

# Paris Hilton brand expands, releasing debut album

by Zachary Slobig Wed Aug 16, 11:09 AM ET, YAHOO NEWS

Mass-marketing maven and hotel heiress Paris Hilton continues to defy predictions of a rapidly expiring shelf life as she poises to release her self-titled debut album while hawking products from perfume to purses.

The 25-year-old socialite first gained international attention for her appearance in a sex tape that was leaked on the Internet entitled "1 Night in Paris."

Through scandal and ridicule, the hotel and real estate heiress has managed to amass a fortune all her own, with two million dollars in income from assorted media appearances in 2003-2004 tripling to 6.5 million in 2004-2005.

"Paris", Hilton's leap into the recording industry, will hit the streets on August 22. A single, "Stars Are Blind," entered the US Billboard Hot 100 at number 18, the fourth-highest debut on the chart, and reached the number one spot on charts in Canada, Hungary and Poland.

Las Vegas oddsmakers are even taking bets on how her debut album will fare.

"There seems to be no saturation point in sight," said Robert Thompson, professor of television and popular culture at Syracuse University in New York state.

"In an odd way she is the best representation of masterful manipulation of the entertainment-industrial complex."

Like Zsa Zsa Gabor, who married her great-grandfather, hotel magnate Conrad Hilton, Paris Hilton is famous simply for being famous. But she has managed to parlay her time in the cross-hairs of the paparazzi into a dizzying array of merchandise and media ventures.

Her reality television show with "celebutante" Nicole Richie (daughter of singer Lionel Richie), "The Simple Life," was a runaway hit, and is entering its fourth season. She has appeared in low-budget horror films and made commercials for fast-food burgers wearing a skimpy bathing suit.

A Hilton-centered animated series is in the works. "Paris" the nightclub opened in two Florida cities recently, and she has talked of launching her own chain of boutique hotels, starting in Las Vegas.

The heiress-cum-singer has cowritten an autobiography with an entire chapter devoted to her own fashion mistakes, and published a diary entitled "Your Heiress Diary: Confess It All to Me," a collection of blank pages studded with photos of Hilton. Fans can also purchase a "diary" from the perspective of her pet chihuahua, Tinkerbelle, entitled "My Life Tailing Paris Hilton."

The spotlight has yet to tire of Hilton. Whether it is an announcement of a year of celibacy, or the news that she has been bitten by her pet kinkajou, the camera flashes and celebrity press follow.

"Here we are in the middle of a war and global unrest, and every time another of these stories breaks, you just have to take your hat off to her," said Thompson. "Business schools should take her as a model and teach semesters devoted to her."

Thompson likens Hilton to the dusty outposts of the early American West, towns whose growth into real cities relied on big-talking boosters.

"She is a fascinating cultural experiment, a house of cards built on a very finite list of accomplishments," said Thompson. The experiment is not without its vocal critics.

"The world is watching Paris insinuate her noisy, shopworn caboose into just about every unnecessary public venue conceivable: modeling, acting, singing, television, fashion, jewelry, and amateur pornography," rants a typical anonymous post on rotten.com.

Media analyst Jerry Del Colliano, of the University of Southern California, sees a growing hypocrisy in the entertainment industry where lifestyle has come under more intense scrutiny.

"We have higher standards for Paris Hilton than we do of (US President) George W. Bush," Colliano told AFP. "If we required every musician to lead an exemplary life, we'd be left with very few musicians."

But Thompson believes Hilton has yet to secure a position in the pantheon of popular culture. Her house may still be made of cards, despite a record release on a major label.

"I doubt Paris will be on the tips of many tongues five or 10 years from now," said Thompson. "But who knows, she has