those official groups since the owners of the groups tend to post either official content related to the artists or approved commercial posts. Secondly, waiting for approval from those groups would probably take a significant amount of time with no estimated timeframes for the request approval.

Finally, the audiences of official groups seem to mainly consist of more general followers interested in the artist rather than true fans. As was mentioned before, for the purpose of receiving deep and thoughtful answers to the questions about the artists, it was necessary to interview the fans who do not only express interest in the music of the artists but are involved in the fan movements around them. For this reason, fan groups appeared to be the most fitting environment for searching for this target audience.

Based on those requirements, there were found three fan groups that were suitable for searching for the interview participants:

1. Facebook group "Sid Vicious" (2020) numbering 13900 members at the moment of writing.
2. VK group "Viktor Tsoi Rok Gruppa Kino" (2020) numbering 322961 members at the moment of writing.
3. Facebook group "Avicii's Fans" (2020) numbering 14000 members at the moment of writing.

In each of these groups, I have made a post where I stated that I was writing a master thesis about these musicians and was searching for the fans to participate in the interviews. In the post, I have also described the requirements for each of the research cases. For Sid Vicious' fans the requirements were the following: being born and live in the United Kingdom and be 57 years old or older. In the case of Viktor Tsoi's fans, the requirements were to be born and live in one of the post-Soviet states and be at least 46 years old. Last but not least, Avicii's fans should be born and live in Sweden and be at least 18 years old. In addition to this, I have mentioned in the post that the interviews were going to be organized online through a survey and the questions would focus on thoughts and feelings of the participants about the artists, their lives and deaths. No personal information was required from the participants of the interviews.

After receiving comments on my post as well as private messages from individuals wishing to participate I manually checked Facebook or VK profiles of each of them in order to ensure that they fit age and location requirements. If the information was not available on their profiles, I had to deny their participation and chose other individuals where I could verify their age and location.

When creating the surveys using Google Forms, I designed them the way that would be convenient for the participants when answering the questions as well as for me when processing the results. The form started with the photographs of the musicians that, in my view, has helped the participants reminisce better their emotions about the artists after they have seen their faces. After the photographs, the form contained the guidelines about the survey, the information about the sections it includes, and the estimated time for completion. In the description box, I have also informed the participants that the answers were going to be anonymous and not connected to their personas. Additionally, I have encouraged the participants to answer the questions as explicitly as possible.

The surveys consisted of 21 (or 23) questions where the fans of Sid Vicious and Viktor Tsoi were asked 21 questions and Avicii's fans were asked 23 questions since the death of the latter took place after the spreading of the Internet and allowed me to ask two additional questions focused on this topic. Interview questions were divided into six different sections that was a more convenient way for the participants to move through the questions since in each section, they could focus on a specific theme instead of going through the full list of all the questions. Moreover, this was helpful for me in processing the results since all the answers were sorted into sections based on the theme.

In the next chapter “Interview Results and Analysis”, I will describe in detail the responses that I have received from the fans of the chosen artists, how they relate to the theoretical framework chosen for this study, and the conclusions made from the interviews. The chapter will follow the same structure as the previous chapters and explore each theme in a separate section. This will help us analyze deeper each topic and make separate conclusions out of them which will consequently be united in the main conclusion in the final chapter.

## **Interview Results and Analysis**

As can be concluded from the name of the chapter, it will contain the results of the interviews and the discussion of the responses. The structure of the sections will continue to follow the same pattern as the previous chapters based on the theme of each section. Although, the titles of the sections were changed in order to emphasize the main conclusions of each section.

Therefore, the interview results are divided into five sections. The first section is called “Sid’s a legend, not a celebrity” and focuses on the participants’ perception of the terms “celebrity” and “fan”, their emotional connection with the deceased artists and the influence of the latter on the participants. The title of the second section is “Mourning and Grieving” which clearly illustrates the ideas contained in it – the participants’ experiences of mourning and grieving over the chosen musicians. The part gradually transforms into the next section “The Role of Media in Mourning and Grieving” focusing specifically on media use in these circumstances. The fourth section is called “Reconnecting with the Past” and showcases the findings about the idea of afterlife co-presence and its meaning for the participants. The fifth and final part of this chapter is “When stars die young, they live forever” which presents the main associations and connotations in connection to the deaths of the chosen musicians described by the participants.

Each of the sections contains the quotes from the participants’ answers as well as discussions and analysis of the responses.

### **“Sid’s a legend, not a celebrity”**

This part of the survey aimed to understand the nature of the relationships between a fan and a celebrity. In order to achieve this goal, the participants were asked questions about their understanding of the concepts “celebrity” and “fan”, their attitude towards these notions, and the influence celebrities have on their lives. The questions of this section did not focus on the artists that were chosen for this research. Instead, they were open questions about the concept in general. Nevertheless, as will be described later, some of the participants perceived them rather defensively and clearly stated that their idols were not celebrities as well as they were not fans.

As was described in the theoretical model, the notion “celebrity” represents a public opinion granted by no one in particular (Lawler, 2010) which made it especially interesting to explore the subject by understanding how the fans perceive it. As a result, the most common answer to this question was associating the term with being famous and known by many. In



fact, it was a common thread in most of the answers – emphasizing the fact of being known, but not specifying for what reason.

Lawler (2010) also mentioned a few other factors that can help distinguish a celebrity, such as revenue, achievements, involvement in public scandals, the extent of influence, etc. and some of them were mentioned by the interview participants. For instance, one of the respondents stated that the high extent of influence over others may be a distinctive characteristic of a celebrity. Generally speaking, according to the respondents, being called a celebrity does not necessarily imply the importance of the achievements, but rather the degree of awareness about the celebrity among the audiences. In fact, only a couple of the participants connected the notion to a certain talent or achievement, such as being a famous artist, football player, actor, etc. Although, it was mentioned that the situation was different a couple of decades ago and has changed recently:

*“To be honest, it doesn't mean much today [the term “celebrity”]. Twenty years ago, before reality shows etc., it meant a bit more. Today's celebrities mean nothing to me”.*

That was an opinion from one of Sid Vicious' fans and an interesting fact is that another respondent from the United Kingdom has also mentioned reality shows as an example of individuals who may be considered to be celebrities while in fact, have not achieved anything significant and are usually perceived rather negatively.

Additionally, as was briefly mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, one of the respondents stated specifically that Sid Vicious was not a celebrity but a legend. That demonstrates that there seems to exist a certain negative connotation with the term “celebrity”, especially among the participants from the United Kingdom and partly among the Swedish respondents. It was repeatedly mentioned by the interviewees that nowadays, when there is often no direct connection between being called a celebrity and one's talent and/or achievements, the notion starts losing its original meaning (if there was any) and begins to carry a rather negative connotation. As a result, calling someone a celebrity may be perceived offensively and as diminishing his/her value.

As for the attitude of the interviewees towards the notion “fan” and considering themselves being a part of this culture, there can be noticed a rather distinctive denial of the fact of belonging to this culture among the participants from post-Soviet countries. When being asked about the factors that can make them become a fan of a celebrity, some of the respondents stated that they have never been fans of anyone, and that admiring art of a musician has nothing to do with being a fan. One of the respondents has even compared the idea of being a fan to a mental disorder:

*“Fanaticism is for psychiatrists, it’s not a norm – it’s a [mental] divergence”* (translated by Aldona Martynenka).

This attitude can be connected to the negative perception of the term “fan” in the 1990s as was mentioned earlier in this study which implies that individuals calling themselves fans are the ones who waste their lives on something as insignificant and unimportant as following famous people (Duffet, 2013). It is worth noticing that in the Russian language, there are two terms for the English word “fan”: a fan and an admirer. This fact was emphasized several times by the participants in their answers – that they are admirers but not fans. As if the term “fan” was perceived as an insult by the Russian speaking participants. In general, it is interesting to notice that in English, the word “fan” is widely used and does not have a distinctly negative connotation.

Overall, for the vast majority of the respondents, music was the main factor in becoming a fan of a musician. In addition to this, there were also mentioned such aspects as the appearance of a musician, fashion style, personal qualities, and the message that the artist is communicating through the music. One of the respondents also mentioned that it can be one thing that firstly attracts attention and then makes one curious about the other sides of the artist. In other words, one may read a quote from the lyrics of a musician, feel connected to the ideas contained in it, become curious about the musician and motivated to explore more of his/her art or personality.

The participants also described the importance of being able to relate to a musician and his/her experience. It can be something that an individual (a fan) has faced in personal life, is experiencing at the moment or wishes to experience and gets a chance to do it through the music created by the artist. The factor that can make this connection even stronger is if a musician inspires one to do something. It can be a simple thing, such as, for example, picking up a guitar and learning to play or opening up about one’s mental issues after seeing a famous person doing the same, as was mentioned by some of the participants. The idea of famous people being able to provide order in individuals’ lives and inspire them was previously described by Sumiala (2013) and can be clearly noticed in the answers of the participants. In other words, such small moments can help one connect to a musician on a deeper level and also, sustain this connection for a longer time.

Earlier in this section, there was a notion about the extent to which celebrities are able to influence their fans. Even though almost all of the participants stated that their idols and celebrities in general do not affect their life choices, some of them admitted that when they were younger, their fashion tastes and appearance could possibly be affected by their idols. This

explanation was very common among the older groups of the respondents from the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union:

*“When I was younger, I dressed up in a style of my idols, copied their ways of talking, body language, etc.”* (translated by Aldona Martynenka).

Although, the younger part of the participants (the fans of Avicii based in Sweden) seem to be more willing to admit that their life choices may be affected by celebrities to a certain extent. For instance, one of the respondents wrote:

*“Don't know if celebrities affect my life choices (...) as a whole, but if it's someone that you look up too it can have some effect of course”.*

Another participant from Sweden expressed a similar point of view:

*“Sometimes I don't even notice how I inherit opinions and views of the ones I admire. I'm curious to know their views and therefore, pay more attention to them rather than to other people's”.*

Overall, it looks as nowadays, fashion style and appearance of an artist do not have such a strong influence on his/her fans compared to the 1970s or 1990s. In contrast, fans' general opinions and views about life seem to be more exposed to this influence. An interesting observation here is how in content some of the respondents are with this fact and how willingly they admit the influence of their idols on their life choices. This fact may be explained due a higher degree of openness among young people compared to the older groups of the survey, or it may happen due to the levels of acceptance of different views and beliefs in Sweden and therefore, the lower levels of fear to be understood wrongly or not accepted by others for certain reasons.

To summarize, there can be observed certain negative associations with the terms “celebrity” and “fan” among the participants of the survey, especially among the citizens of the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. Namely, being called a celebrity does not necessarily imply any achievements or talent while being a fan of a celebrity may be perceived as something unhealthy. It is noticeable how the participants of the interview insist on using other terms instead of these two, for instance, a legend rather than a celebrity or an admirer rather than a fan.

Overall, music is usually the main factor for the respondents in becoming a fan of a musician, but when speaking about more long-term passions, it becomes important for an artist to be relatable and/or inspire the fans to express themselves. As for the degree of influence of celebrities on their fans, some of the younger participants from Sweden admitted that their life choices do get affected by celebrities to a certain extent while the older groups of the

respondents denied that influence and only partly admitted that their fashion style might have been affected when they were younger which was especially noticeable among the participants from the United Kingdom and the former Soviet Union.

### **Mourning and Grieving**

*“I was in absolute shock. (...) For the longest time I was hoping that it was fake news and that someone would tell me it was all a mistake. (...) When I went to bed that night I cried, and I cried several times within the next few days. It sort of felt like someone close to me had died. That's when I really realized how big of an impact his music had on my life. A few weeks before his death I had watched his documentary where it ended with him getting better and him feeling happier. I was so happy to see that after all he had been through. When I found out he committed suicide, all I could think about was what he said in the documentary – ‘If I continue this way I will die’. Those words haunted me”.*

That was the answer of one of Avicii's fans in the part of the survey where the participants were asked about their first feelings and thoughts after they found out about the deaths of their idols. As was mentioned in the chapter “Previous Research”, after exploring academic works of other researchers on the topics connected to celebrities, death, and media, I have realized that there was insufficient amount of studies that would focus on the perception of celebrities' deaths by the audiences and the ways in which the fans cope with such event as the death of a famous person. For this reason, in this part of the survey, my goal was to understand how exactly the fans mourn the deceased artists; their feelings, thoughts, and actions after the death announcements as well as afterward.

There is no surprise that for most of the participants, the announcement of death was a complete shock. Even though years later, some of them started thinking that it was not as unexpected as it seemed at first based on what the musician was going through in his life, in the moment of finding out about it, they were all caught off-guard.

It is important to mention here a feature that was peculiar only to the fans of Avicii, the youngest research group, who described the need to verify the information after receiving the news. Four out of five interviewees said that they could not believe the news and felt immediate urge to google it and make sure that it was not a mistake. This situation was also mentioned previously by Sumiala (2013) who described how after finding out about the death of Michael Jackson, she was checking the newspapers and surfing the Internet trying to find the details about his death and funerals.

Based on this, we can make a conclusion that due to the spreading of the Internet, the development of technologies, and the increased availability of the information, individuals tend to second-guess the facts that they receive from the news. For instance, the fans of Sid Vicious also mentioned that the news felt surreal to them and they struggled with believing them, but they did not mention any need or desire to check this information. This topic will be explored in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

Overall, for most of the interviewees, the deaths felt as a loss of someone they used to know personally. They experienced pain, anxiety, sadness. Moreover, some of them did not simply feel sadness, they felt anger. Some were angry with the idol's fate: *"I was angry and pissed off"*, *"I was angry rather than hurt"*; others were angry with media for their approach to the news and for exacerbating the whole situation: *"Hate for the media who I blamed for putting a vulnerable person at risk"* (more information about the role of media in mourning and grieving will follow in the next section). Some of the participants also mentioned that the death of their idol was the first loss that they have experienced in their life and therefore, they did not know exactly how to process those emotions.

It was rather expected that for almost all of the respondents, one of the most common first actions after finding out about the deaths of their idols was listening to their music. That was something that helped them go through the grieving experience and reconnect with the artists through their music (more information about listening to music as a way to reconnect with the passed away artists will follow later in this chapter). One of the participants described the moment right after s/he has read in a newspaper about Sid Vicious' death:

*"[I] immediately rang my best friend who liked Sid as well... Went to hers and listened to his songs as though it brought us closer to him".*

When it comes to sharing the experience of mourning with other individuals, Moreman and Lewis (2014) stated that grieving represented a private experience while mourning was something that individuals tend to share with others. Nevertheless, based on the results of the survey, it can be noticed that all of the participants experienced the need to share their mourning and grieving with others, whether it would be offline with the peers or online with complete strangers. Although, it should be noticed that some of the respondents from the United Kingdom and Sweden mentioned difficulties in expressing their feelings to others in person due to the lack of understanding from their families and friends. One of the interviewees stated:

*“It was difficult to relate my thoughts to my parents as my father thought Sid was a yobbo<sup>4</sup> and the same opinion of the rest of the Pistols”.*

For this reason, the fans were more likely to gather with like-minded individuals who could understand their feeling of loss instead of expecting support from their families or friends (the latter did not always share their interests either). It is worth noticing that previously in this study, I assumed that nowadays with the availability of such tools as the Internet and social media, it became easier for individuals to find adherents or other fans to share the loss experience with compared to the 1970s and 1990s. Therefore, I was not sure if the collective aspect of this experience would be highly common to mention by the older groups of the participants. However, it did not seem to be a problem for the fans of Sid Vicious or Viktor Tsoi to find support from like-minded individuals based on the participants’ responses. Moreover, they were more likely to experience mourning and grieving with others in person compared to the younger group who focused on using social media for this purpose. Additionally, the older groups of the participants started using technological benefits, such as social media, forums, news portals as an additional source of information or a communication tool, but they did not substitute their habits of meeting with adherents in person by, for example, attending concerts together or having beers in a bar as was mentioned by some of the participants from the United Kingdom and the former Soviet Union.

An interesting fact is that in each of the three cases, fans shared and discussed the news in a fairly different way. For instance, some of Sid Vicious’ fans (based in the United Kingdom) mentioned that they were discussing the artist’s death with their peers all the time, and it was going on for months. They were talking to friends, classmates, other fans, etc. It was one of the most important topics for a while. In contrast, the fans of Viktor Tsoi from the former Soviet Union mentioned that for some time, they could not speak at all about him – the pain was too strong. As one of them described it:

*“At first, everyone was shocked, depressed, we could not even talk. We were gathering together and just sat in silence”* (translated by Aldona Martynenka).

Different from the cases of Sid Vicious and Viktor Tsoi, one of Avicii’s fans has mentioned how s/he shared the news on Facebook which consequently helped him/her open up about his/her own experience with mental health issues. The topic of social media use will be described further in the next section of this chapter, but it is already obvious how different the approach to express feelings was for the fans living in different locations and time periods. The

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<sup>4</sup> A slang word commonly used in the United Kingdom to describe a loutish, uncultured person.

United Kingdom has been famous for its punk culture and therefore, this sub-culture represented a rather strong community, especially during the years of its growth. That may be the reason for the fans to not struggle very much with finding support from adherents since they were surrounded by like-minded individuals to a great extent. Additionally, being immersed into the collective mourning has probably prolonged the process of grieving due to the shared nature of the experience.

Comparing it to the case of Viktor Tsoi where admiring his music was not a common feature for individuals in the 1990s in the USSR. On the contrary, his fans represented rare cases of individuals going against the system, rebels, outsiders, an exception to the rule. Additionally, expressing openly one's feelings is not common among people from the states of the former Soviet Union, especially for males, and was even less so 30 years ago. As a result, when experiencing such strong feelings as grief and mourning, many individuals probably did not even know how to express them. Especially taking into account the fact that the feelings were about someone not widely accepted by the masses. This fact partly explains why even in cases when the fans had other like-minded individuals to share the experience with, they did not always know how exactly they could express their feeling to others.

To summarize the thoughts and actions of the fans after finding out about their idols' deaths, the most distinctive feature was the need to verify the facts mentioned by almost all participants in the group of Avicii's fans. Even though other participants often could not believe the news either, they did not express any desire to check the information.

Overall, some of the respondents mentioned that they struggled with expressing their feelings about the event to their families because they thought that they would not be understood. Hence, they mostly shared the mourning experience with adherents (each group in a fairly different way), including discussing the happening with peers for months, spending times with like-minded individuals but not being able to express feelings to them, or sharing emotions on social media. An interesting fact here is that the older groups of the participants mentioned that they started using technological tools to search for more details about their idols or to find other fans to communicate with, but they did not substitute their habits of meeting personally with other like-minded individuals. To explore the latter in detail, the next section will focus on the role of media in the process of experiencing loss.

### **The Role of Media in Mourning and Grieving**

In this part of the survey, the main focus was on exploring the ways in which the participants used media, whether it was newspapers, television, social media or something else,

while grieving over the deceased artists as well as on their attitude towards the role of media in such difficult times.

The case of Avicii is fairly different from the two other cases due to a completely different set of tools available for individuals and, as can be noticed in the answers of the respondents, a more critical approach to the consumed information. As was previously mentioned by Hanusch (2010), the Internet has provided ordinary individuals with new ways of communicating, responding to news, and expressing opinions online that have strongly affected their perception of media as a whole. The case of Avicii is used as an example to emphasize the fact that only his fans have mentioned that after the death announcement, they felt the need to verify the information. Most of the fans of all three musicians could not believe the news, but only this research group tried to check other sources to validate the facts.

The tendency to question consumed information seems to be more and more natural for individuals nowadays provided that they have resources to perform this action and do not have to believe everything they read or hear. In addition to this, due to extreme volumes of information produced daily, younger generations seem to approach everything much more critically and filter the consumed facts. Moreover, due to the amount of disinformation and misinformation, the levels of trust for media seem to decrease. This fact may explain why some of the interviewees described how they tried to check multiple news portals and find reliable sources that they could believe. In some cases, they tried to search for details or find the proof of the opposite – that the news was not true:

*“I tried to find more information, get some confirmation from reliable sources. I was probably hoping to actually get the opposite – a confirmation of the fact that the news was fake and that he was still alive. But nope, it was all true”.*

Given that the access to such a massive search tool as Google was not available for individuals in the 1970s and even in the 1990s, people had to believe what they read in newspapers or saw on television. Additionally, since their beliefs were probably not challenged as much by multiple points of view on any issue, it can be assumed that they have had higher levels of confidence in the media that they received the information from.

Another tool that was not available for the fans of Sid Vicious and Viktor Tsoi is social media. As an illustration, this aspect will be explored on the example of Avicii’s fans due to the inapplicability of the concept in the cases of Sid Vicious and Viktor Tsoi. In general, the attitude towards social media seems to be different for the participants. As it was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the respondents has mentioned that Facebook has



helped him/her express the feelings about Avicii's death and open up about his/her own mental health issues which s/he has never done before:

*"I posted on Facebook (...) about how I could relate to Avicii in ways that many might not suspect as I don't talk a lot about it. But since I have dealt with depression and anxiety my whole life, his death really made me want to open up about those things, and I wanted to try to do my part to bring awareness to those issues".*

This situation is rather common nowadays and can be observed on examples of different celebrities who speak up about the things that used to be stigmatized or simply not common to talk about. As a result, this action does not only bring more admirers to the celebrity and make him/her closer to the audience by decreasing the distance between an idol and a fan, but it also performs an extremely important mission – it fights anxiety, biases, stigmas around certain issues. In other words, this helps fans relate more to the artist and maybe even become long-term loyal fans, and also, it helps them open up about their own issues because they see that struggling is not something to be ashamed of. For instance, one of Sid Vicious' fans mentioned:

*"I saw him [Sid Vicious] on an interview on mainstream TV. I was only 15 – it was after Nancy died and the interviewer asked what he would like to be doing and he said with such honesty 'I'd like to be under the ground'. Probably the first time I had heard a singer talk with such honesty and about wanting to be dead. I made a connection straight away".*

A similar situation was happening after Tim Bergling's death and social media was the platform that gave fans voice and helped them open up. In return, the tool has provided the fans with a certain kind of support. Earlier in this study, there was mentioned the idea by Hanusch who stated that due to the development of social media, death has turned from a personal experience into a public matter which consequently led to the "renewed acceptance and public discussion of death" (Hanusch, 2010, p. 144). Even though in some cases, public discussions of death may be represented by likes and comments only, it was still perceived as helpful by some of the participants because it made them feel as if they were not alone. They knew that they shared these feelings with millions of people around the world and social media has given them a chance to connect.

Another assumption made by me earlier in this study was that the volumes of content connected to the deceased musicians and their deaths may have impacted the levels of awareness about the events of death as well as about the musicians. In other words, when social media is filled with the posts about an artist, it may create a certain pressure for others in terms of feeling the need to get involved into the shared experience, search for more information about the artist or maybe even become interested in the art produced by the artist. Nevertheless,

some of the interviewees proved this hypothesis wrong and stated that in fact, social media was overwhelming for them due to the volumes of depressing content which made them use it as rarely as possible in order to avoid it:

*“The news immediately filled all social media, everyone was posting pictures, quotes, thoughts and so on that it made no sense to me to contribute with my opinion. Everyone was already aware and grieving over Avicii. We all knew what each of us was feeling”.*

Another participant has mentioned a similar feeling about the content that was spread on social media after Avicii’s death:

*“I got very tired of social media because of this ongoing flow of mourning posts from other people. I tried to move on and not to stuck on the fact of his death while people seem to just continue crying over him”.*

A conclusion that can be made from this is that by giving a chance to speak up to some individuals, social media is creating certain pressure for others who consume this content. Although, when both sides (producer and consumer) are interested in the topic, it actually creates a fertile ground for communication. For instance, for one of the interviewees, it was easier to find like-minded individuals online since personal connections surrounding him/her in everyday life did not share his/her feelings about the passed away musician:

*“It would be more difficult to find someone around you who shared the same love for the person as you did, and you want to talk to people who will understand your grief. (...) [M]any might opt for online communication if they don't feel they have the right type of support in their offline life”.*

Additionally, some of the participants have mentioned that online communication was a more suitable way for them to discuss such topic as death which reflects the ideas stated by Wagner (2018) about social media representing a tool that grants individuals a chance to share their feelings and discuss the topics that may be rather difficult to speak about in person. This notion can be observed in the response of one of the respondents from Sweden:

*“It's easier to talk about such things online. Death is a very tricky and scary topic. Even with close friends, it's very difficult to just express the pain or talk about certain things while online, you feel freer to state your opinion and be yourself. I myself can express the pain in writing but I would never be able to describe it as clearly to someone in person”.*

As for media outlets, the participants’ attitude was mostly negative. The fans did not share the media’s approach in how they communicated the news and believed that their goal was only securing revenue and not informing the public or commemorating the artists:

*“I didn't realize it at the time, but newspapers and media don't give a shit about personalities unless they can make money or sell papers out of them. Newspapers and media outlets love a celebrity death, it makes money for them. They are vultures”.*

Another respondent said that “[m]edia sensationalized [the death announcement] for their own gain”. A similar attitude can be noticed in another participant’s answer where s/he expressed frustration with how disrespectful media often act towards the families of the ones who passed away:

*“I've never felt that they [media sources] comfort me in situations like these. If anything, media simply annoys me due to the fact that they disturb the loved ones of the person who has passed at a time when it really isn't appropriate”.*

The only exception from the negative opinions of the fans about media was from one of Avicii’s fans who had a rather positive attitude towards Swedish media:

*“Every news site and newspaper in Sweden honored his life and wrote about him, everyone said positive things about him and that made me a bit less sad”.*

A worth noticing fact is that according to the opinions of the fans from the former USSR, there was very little information available about Viktor Tsoi’s death. The participants said that there were some news and publications in newspapers, but there was not enough of information. Only years later, independent journalists and newspapers started doing their own investigations and reports and more information became available for the fans.

To sum up, it should be emphasized that a distinctive characteristic of the attitude towards media from the individuals nowadays is a more critical approach to the information received from media sources. Younger participants of the survey described how they questioned the fact of the death of Tim Bergling and the need to verify this information.

When it comes to social media, for some of the participants, it was a useful tool that represented a safe environment for sharing their feelings and even open up about their own struggles. Nevertheless, for some of the respondents, consuming this information was rather overwhelming and they tried to reduce the presence of social media in their lives. Although, in cases when the topic was interesting for both sides (for producers and consumers of content), it created a foundation for communication that was helpful for those individuals who struggled with discussing such a difficult topic as death in offline environments. However, in regard to media outlets, there can be noticed mostly negative opinions among the participants who believed that publishers never care about the artists who passed away, disrespect the privacy of their families and loved ones and only focus on the revenue.

### **Reconnecting with the Past**

As was mentioned earlier in this study, the concept of afterlife co-presence implies a medium (whether it is an object or a more abstract thing, for example, music or text messages) that represents the heritage left after someone who passed away that can be used by others to reconnect with him/her (Cumiskey and Hjorth, 2017). As a result, this medium often manages to prolong the person's existence after the death. In the case of musicians, this afterlife co-presence may be represented by the music that they have created, their photographs, music videos, social media profiles, etc. Although, it should be emphasized that based on the responses of the interview participants, music is the main medium that represents late musicians for the fans.

Referring to the results of the survey, when being asked about the thing that represents the afterlife co-presence of the idols for the participants, their answers were rather diverse, but the common thread in all of them was one – nostalgia.

One of the participants has mentioned that when one grows up, his/her tastes naturally change and the things that seemed significant then do not mean as much as they used to. Nevertheless, listening to the music from those times is something that brings back the memories and that feeling of being young and reckless. One of the interviewees stated that s/he plays his/her favorite songs on purpose when s/he wants to mentally travel to the times when s/he was happy.

Describing this idea of coming back in time was especially common among the fans of Sid Vicious and Viktor Tsoi who brought up some of their own memories that the music reminded them of. It is interesting that almost all of the participants in these two groups have mentioned associations with the long-gone youth. When asked a question about what it is that makes them come back to the music of their passed away idols, again and again, one of the respondents answered:

*“Memories of those times, friends, parties. A repeated experiencing of those emotions. Getting surprised by the fact that even then, Tsoi was singing songs reflecting nowadays”* (translated by Aldona Martynenka).

Another participant mentioned that s/he enjoys those memories because those were the times before adulthood, when life was not as complicated. These ideas make me wonder: does the music represent a medium that helps the fans reconnect with their idols or they are actually reconnecting with their former selves? The notions of nostalgia and memories associated with the music of the passed away musicians make me think that the purpose of the music, in this case, is not to represent a creator of it, but rather the period of life of a listener that the music

reminds him/her of. Additionally, since the artist did not create new music anymore, that means that it is only connected to that specific moment in the past which makes the nostalgia even stronger.

Most of the participants, regardless of whose fans they are, have mentioned their own experiences as associations with the music left after the artists. They did not mention the artists themselves, their feelings for them, or any shared experiences, such as concerts, for example. Instead, they described the moments that they have experienced in connection to the music. As a result, it can be noticed that in many cases, the afterlife co-presence of deceased musicians may actually be a medium to reconnect with oneself in the past rather than with the musician himself. This conclusion perfectly reflects the purpose of art described by McIlwain (2005) who argued that the main purpose of art is fostering self-reflection and making a listener to look inside of oneself and get a meaning within oneself.

Additionally, some of the participants described how listening to the music of their late idols makes them feel which was different for the fans of Sid Vicious and Viktor Tsoi comparing to the fans of Avicii. For the fans of Sid Vicious and Viktor Tsoi those were rather positive and light feelings. They brought up good memories in the listeners and inspired them. For instance, one of Vicious' fans stated:

*"[M]y music room has memorabilia of Sid which I can look at every day. It gives me a lift being surrounded by my hero".*

Similarly, a fan of Viktor Tsoi said:

*"Only positive emotions now. Sadness has gone and there is only joy left in everything that Tsoi has managed to leave us"* (translated by Aldona Martynenka).

A couple of the participants also mentioned how proud they feel for being lucky enough to live at the same time as their idols.

Although, when discussing the topic with the fans of Avicii, a rather different attitude becomes apparent:

*"I do listen to his songs sometimes, but they make me sad. They don't give me a relief but instead, they just remind me about his sad destiny. When he was alive, I could spend days and days listening to the same songs by him. They are positive and always made my mood better until now, when I can't listen to them without thinking about his death".*

Significantly less time has elapsed since Tim Bergling's death – two years – which makes it more difficult for the fans to experience positive feelings from the art without associating it with the death of the artist. One of the participants even stated that s/he

understands the importance of appreciating the art as it is one of the few things left after the artist, but it still brings painful feelings in him/her:

*“[I]t took me some time before I could properly listen to his music without feeling anxious and miserable. But I decided that listening to his music was the best thing I could do, because I wanted to remind myself of the fact that his music will still be around even when he is not, and he will live on in that way and will always be part of my life”.*

This quote brings us back to another idea of McIlwain (2005) who stated that after the death of an artist, the records left after him/her represent his/her whole existence. Although, in the case of Avicii, the pain still seems to remain too fresh for the fans to be able to appreciate it fully:

*“It hurts too much. Even when I hear his songs out in bars or stores, it feels like something is piercing my heart”.*

When reasoning about the whole situation of musicians becoming even more popular after dying and audiences paying more attention to their art, the participants mostly agreed that it is a rather good sign because the attention from the audience helps the music continue existing and therefore, prolongs the life of a musician through his/her music. In other words, as long as the heritage left after the artists is not forgotten, it will secure the continuing life and immortality to the artists after their deaths. Although, the participants also mentioned that it is upsetting that one has to die in order to convey something to the masses:

*“I think that it's mostly a good thing. Unfortunately, it sometimes takes something as sad as a person's death for their music to spread to those who wouldn't necessarily have listened to them previously. It sparks interest in people where they want to find out what this person made before their death. I also think it's good to honor their memory by listening to their work even after they're gone, and in many cases spread awareness of mental health issues that unfortunately aren't talked about enough. At the same time, it's very sad that someone has to die for these issues to be talked about properly”.*

Another respondent said:

*“It's a shame they aren't more appreciated when they were alive. Elvis, John Lennon were considered 'old hat' and they had No1s immediately after they died. Sad.”*

As a result, it turned out that the music left after the deceased artists tend to represent not the existence of the artists and a way to reconnect with them, but the past and the former version of the listeners. In the case of musicians who passed away, their art represents a specific time period that was ended, and therefore, this fact makes the nostalgia for those times even stronger. It was a rather big surprise to find out that the heritage left after the musicians

continues to exist not because of the fans trying to commemorate those musicians or reconnect with them, but because of the attempts of the fans to reconnect with their own past, with their memories and the long-gone youth. It was especially obvious on the examples of the fans of Sid Vicious and Viktor Tsoi, but it can also be observed on the example of Avicii who has died only two years ago, but his fans already mention how his music reminds them of the happy moments in the past.

### **“When stars die young, they live forever”**

The goal of this part of the survey was to understand the symbolic connotations surrounding the deaths of famous musicians and if their meaning changes or fades away with the matter of time. The participants were asked about their associations with the artists’ lives and deaths, how they felt about them right after the death announcements comparing to nowadays.

It was not surprising to find out that a cause of death has greatly impacted the ways in which the deceased artists were perceived afterward, even by their most loyal fans. For instance, all Sid Vicious’ fans reminisced the times when they were young and the artist was a representation of a natural hero for them, a rebel and a rule-breaker. Nevertheless, after more than 40 years since his death from overdose, the perception of the artist has significantly altered. One of the respondents said:

*“My opinion has changed completely since I was a kid. As a poster boy he looks great, but ultimately he had a very sad existence”.*

A similar attitude can be observed in the answer of another participant:

*“He went from being a name in punk rock, to globally infamous overnight. He was always going to be a drug addict, he grew up with addiction – and he got to go through the worst of it in front of the world's press. And he was dead at 21, that's one hell of a price to pay – it's mostly just a sad story to me now”.*

A common thread in the answers of Sid Vicious’ fans is that they all feel sorry for him. It is an interesting observation since it appears that the fans still perceive Vicious as a musical hero, a legend, an idol, but at the same time, his status as a person has significantly degraded. The image of a bold, crazy punk-star breaking the rules looked attractive for 16-years-old fans at the time, but in the end, it turned out to be just a representation of how sad one’s destiny often is. Qualities that mainly made Sid Vicious famous turned out to be something that causes pity afterward. One of the respondents mentioned:

*“He was so extreme that his fans idolized him when he was gone”.*

Another participant described how at the time, Sid Vicious represented the whole punk movement for the fans. Without faking it, he lived this lifestyle:

*“When I was young, I thought he was the epitome of punk rock cool. His flaws and he wasn't short of them, were cool flaws. Now I see a young man who really didn't get a chance”.*

It is interesting that some of the participants understand very well how the fact of early death makes Vicious' life look even more extreme:

*“Punk was about destruction and anarchy and rebellion and looking outrageous and he did that to a tee – he never sold out, never got old or fat or ugly”.*

It looks as the shorter the life of an artist is, the brighter and more unique it seems afterward. It is easier to idolize an artist when his life ends at the peak, when the audience did not witness a decrease in the popularity or the aging of the artist and did not get disappointed in the artist. One of the respondents emphasized this idea in his/her answer:

*“It's very sad, but that's why he is still iconic. When stars die young, they live forever”.*

Nevertheless, despite the fact that most of Vicious' extreme popularity was achieved with the help of not very healthy behavior and habits, there was still some positive influence from it on his fans. For example, one of the interviewees mentioned that seeing an idol destroying his life with drugs has made him/her never try them. Another participant reasoned that at some point, it became apparent that Vicious' behavior was not going to bring any positive outcome:

*“He was a figure of fun when I was a kid, he made me laugh with his antics but ultimately he cuts a very sad figure, playing up to the part rather than being clever about it. In retrospect he was the dumbest of them all”.*

The same realization has come to almost all of the participants throughout the years after his death. As a result, the most common association that Vicious' fans had with his life and death was the phrase “a waste of life”. Several participants used these exact words when reasoning about this subject.

At the same time, the case of Viktor Tsoi who died in a car accident demonstrates that even though he has had a rather short life as well<sup>5</sup>, his fans seem to feel more at peace with it. Apparently, due to the circumstances of death, it feels to them as the death was an accident and therefore, something outside of control. Additionally, his “ordinary” lifestyle has helped the fans remember him this way – a normal guy who stayed true to himself. The participants also

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<sup>5</sup> Viktor Tsoi died at the age of 28



mentioned that he remained famous for so long not for crazy behavior or scandals, but for his “normality”.

*“He is spiritually close to them [to the fans], so he is basically the same as them”*  
(translated by Aldona Martynenka).

Another reason for Viktor Tsoi to not be forgotten by the fans is that his music is still relevant to the audience. A few generations after his death, individuals are capable to relate to the music which may be an explanation for why the artist is still rather popular among younger audiences. Therefore, Tsoi’s music helps not only the older fans to reconnect with the past, but also, it helps younger generations understand better today’s reality and as a result, connect with themselves on a deeper level.

In a similar way, the fans of Avicii mentioned that being able to relate to Tim Bergling was one of the reasons why he has had such an impact on people’s minds. Openness and vulnerability that he was brave enough to share allowed him to be relatable to others. The participants seem to perceive him as just another human being rather than a music superstar:

*“[H]e was one of a kind, loving personality, melodic genius, caring and kind to everyone”.*

Again, it is very interesting that the way of describing Tim Bergling reminds more of a description of a close person, a family member, or a loved one, rather than a celebrity. It can be noticed on the words used to describe him as well as on the warmth in the participants’ responses. For example, it can be visible in the way in which another participant expresses his/her feelings about the artist:

*“I think of him as a regular person who struggled with the same things many of us struggled with. After I saw his documentary, it made me see him in a completely different way. He was relatable. He was human”.*

That might have been the reason for why it was rather easy for Avicii’s fans to connect to him and his music – he was not just producing quality music, he managed to include his personality in this music:

*“[I]n Avicii’s case, he managed to connect his whole personality to it [to his music] and help people relate to it even more. That’s why he will surely stay for some time – people will think of him when listening to his music”.*

In terms of associations that the fans have with the lives of their idols, in the case of Avicii, it is important to take into account the fact that too little time has passed since his death. Therefore, it may be extremely difficult for his fans to associate his life and art with something other than his death. As an example, it is worth quoting one of the participants who said:

*“It's difficult for me to think about his life without being reminded about his death. As soon as I think about his face, I immediately think about the fact that he's dead. In these moments, I'm just thinking how unfair life is”.*

Additionally, the cause of Tim Bergling's death<sup>6</sup> seems to make his fans feel especially emotional about the artist. In other words, they understand that such action has probably resulted from a lot of pain and struggle which makes them feel even more sorry and empathetic towards the situation. To illustrate this idea, it can be observed that no one of the participants has mentioned any negative connotations with Avicii's life and all of them were expressing their empathy and compassion:

*“[H]e was such a pure soul but was struggling with this life a lot”.*

It is an interesting topic to speculate about in terms of how biased the perception of a celebrity may be depending on the cause of his/her death. It can be assumed that, for example, Sid Vicious has made more harm to others during his lifetime compared to Avicii based on the images of both musicians in media. Nevertheless, it does not mean that Tim Bergling has never wronged anyone or did not hurt a single soul. That makes me conclude that different causes of death are capable of fostering different perceptions of a person afterward.

Another interesting observation is that the fans of Avicii even seem to feel guilty (in some sense) about the accident. They are not stating it specifically, but the hints of regret and guilt can be noticed in their answers:

*“I associate it [Bergling's death] with a horrible accident. You know, something terrible which could be avoided but wasn't. I truly believe that any small thing could have changed this whole situation. It just didn't feel like this was coming”.*

The feeling of regret can also be noticed in the answer of another respondent:

*“[W]hy no one pulled the handbrake when he wrote songs like “Fades away”, “Hold the line”, “Never leave me” in his last days?”.*

Similarly to the fan of Sid Vicious who has described his/her negative attitude towards drugs after s/he had witnessed what they led to in the case of Vicious, one of Avicii's fans has also mentioned how his example has helped him/her open up about his/her own struggles:

*“I have become more open about my own struggles with depression and anxiety, and I will never suppress those feelings again. I bring them up with my friends, my employer and anyone I feel appropriate. I think it's important that it's talked about just as you talk about everything else in your life”.*

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<sup>6</sup> Tim Bergling committed suicide

In summary, it is important to emphasize that it is difficult to compare the symbolism of death in the three research cases and it is not clear if comparing them would bring any value. The question that was answered in this section is that the cause of death affects the perception of the artist to a great extent. It is clearly noticeable that in the case of Viktor Tsoi, there are almost no speculations among the fans regarding the correctness or incorrectness of his life decisions since his death was not a result of those decisions. In contrast, it is rather obvious how the fans of Sid Vicious and Avicii continue thinking about what went right and what went wrong. They try to guess how different things could be if something happened or did not happen. This process changes throughout life and it can be noticed how the opinions altered in the case of Sid Vicious. As for Avicii, it is probably too early to make assumptions as the participants seem to still be too overwhelmed with his death to be able to disassociate from it.

I would like to finish this chapter with the quote of one of the participants reasoning on the changing perceptions of the artists throughout the years after their deaths:

*“As we get older, we understand that what we see as ‘cool’ when we were young doesn't necessarily age very well. Certainly not if you die like Sid did. When you look at the other band members, they're still cool, I'm not so sure Sid would ever have been cool past his 25th birthday. He was stupid. I think he played the part rather than being the genuine article, which led to being a junkie and essentially killing himself. He was a fucking idiot”.*

## Conclusion

From the very beginning of working on this paper, when first coming up with an idea for research, the main incentive for me was to understand the nature of the situation when musicians who passed away years or even decades ago continue to be popular and consequently, in some cases, even become legends. In other words, such figures of success as album sales, followers on social media, streamings on Spotify, positions in charts, etc. often increase after their deaths, and sometimes they continue to be rather high even years and decades later.

Therefore, this research aimed at understanding the perception of celebrities' deaths by the audiences, the role of media in mourning and grieving over deceased musicians, and the ways in which the heritage left after the musicians manages to prolong the artists' existence and, in some sense, grants them immortality. Additionally, a comparative aspect for the study was covered by selecting three musicians from different locations and time periods: Sid Vicious (the 1970s, the United Kingdom), Viktor Tsoi (the 1990s, the Soviet Union), and Avicii (the 2010s, Sweden). With the help of the comparative analysis, the subject was explored from different angles that was important to achieve due to the fact that media has gone through completely different stages of development in these time periods. Moreover, the locations represent rather diverse cultural and social environments and therefore, the experience of loss, mourning, and grieving may be different for individuals living in those areas.

In order to achieve the goal, the survey was organized to interview the fans of the chosen musicians. The survey was conducted online by using Google Forms containing interview questions. The participants for the survey were found in social media fan groups of the chosen musicians. The only two requirements were stated for the participants: being born and living in the locations of the musicians and being at least 16 years old at the time of the musicians' deaths. These requirements were necessary to comply with in order to make sure that the respondents were immersed in the local culture of the musicians while also being old enough at the moment of their deaths to be able to remember their feelings and thoughts at the time.

Before conducting the interviews, I have researched media sources in order to find publications containing the musicians' death announcements. The goal of this part of the study was to find any patterns in the ways in which the news about the musicians' deaths were communicated and understand how and if they affected the perception of the artists afterward. Ideally, I tried to find the articles dated right after the time of the deaths, but unfortunately, it was impossible for some of the cases. Nevertheless, even by exploring the articles published afterward, I managed to get an idea of the image of the artists represented in media.

It was rather clear that the image of Sid Vicious in the articles about his death was very negative. The authors emphasized the extreme accidents in which Vicious got involved prior to his death, such as charges for murdering his partner, cutting his wrists with broken light bulbs, drug addiction, violence, mental illness, etc. When it comes to Viktor Tsoi, his death was most commonly described as tragic and unexpected. The publications about him focused on reminiscing his achievements, personal qualities, and the love of the fans for him. Even more so, media outlets focused on the pain of loss when announcing Avicii's death. His death was represented as heart-breaking, devastating, shocking while the artist himself was praised for his talent and kindness. Even though the audiences do not necessarily inherit the opinions about the artists from media sources, there can still be noticed certain similarities in how their lives were portrayed in media versus the perception of the artists by their fans.

My first assumptions regarding the audiences' reasoning in going back to the music by their late idols were the emotional connection to the artists and the unwillingness of the fans to let it go; the fans' attempts to be a part of a collective grieving experience and by doing this, getting gratification from the feeling of belonging to something bigger; or idealizing the artists since the deaths might have overshadowed negative sides of their personalities and/or music and left only positive impressions. As can be noticed, only some of the assumptions turned out to be accurate and reflect the opinions of the survey participants.

When conducting interviews, I have begun by exploring the nature of the fan/idol relationships. My goal here was to understand how big the presence of celebrities was in the lives of fans, the extent of the influence of celebrities on the lives of fans, and the emotional connection between a fan and an idol. This was a necessary starting point because understanding the degree of closeness between a fan and an idol would be helpful in researching the reasons for the fans to act a certain way after the artists passed away.

The results of the survey have shown that most of the participants do not feel comfortable calling themselves "fans" and their idols "celebrities". Especially negative attitude towards the term "fan" was observed among the Russian speaking participants where some individuals even compared being a fan to a mental illness that has nothing to do with admiring the music of an artist. In a similar way, when being asked about the concept of celebrities (a general concept not connected to a specific artist), most of the participants, especially the ones from the United Kingdom and the former Soviet Union, argued that their idols were not celebrities which demonstrated a rather negative connotation of the term. As was explained by the participants later on, nowadays, being called a celebrity does not necessarily imply any

achievements or talent. As a result, calling someone a celebrity may actually be perceived as diminishing their value.

In terms of the influence of celebrities on the lives of fans, the younger group of the respondents admitted that their life choices are not fully influenced by celebrities, although, they may inherit certain views or beliefs of the ones they look up to. It is worth noticing that the older groups of the respondents (the fans of Sid Vicious and Viktor Tsoi) denied any influence of celebrities on their lives and only some of them admitted that their fashion style might have been affected when they were younger.

Further on in the survey, the participants were asked questions about their first feelings, thoughts, and actions after they found out about the deaths of their idols. The first reaction to the announcement was similar for most of the participants. They all felt shocked and, in some cases, they were so hurt that it felt to them as a personal loss even though they have never met the artists personally.

A distinctive characteristic of the fans of Avicii was the immediate need to verify the information. It is an interesting observation because the fans of Sid Vicious and Viktor Tsoi also struggled with believing the news since it felt completely surreal to them, but they did not express the need to check other sources in order to make sure that the news was not fake. It may be explained due to the absence of the ways to validate the facts in the 1970s or 1990s compared to nowadays when individuals have the Internet and different sources available to almost everyone. Additionally, younger individuals tend to question the information they consume and perceive the facts critically which may happen due to increased inflows of new information and the necessity to filter it out to avoid disinformation and misinformation.

Additionally, many of the participants mentioned difficulties in discussing the subject with their families and friends. Firstly, death seemed to them as a heavy topic to speak openly about, especially in person. Secondly, some of the respondents from the United Kingdom and Sweden mentioned that they were often misunderstood and could not relate their feelings to others while in this case, it was necessary for them to discuss the subject with someone who would share the same views. Also, it should be mentioned that the fans of Viktor Tsoi struggled with expressing their feelings even with adherents: they just could not open up which seems to be a cultural feature of the citizens of post-Soviet countries.

Overall, social media has helped some of the participants open up to others. It was easier for them to speak openly about their struggles online instead of talking in person. Additionally, the example of their idols who dared to open up about their own issues has made the fans feel more confident in discussing theirs too. Although for others, social media has become

overwhelming due to the constant flow of posts about the artists' deaths and the emotions it caused in others that has forced them to avoid using social media at all.

In the section about the role of media in mourning and grieving, the participants were also asked about their opinions regarding other media, such as newspapers, television, and other media outlets. As a result, almost all of the participants demonstrated a rather negative attitude towards media companies and journalists. They mentioned that media companies focus on securing revenue and scandalizing the news instead of honoring the lives of the deceased artists. Additionally, they were often perceived as disrespectful in regard to the families of the passed away artists by trying to invade their private space in such inappropriate times.

After that, the participants had to answer the questions about the artists' afterlife co-presence. As was mentioned before, the notion implies a medium (an object or an abstract thing, for instance, music, social media profiles, etc.) left after the passed away artists that, in some sense, prolongs their existence and gives the fans a chance to reconnect with them. The most interesting and unexpected finding of this study was discovering that the heritage left after the musicians is actually perceived by the fans not as a representation of the musicians, but rather as a representation of the nostalgia that the fans are feeling about their own past.

Almost all of the participants have mentioned that when listening to the music by the passed away artists, they feel as if they are traveling to the past, to the times when they were young, and life was easy. It was common for the older groups of fans of Sid Vicious and Viktor Tsoi, but a few of Avicii's fans have also mentioned similar ideas. As a result, my initial assumption regarding the fans listening to the music of the late musicians to reconnect with the artists was wrong and instead of reconnecting with the artists, they are actually reconnecting with their former selves. The fact that the music has remained in the past (since those artists are not producing new music), makes it easier for the fans to associate it with a specific time period.

As for the idea of the symbolism of death, when trying to find a common thread in how the fans of the chosen artists perceive the artists' lives and deaths and what they associate them with, I realized that there was no clear answer to this question. The only clear conclusion was that the cause of death greatly affects the perception of a musician even years later. It is obvious that opinions and tastes change, and young fans of Sid Vicious could see his death from an overdose as an act of rebellion, something to be impressed by, while nowadays these men and women in their 60s just feel sorry for him and call that act a waste of life. When it comes to the death of Viktor Tsoi which was an accident, his fans seem to have accepted his fate and not try to judge the decisions that brought him to that point. At the same time, the fans of Avicii, who

died from suicide, seem to continue trying to understand what went wrong and how things could be different if someone has done something.

In addition to what was said before, one of the research questions of this study was about the ways in which its results can be applied in theoretical and practical fields. The results of this research have hopefully provided an insight into the emotional connection between fans and their idols and how this connection grows and alters with time. When it comes to emotional state, there are certain factors that help individuals open up about their personal struggles and how famous people can impact this process. Additionally, it can be noticed that being able to relate to a musician was probably the main reason for the fans to connect with the musician initially and maintain this connection throughout the years. Although, the main incentive for the fans to continue getting back to the music of the late musicians is not the connection with the artist, but personal experiences that the fans associate with the music.

Overall, even though the results of this study were slightly different from the first assumptions, they definitely provided value and new insights into the minds of fans experiencing the feeling of loss over a famous person. Observing how the interviewees' focus switches from the artists to their personal memories when they were asked about their reasons to get back to the music of the deceased artists again and again was indeed surprising. Additionally, it was rather unexpected to see how Sid Vicious has fallen off his pedestal as a person in the eyes of his fans while still remaining a legend as a musician.

Hopefully, this study has managed to provide a contribution to the fields of celebrity studies, fan studies, and the media and communication field in general.



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## APPENDIX

### Interview Guidelines

#### 1. *Celebrity and fan relationship*

- What does the word “celebrity” mean to you?
- What are the main factors for you in becoming a fan of a musician?
- What is the difference between a fan and a fandom?
- How do celebrities affect your life choices?
- What do you think about the situations when after the death of a musician, his/her music becomes even more popular, more people start following their social media, buy their albums, merch, etc.?

#### 2. *The artist*

- How did you become a fan of \_\_\_\_\_?
- How big is \_\_\_\_\_ presence in your life now? Is it different from the times when he was alive? Why?
- Have you ever communicated with \_\_\_\_\_? If yes, please, describe the situation(s) and your thoughts/feelings in detail.
- What are your relationships with other fans of \_\_\_\_\_?

#### 3. *Death*

- How did you find out about the death of \_\_\_\_\_?
- What did you feel then? What were your first emotions and thoughts?
- What were your first actions after the announcement? The need or desire to do something.
- Did you share the news with anyone? If yes, how and with whom did you discuss it? If not, why?
- How did you manage to go through the grieving experience?

#### 4. *Grief and media*

- What was the role of media in your mourning and grieving over \_\_\_\_\_? How did you use it?
- How did you use the Internet after the death announcement and during mourning and grieving? (if applicable)

- Why when grieving over someone's death, some people opt for online communication and others – offline? (if applicable)

5. *Afterlife co-presence*

- What is it that makes you go back to \_\_\_\_\_ music, photographs, videos, etc. years after his death?
- How does it make you feel (listening to his music, looking at his photographs, etc.)?

6. *Symbolism of death*

- What kind of image does \_\_\_\_\_ have in your mind now? What are you feeling when thinking about his life?
- What do you associate the death of \_\_\_\_\_ with? What feelings do you have about it now?
- Have these feelings changed since the moment of his death and will they ever change in the future? Why?
- Why is \_\_\_\_\_ not forgotten by the fans after all these years since his death?
- Do you have any other thoughts on this topic that you would like to share?