

# Exploring the Impact of Persona Collapse in the Context of the Internet Era in China

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## ABSTRACT

Setting personas has become a popular operation among celebrities to building up their personal brands. However, the number of persona collapse events has been rising at the same time. This article mainly focuses on the topic of exploring the impact of persona collapse in the context of the Internet era in China. The article has explained the impacts caused by persona collapse from various perspectives. This article has provided a solid theoretical foundation for future researches which related to the effective methods of alleviating and further eliminating the harmful impacts of persona collapse. This article takes “persona collapse” as the key word, which is used to search articles on the CNKI from 2017 to now, and there are 12 articles which are selected into the classification of this research. The collapse of celebrities’ persona will cause various impacts in numerous aspects. It is pathetic that a major of the impacts will do harm to the society, including human beings themselves, the development of economics, the healthy being of mainstream social values, etc. Therefore, the persona collapse thing is harmful and needs to be avoided.

**Keywords:** *Persona collapse, Internet, China.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As the scale of social media platforms is growing at a dramatic speed, more celebrities are preferring to setting their own social media accounts to express more about their personalities. In order to form the most ideal type for their fans and a majority of bystanders, they will formulate certain kinds of characters in advance and perform them in different circumstances accordingly. Due to the fact that more people are benefit from this pattern, the practice of setting a persona has been popularized, which also results in the rising rate of persona collapse events. Celebrities’ personas are a kind of social character, which is a kind of exposed concrete social label, and it has certain stable social norms and ethical values [1]. The criteria for persona collapse have two layers. One is the public images designed by managers are not quite appropriate or the performance presented by the artists is incomplete, the other is that the public image of a celebrity is ruined by a certain event, principally some dramatic scandals, subverting their former positive personas [2]. The research question is about the impact of persona collapse in the context of the Internet era in China from the perspectives of different social groups. Since the concept of persona has been popularized for about ten years, some related

research articles are not adequate and many of them are published within recent five years. Some articles are developed from the perspective of communication studies, focusing on the reasons of this event from the angles of the manager company, the fans group and the celebrities themselves. The other large portion of articles are using Goffman’s dramaturgical theory to illustrate the deep reasons about why the celebrities tend to set personas on social media platforms and why their personas are collapsing frequently, among which many articles have given their solutions for better maintaining their personas from being subverted. Though the process of recognizing the impacts of persona collapse, a deeper knowledge of what kind of changes and the scale of influences aroused by persona collapse can be absorbed, which can serve as a solid theoretical foundation for future researches that are related to the effective ways of alleviating or even eliminating the adverse effects of this kind of events. This article takes “persona collapse” as the key word, which is used to search articles on the CNKI from 2017 to now, and there are 12 articles which are selected into the classification of this research.

## 2. IMPACTS OF PERSONA COLLAPSE

The theme is going to be explored from five perspectives, including focused encounters, celebrities, social media platforms, the development of crisis

management industry and the whole society. The classification of the articles can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Analysis of 12 papers containing the phrase “persona”

No. of papers	Context of “persona” usage	References
2	The impact of persona collapse for focused encounters	[3][4]
3	The impact of persona collapse for celebrities themselves	[5][6][7]
2	The impact of persona collapse for social media platforms	[8][9]
2	The impact of persona collapse for the development of crisis management industry	[10][11]
3	The impact of persona collapse for the whole society	[12][13][14]

### 2.1. For Focused Encounters

#### 2.1.1. Perception Level

The collapse of persona will lead to the questions of fans about the social norms and ethical values which are presenting by this kind of persona, which equals cognitive dissonance at some levels. Since the celebrities are the core of their fans, they serve as the bond of certain emotional communities, and they are also the standard of certain personas or social roles. Once the ideal images are ruined by some scandals, the fans will be confused about the supposed rules of this kind of social characters that the idols have been performing for a long time [3]. Recently, a Chinese American singer, Wang Lihong, recently was reported divorcing with his wife Li Lianglei. However, shortly after this news was released, his ex-wife posted a long passage about his affairs with other women and his psychological manipulation to her during their marriage. This scandal completely ruined his image of a lovely and energetic boy which he had maintained for over ten years. Though some information has not been confirmed yet, his persona has been subverted, which caused large-scale discussion about his image of a positive boy and affectionate husband in public.

#### 2.1.2. Value System Level

It reminds the nuptial tuberdes to reconsider about their value system of admiring and worshiping a celebrity. As the fan group is having growing influence on the career prospect of the idols, the manager companies will consider more about their requests and expectations for the artists [4]. However, the fans tend

to focus on the several positive qualities which they want to their idols to have, which are their own psychological projection at some certain level. They are supposed to recognize the fact that humans are multidimensional, and several labels cannot fully describe a person. For some shortcomings of their idols, the fans should learn to accept and try to absorb from the positive energies from the artists. Become more understandable for everyone.

### 2.2. For Celebrities

#### 2.2.1. For Their Own Psychological Health

The discrepancy between celebrities’ personas and their real personalities leads to the disintegration of artists’ performance and also the insanity for they have to change among different kinds of characters while standing on different stages [5]. As the public and the manager company have set the ideal persona of celebrities, they should obey and try their best to perform these settings. However, when the conflict between their persona and the authentic personalities grows bigger, the celebrities will split themselves or even feel extremely painful and do not know what the appropriate way is to express themselves. When their inappropriate behavior is exposed and got their persona collapsed, plus the numerous criticize of the public, their self-esteem will be seriously hurt and the psychological construct will be dramatically damaged. A Chinese actress Ma Sichun have suffered from depression due to her persona collapse. Since she had starred in several youth films, her image has been accepted by the public as pure, pretty and innocent. However, her persona got collapse and she was

criticized by the audience for being out of shape and no longer fitting her previous characters. Facing quantities of negative comments, she could not digest all these things in a short time and suffer acute depression.

### *2.2.2. For The Positive Development Of Social Values*

The biggest difference between celebrities and normal people is that they have certain public influence and serve as opinion leaders under certain circumstances, especially in the fan community [6]. At certain levels, the organizations consisting of celebrities and their followers are like religion groups, with a leader and a group of believers. In some fans' minds, their idols are the firmest belief, and they will follow whatever the idols have said and done. Therefore, the celebrities must be cautious about their performance when they are acting on the front stage. Once their personas collapse, some of their fans may leave this group but there will be a portion of followers who will believe their idols unconditionally and try to find excuses to defense for their idols' mistakes. If the scale of this group is comparatively large and they have certain influence, some audience who have weaker critical thinking ability are possibly misled by the harmful publicity, which will have negative effect on the healthy development of social value system. Also, the setting of personas develops various certain stereotypes for certain kinds of groups or characters. However, the celebrities are always showing the positive sides of this type of persona to the public. When the common people meet the seemingly same of kind of person as some celebrities, they tend to preset that the person they met has all the charming qualities as the celebrities do. But when they find that the person they met actually has many shortcomings and is not as perfect as they imagine, they will feel upset and psychological distortion could be developed since they are confused about what the right criteria are for the persona or the persona they admire [7].

### *2.3. For Social Media Platforms*

The rising rate of persona collapse will push the officials of social media platforms to strengthen their surveillance and management of the information posted online [8]. With the rapid development of cultural industry and social media platforms, like Tiktok and Instagram, the threshold of becoming an influencer is much lower than before and even juveniles are actively engaged in posting some videos online to gain some attractions and praise. However, the young generation haven't got a complete value system to help them tell right from wrong. They have comparably larger possibility to be misled by some virtual persona of public figures and try to imitate their behaviors. Therefore, the official of social media platforms should

regulate their management of the categorized news. The audience should pay attention to the contribution of the artists and the value they provide but not their private lives. They should also have reasonable expectation for celebrities' quality. If the desire of focused encounters to pry into the privacy of continues growing, it will further deteriorate the atmosphere of showbiz and the whole society. To some degrees, social media platforms are kind of bridge which serve as a flexible bond between public figures and common people. It is flexible because it can be beneficial for celebrities to market their attractive persona and it can also be a sharp knife to stab when some of their negative news are grasped by some official medias or common people who are engaged in discussing heated social events. At these moments, social media platforms should stick to their responsibilities and let the truth and positive images conveyed to the public without overstating any kind of facts or spreading any kinds of fake news [9].

### *2.4. For The Development Of Crisis Management Industry*

The increasing number of persona collapse event promote the development of crisis management industry [10]. Since the scandals that destroy the celebrities' persona will cause harmful social effects and be criticized by the audience, the manager company will try to figure out ways to alleviate the negative impacts from a large degree. However, that is a complicated job and will consume quantities of time, energy and resources in every field. Therefore, some professional crisis management companies are born, and their handling methods are gradually improved and perfected during every demanding and challenging case that they are supposed to deal with. One thing should be highlighted is that the crisis management companies should have a clear knowledge about that the case that they are supposed to take over. If the event is related to a crime or possibly offend the law, the company should hold their moral line and do not defend any evil party that may do harm to the public order. If the news exposed by some black-hearted media purposefully was just a piece of rumor but it hurt the image of the celebrity on the social media platforms, crisis management company can spread the right information professionally, using their numerous channels and influential accounts [11]. From a general perspective, the rising rate of persona collapse event have inspired the development of crisis management industry, which conversely has a positive effect on erasing the negative impacts of the collapse of celebrities' persona.

### *2.5. For Society*

Persona collapse will cause dramatic social influences as its heroes have significant exposure and they have effects on a huge number of people and

various aspects of a society as well. First of all, after persona collapsed, the celebrities still have a group of solid followers who will always be always there to support their idols, no matter what kinds of scandals have be exposed the fans group will always believe that there are certain secret facts of this event. They have been deeply affected by their idols who barely carry all the hope they need to support them continuing their life. Additionally, some celebrities in the showbiz have complicated connections with some reputable figures in other fields, like the economy and politic [12]. If the scandals are extremely serious, they will cause unrest of society and also the interests of different social classes, resulting in a lose-lose or even triple lose situation. Last but not least, some persona collapse events may be related to law-breaking problems, such as academic cheating, tax evasion and taking drugs. These kinds of things can possibly mislead some people who have the tendency of breaking the law to carry out something illegal [13]. There is also another concept we should be clear about is that the persona thing is an organizational behavior of multiple subjects. Various aspects will eventually have an effect on the persona being, including their growing surrounding, their educational background and the party who want to signify the celebrities' personalities to quick and big profit. All of these are crucial factors for the success and collapse of persona, which remind us of the importance of purifying the social surroundings and providing a bright and prospected environment for the entertainment industry to develop healthily [14].

### 3. CONCLUSION

Persona has been created by various parties, including the manager companies, the celebrities themselves and the needs of the market, to fulfill the object of quick profit-making through several labelling words or phrases. To some degrees, those celebrities are being transformed into collections of piles of profitable symbols without their own soul. As long as they have not completely lost their true selves, persona collapse events are a predictable result. Viewing from the major perspectives, the collapse of celebrities' persona will cause negative impacts to every layer in Chinese society. However, under the circumstances of the Internet and fast developing economy, since the setting of persona has become the necessity to popularize the traits of public figures within a short period of time, the researches related to exploring the reasonable ways to construct personas should be done, including figuring out the methods to largely alleviate the negative impacts to secure a clean and righteous atmosphere for the whole society.

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