

From "Overnight Fame" to "Being Worth Teaching"

"Idol Cultivation": a New Narrative Mode of Talent Show

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Abstract—As the focus in the layout of self-made content on the Internet, network variety shows are different from traditional TV variety shows in the aspects of production logic and application scenarios, which makes them burst out more possibilities in content production, marketing and promotion. Compared with the traditional talent shows, the network talent shows with the narrative mode of "idol cultivation" focus on the process of "cultivation" and actively create star idols in line with the mainstream values, so as to realize the successful transformation of core values from "overnight fame" to "being worth teaching". According to the value and law of content production endowed by the Internet era, this new narrative mode not only facilitates the deep involvement of the audience in the program, but also cultivates a new type of talent show suitable for the characteristics of the Internet era based on the changes of the programming and broadcasting carrier.

Keywords—network variety show; talent show; idol cultivation; narration

I. INTRODUCTION

The comprehensive rise of network variety shows has become an indisputable fact. From the original replication and replay of video resources of traditional media, to the gradual attempt to make simple program contents, to the continuous production of various phenomenal network variety shows, network media has completely realized the functional transformation from a single platform of video broadcasting to a production organization integrating programming and broadcasting. Seizing this advantage, iQIYI aired the "Idol Producer", the first reality show of competition for idol boy band cultivation in China, in the first quarter of 2018 when the overall trend of talent shows was weak. A total broadcast volume of 2.9 billion has been achieved in the 12 episodes. On its heels, Tencent Video launched the first youth growth program of girl group "Produce 101" in the second quarter, which received more than 3 billion views in two months after being launched. The going viral of these two programs makes the programs themselves IP brands with great popularity value. The new narrative mode of "idol cultivation" also provides new ideas for the successful construction of talent show production mode.

II. FROM WATCHING TO ACCOMPANYING: GETTING ALONG WITH EACH OTHER DAY AND NIGHT UNDER THE LENS

From "Mr. Love: Queen's Choice" to "Travel Frog", "cultivation" has become a hot keyword on the Internet for a short time. The process of cultivating is actually the process of emotional accumulation. The accumulated emotions will inevitably make people take multiple factors into consideration when making the final choice. The core of the new talent show "cultivation" is that contestants and fans "get along with each other day and night" under the camera. The hard work behind the stage and the frolic in life are what fans are eager to see, therefore through the panorama of contestants' daily study and life, the program greatly meets all the needs of fans for their idols. The uninterrupted shooting of the idol cultivation process also makes every step of the growth of the contestants be accompanied by the full attention of fans. Limited by the length of the program, the uneven distribution of players' lenses is a prominent problem that cannot be solved in traditional talent shows. As a new type of online talent shows, their characteristics lie in the targeted performance of every bit of each trainee, and the strengthening of the cultivation of fans' and trainees' directed and exclusive emotions. Therefore, in addition to the broadcast of regular content, the program group also tried to expand other channels, and produced and broadcast many extended contents related to contestants, such as idol has "Idol New Stories" and "Idols at Midnight" and other video programs of the "Idol Producer". It allows the interaction between fans and trainees to the maximum extent, thus effectively solving the contradiction between the limited program duration and the unlimited demand of audience.

In an online engagement culture, "Fans are invested in a practice that gives them a degree of control over their emotional lives." No matter it is in "Idol Producer", or "Produce 101", the cultivation of idol cannot do without the support of fans. The power of fans occupies a relatively dominant position since many links in the program require the deep participation of the audience, like the fate of contestants, the principal and deputy position in the performance, are all decided by the vote of the audience. The

speeches before the stage, private interviews, and the audience the contestants face are also clearly directed to the fans. The daily company under the camera will make the fans form a strong attachment to the players they like. And the communication and interaction formed through multiple platforms will make their relationship more intimate. This model of "participation and company" breaks the awkward situation of unilateral "association" between fans and idols after the separation of fans and idols of traditional talent shows. It focuses on realizing that every step of the growth of idols is accompanied by the "collective presence" of fans. Fans are no longer passive recipients of cultural products, but become active media consumers. They are willing to spend more time and energy on the cultivation of idols with their true feelings, which make "cultivated" idol no longer a lofty star on the stage, but become a close friend in the life of their fans. They will further strengthen the emotional connection between the two sides through their own emotional expression. This narrative strategy, which includes both laughter and frustration tears, can allow fans to more thoroughly enter the world of players, which is also the key to form an intimate relationship between players and fans.

"Intimate relationships are ultimately a matter of emotional exchange, with others and with oneself in a context of interpersonal equality. But it also makes loyalty the core ambivalent structure of the relationship, because either party can more or less casually propose to terminate the relationship at some point, which is exactly a feature of the pure relationship." In the Internet age, the emotional communication between people is no longer confined to face-to-face communication. A close relationship can be achieved in more diverse ways. Although it is impossible to realize zero-distance dialogue and interaction between fans and idols, the virtual network can break the limitation of time and space, so that fans can get more opportunities to communicate with contestants emotionally. The program group uses the operation mode of "expansion + fixation" to realize the management of fans. On the one hand, it displays the performance of players in an all-round way, integrates the information of players, and highlights the advantages of players, so as to attract more people to become new fans. On the other hand, the program also set up a special operation team for fans, effectively ensuring the close interaction between fans and players, so as to consolidate and maintain the existing fan groups. This intimate relationship allows fans to be loyal to their chosen idol in the face of complex situations. As long as there are no ethical issues involved, fans will view the performance of players with a more inclusive attitude. Some seemingly damaging "negative" reports will be regarded by fans as the inevitable ups and downs in the process of personal growth. The one-way wait-and-see style of "idol expectation", which was originally too absolute, will be replaced by the more rational two-way cultivation of "sharing happiness and sorrow" thereby.

III. FROM MONISM TO PLURALISM: THE INDIVIDUAL CHOICE FACILITATED BY THE LONG TAIL

Most of the users in the network are young people with a wider range of interests and hobbies. In order to create

network variety shows that meet the needs of this group, it is necessary to fully respect the personalized needs of each user, identify their interest points and social circles, and pay attention to the cultivation of their sense of participation and substitution. Only in this way can the originally scattered audience groups be focused on the same program. Since the final winners of "Idol Producer" and "Produce 101" will make their debut as a band, the full prominence of a player's individual strength does not determine whether he or she will win in the end, but the overall performance of each player in the team should be taken into consideration. For the pros and cons of the players, the program did not point to clear criteria for judging. Instead, it made that an open choice entirely in the hands of the audience. Each player has his or her own unique personality and unique focus on the business, from the first team to the winning debut team. In the face of different attributes of the players, the program will be fully presented to the audience in the open network space and the audience can choose according to their preferences. "In the Internet age, because the cost of attention has been greatly reduced, people will pay attention to the 'tail' of the normal distribution at a very low cost. No matter how low the demand seems before, as long as there is a seller, there will be a buyer." Different students have different personalities and characteristics, and the audience can always find the one they like. In traditional talent shows, the "long tail" of contestants' personal attributes may be abandoned in a very short time due to the limitation of program length and competition system. But in the cultivation talent shows, the persistence of this long tail will provide more possibilities for the audience's personalized choice, just like some contestants may not have strong professional strength, but their lovely characters and sweet looks may be the reason for the audience to Pick them.

The types of prospective contestants from different contracting companies are positioned differently, and the performance teams formed in each phase also actively try a variety of styles. The highlights of the two programs not only lie in the wonderful competition system and gorgeous choreography, but also in the different personality charm and spiritual strength of the trainees. The contestants are eager to break through themselves and let the audience see their infinite potential and possibility. On the other hand, the audience also expected their favorite contestant to have a more outstanding performance in the team combination. The way the contestants and fans tell each other their true selves not only contributes to the great enthusiasm of the audience for participating in the show, but also makes them trust each other. This kind of trust, to the greatest extent, enables the audience to feel the joy of their own value being recognized. It also reflects the program's understanding and respect for the network youth culture, enabling them to find the identity and belonging of their group. Fans who grow up with idols will always find their own aesthetic idols in idol groups with different styles. Although the number of groups they belong to can be either large or small, it is precisely this kind of diversified and vertical ecosystem that manifests the personality differences between different groups in real life. "Differences among individuals constitute a sense of identity, which in turn reflects exclusion and inclusion. According to

Freud, identity is a process of emotional and psychological convergence between individuals and others, groups or people being imitated." In fact, the process of fans that feel differences in groups and determine preferences among them accompanying their idols to grow up is exactly the process of them building their self-identity synchronously.

According to the data provided by iQIYI, among the audience of "Idol Producer", the proportion of female audience after 1995 is as high as 73 percent. However, even the main audience groups with relatively concentrated gender and age will show completely different preferences. The new online talent shows are different from the previous talent shows in that some contestants have their own topic and attention before participating in the shows, while some contestants have no performance experience before. The experienced "quality center" is bound to be recognized by most audiences with its mature stage performance, while the earnest and practical "diligent center" will also let more people see their hidden potential through their own efforts. The multiple criteria not only bring more possibilities to each program, but also show the increasingly diverse personality characteristics of people in the real community. Acceptance of diversity will inevitably bring more new ideas to the creation of programs, and respect for individuality will also enable many seemingly incompatible individuals to form a powerful force of "harmony with difference".

IV. FROM UNIDIRECTION TO INTEGRATION: FLEXIBLE CONSTRUCTION OF INTERACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Durkheim emphasized the physical convergence of groups in his Interaction Rituals Theory — when a group of people gather in the same space and time, people begin to pay attention to each other's expressions and movements, and generate physical contact or emotional communication. The profound transformation of information technology has changed the way people communicate with each other, and further affected the operation mode of the whole social organization. In the era of media convergence, the role of onlookers has been far from meeting people's requirements for media use. In particular, with the emergence of variety show through the Internet, the time and space boundary between information production and audience consumption disappears. "Convergence is not a 'pure technology' issue and should not be a technical process in which one media device provides multiple media functions. Convergence represents a cultural shift in which consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections in these media." The essence of "idol cultivation" talent shows is that consumers create associations in the media. Such spontaneous, active and positive association manufacturing is fully reflected in platform channels, technical means, media practices and other aspects. Good driving force of the social media has injected new vitality for the talent show. Talent shows are closely connected with sina weibo and other social media. Audiences can support their favorite trainees through thumbs up, which makes trainees not only need the support of tutors and live audience, but also need active users in social media for their thumbs up. This kind of network interaction on social media has become one of the ways for fans to

participate in the cultivation of idols. And this new fan-based interactive mode, which is installed on the network platform, not only gives full play to the advantages of the network platform, but also provides considerable popularity security for "idol cultivation".

In the era of social media, the communication strength of traditional media has long been unable to meet the expectation of the publicity of talent shows. Under the trend of multi-screen interaction, online talent shows are dominated by Weibo and WeChat, which drives the comprehensive coverage of media platforms, thus creating multiple "shows" for trainees except the main platform. Fans' continuous attention to contestants has become an important factor in the promotion of the program. In addition to accompanying the growth of idols, everyone can become a producer and publisher of information. By virtue of the network platform, they produce and create a large amount of fresh content, and actively share and disseminate information through social media and through direct participation in information release, Internet search, comment forwarding, preservation and sharing, a broader media culture has been formed. Fans use social platforms to flexibly participate in interaction and freely express their opinions, which not only enhance the program's user stickiness, but also triggers the secondary spread of the program on social media. For the common idol, fans will spontaneously form community organizations such as iQIYI bubble, fan club, QQ group, etc. Almost every trainee who participates in the program will have a special fan community. Click the corresponding voting interface and one can enter the fan community. The information screening check and system release of fan community can focus on the advantages of fans, from the direction of more beneficial to the players, and disseminate valuable information for the contestants to the greatest degree.

The cooperation and communication between social media and network homemade variety shows not only expands the publicity of the programs themselves, but also creates a new model for win-win cooperation between powerful parties. In the program, it can be seen that the sponsor brand will run through the whole process of the program, and the implanted advertising endorsement video is more like the introduction video of the trainees. In addition, the online voting, online interaction and fan operation in the program need fans to purchase voting cards or products provided by sponsors. Every purchase by fans is regarded as an interaction with trainees. And this kind of value connection between fans, trainees and sponsors also naturally becomes the cultivation process of idols. In addition to emotional input, fans will provide financial support to idols when necessary.

V. FROM ACCIDENTAL TO INEVITABLE: THE RE-CREATION OF THE VALUE CONCEPT

Idol cultivation is a long process. Contestants who participate in the program as trainees are just like ordinary people, who must work harder to be successful. Only after a period of training in the model of idol cultivation can excellent trainees have the chance to make their debut. As a

new narrative mode of talent shows, the "idol cultivation" mode pins down the target audience at the young group, and creates the entertainment field of the program according to the preferences and aesthetic needs of the young people. The program not only uses the camera to show the golden images of contestants in the stage, but also to capture the ups and downs of their daily life. This mode changes from "show" to "reality", which narrows the distance between the audience and the idol more truly. With more and more attention and recognition given to players due to their ability improvement, the value of "more efforts, more luck" is also fully reflected in the training process. The core slogan of "Idol Producer" breaks the value of "overnight fame" of talent show, and also defines the positive life attitude of fans so that they can draw positive energy from idols to improve themselves, and can gain psychological growth in the process of idol worship.

"Overnight fame" allows young people to expect something for nothing and mistakenly believe that they can achieve unexpected success as long as they seize the opportunity. Accidental success in the program makes them neglect the importance of their own efforts. In the new talent shows, with the gradual development of idol groups, "being worth teaching" becomes the new spiritual outlook of these young idols. In the process of entertaining through education, "idol cultivation" mode conforms to the value orientation of the mainstream of the whole society with a positive image. It is repeatedly stressed that only efforts will be rewarded, and the harder you work, the luckier you will be on the stage of talent show. Just like the star tutors selected in the program, they have certain appeal in themselves, and their outstanding performance in the program also adds a lot to the program. These mentors were also artists who started out as trainees or in groups, and their positive personal images emphasize that today's achievements are hard-won. Seeing the success of the role models at the moment, and listening to their stories along the way, the contestants and the audience feel the simple truth that one can only go further when he or she is willing to pay. Through the profound narration of the "inevitable" reasons behind every seemingly "accidental" success, the core values of the program are also delivered more effectively in this way.

VI. CONCLUSION

As a traditional form of variety shows, talent shows must keep innovating if they want to regain their attention. Different from the past over-entertainment variety shows, the narrative mode of "idol cultivation" of online talent shows has realized the successful transformation of the value concept from "overnight fame" to "being worth teaching". Between the categories of "pick" and "show", it satisfies the personalized needs of audiences in the Internet era to the greatest extent, and also embodies the social responsibility and humanistic care of network talent shows. In the face of the macro layout and top-level design of "Internet space governance" and "creating new mainstream media" "telling better Chinese stories of", in the future, the network TV shows can only realize the program's unceasing innovation and the orderly development better if they strike a balance between digging into user needs and communicating

mainstream values, look for rules between mastering network communication and sticking to professionalism and explore the space between the deep study of discourse expression and the integration of technical means.

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