# Kim Kardashian's Self-Publishing Stage and Her Audience Imitators:
## The Dramaturgical Theory of Social Media Platforms in the New Media Age

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**ABSTRACT**

Social new media platforms have promoted the new-media information dissemination mechanism, by which many people are performing themselves with different personal symbols. The American sociologist Irving Goffman proposed Dramaturgical theory, which means people in society are seen as actors performing on a huge stage, using various symbols to present themselves and trying to get good results or attention. With the rapid development of social media, this theoretical prediction has been observed among many media platforms. This study uses Kim Kardashian as a representative example of how actors are using media platforms as a stage to perform and sell themselves to audiences through their online symbols. Meanwhile, in the same process, social media platforms become a huge stage of public engagement. It is argued in this study that a section of the audience is just the viewers of her, while part of the audience becomes Kim Kardashian's imitators in a new cycle of performance.

*Keywords: Dramaturgical theory, The New Media Age, Social Media.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the development of communication technology, instant message exchange, and chatting are becoming easier for people who have a mobile. Many media platforms have appeared. On these online media platforms, many people who gain countless attention have become celebrities. In communication theory, Dramaturgical theory suggests that the expression of people on social media platforms is a performance, in which people show themselves and hopefully gain the love and interest of their audience [1, 2]. These people become actors in social media and gain an audience through their performances through their diverse symbols like words, pictures, and videos [2, 3]. The discussion of social performing development can be referred back to the American sociologist Irving Goffman and is related to social psychology and communication theory [4].

According to Dramaturgical theory, on social media, people give themselves a Personality positioning and refine it by posting diverse content [3]. Meanwhile,

people who follow celebrities and become their audience, the audience, they helping the celebrities to complete the performance. In addition, some of the influenced people continue to imitate their favorite celebrities and continue their performances on their social media platforms, where a viewer becomes an actor and creates a round of performances. This process shows the whole performance and reflects how performance is transmitted one by one. The research about this period can show how celebrities influence people's psychology in the 21st century. It can help to dig out the value of performance through media, and it can give a reference to the industries which need to promote by media content management. The complex social relationships of individual roles in society will also be presented in this study. People can learn about media's function, celebrities' building process, and social psychology as well. In western countries and China, there have been many pieces of research on Dramaturgical theory over the past decades. They analyze and study the construction and application of Dramaturgical theory, and come up with case studies for analysis [5-7]. However, they rarely

analyzed whether the influence of one performer on other performers would continue to drive the new performance cycle. This research topic appeared to be a topic that has not gotten that much attention. Therefore, this study will include this area and research to make sure that people become the actor and the audience in this background. The purpose of this study uses Kim Kardashian as a representative example of how actors are using media platforms as a stage to perform and sell themselves to audiences through their online symbols. Besides, this study analyzes how part of the audience becomes Kim Kardashian's imitators in a new cycle of performing. It will help people think about the application of Dramaturgical theory in social media and can help people better construct their personalities on social media platforms.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The dramaturgical theory was suggested by the American sociologist Irving Goffman [1, 3]. It is also known as Dramaturgy or Impression Management. It argues that individuals do not interact with each other simply based on a stimulus-response relationship as animals do, but that humans are conscious, thoughtful, and emotional. Therefore, the most fundamental characteristic of human beings and the societies they create must be identified in their particular ability to use symbols to express themselves to each other. Goffman's theory occupies an important place in figurative interaction theory, borrowing from drama theory, the theory compares society to a stage and compares each person in society to a performer on the stage, as a way of exploring how each person in everyday life designs to construct roles and perform in front of the stage to portray themselves well in front of others [8]. Its theories include acting, drama classes, regional behaviors, incongruous roles, out-of-role communication and the art of impression management.

In Goffman's book Self-Presentation in Everyday Life, he focuses on how people create an impression interactively in the impressions of others [3, 9]. He discusses how people create impressions in the minds of others during their interactions and what techniques they can use to make their behavior produce the impression they want others to produce. In dramaturgical terms, this is a performing art, which is why Goffman's theory is known as imitation theatre theory. Kim's Ins content is also a kind of performance, and the phenomenal sexy aesthetic trend she presents in the pictures is precisely in line with the beauty trend that people aspire to. She uses different Ins contents as symbols for the performance, using online media as a platform for the performance, while she is the actor. Everyone who sees her Ins content is an actor watching her performance, and those who receive her content become her fans and audience, helping her to complete the whole performance. Through that, she should her values and meet her own purpose.

Therefore, under the guidance of Dramaturgical theory, the author hopes to analyze her Ins contents and discover some specific features.

Kim Kardashian is one of the most famous people in the world worshipped by many others, especially teenage girls. Since Kardashian herself represents a phenomenal aesthetic trend that has reached the feminine beauty ideal, the content and the sharing of pictures posted by netizens on social media are influenced by Kardashian and the beauty trend she created. This explains the reason why Kardashian was chosen to be the example of this study, and the study intends to show the content and the reaction of her online content, to show how Dramaturgical theory is going through many media platforms. By observing Kardashian's own Ins contents, this study chose five popular types of images that Kim likes to post as "symbols", namely. These symbols are the props of Kardashian as a performer, and the audience's preferences and comments on this content will reflect the results of Kim as a performer. This study will analyze the different contents and reflections through the survey questionnaire to show whether she performs through the Internet media. Besides, it will help to find if others find her performance and how deeply they would like to imitate her.

## 3. DATA AND METHOD

### 3.1. Method & Survey Object

This research placed all audiences of Kim as its main object. It adopted quantitative analysis and non-probability sampling to collect data through which 494 people of different ages and cities conducted an online survey (questionnaire). By using the purposive sampling method, the survey refuses to let people who do not know her fill. Finally, 426 questionnaires were taken, while 418 questionnaires were valid and taken back; the effective recovery rate is 98.1%.

### 3.2. Questionnaire Design

In addition to the basic information about the subjects, the questionnaire tested attitudes in two main areas: Firstly, five important characteristics of the Kardashians are used as important mimetic symbols to measure their thoughts by asking them about their attitudes towards these five elements. Secondly, the questionnaire identifies the influence of the male gaze. This section observes the extent to which men and women are influenced by the presence of the male gaze. Meanwhile, the influence of Kardashian is depicted by asking people about their attitudes towards her media identity management.

The questionnaire uses a Reverso system that enables the interviewee to jump from several corresponding questions according to the personal/different answers.

The first section deals with basic information with eight questions. They are listed as below:

1. Did you hear about the Kim Kardashian family or Kim Kardashian herself?

-Yes, I have read about it online.

-Yes, I have actively searched for information about this person.

-Yes, someone has mentioned her to me.

-Yes, I know about her from _____.

-No (leave questionnaire)

2. Your Gender

-Male

-Female

The third and fourth questions ask about the age and occupation. In the fourth question, answering option five would help deliberate young people's connection with new media platforms and applications. Due to that reason, option five is designed to jump to question five. The same consideration is implied in question seven.

4. What is your occupation?

-Professional Job

(e.g.teacher/doctor/lawyer, etc.)

-Service Industry Worker (caterer/driver/salesman, etc.)

-Freelancer

(e.g.writer/artist/photographer/tour guide, etc.)

-Worker / Factory Worker

(e.g. factory worker/construction worker/city sanitation worker, etc.)

-Corporate Employees

-Civil servant/Government worker

-Student -5

-Housewife

-Other _____

5. Your current status as?

-Junior high school student/Primary school student - 8

-Senior High school student -6

-University student -7

-Graduate student -7

-Ph.D. -7

6. What is your major field of study?

-High School - Arts

-High school - Science

7. What is your professional orientation?

-Literature

-Arts

-Social Sciences

-Science and Technology

-Business

-Medicine

-Other _____

8. Do you actively follow information about Kim Kardashian Family or Kim Kardashian herself?

-Yes, from a national website

-Yes, from external websites

-Yes, from friends

-Yes, in other ways _____

-No

The second part focuses on the behavioral description with the theoretical background of the Dramaturgical theory

1. What are the first words that come to mind when you talk about Kim Kardashian and her family?

(Multiple choice)

-Gossip/Affair news/openness/philatelic girl

-Mansion/celebrity/luxury/high profile

-Facelift/Shaping/Liposuction/Fitness

-Beauty make-up/Exaggerated make-up/Thick eyelashes

-Sexy photos/short sexy dresses/great bodies/showing off beautiful expensive clothing

Please answer the following questions with a "yes" or "no".

2. Do you mind if a blogger/internet celebrity you follow has undergone plastic surgery?

3. Has your aesthetic value changed due to the influence of stars/internet celebrities such as Kim Kardashian?

4. Do you think Kim Kardashian's intense beauty look is in line with your aesthetics?

5. Do you accept or learn from the make-up style recommended by celebrities?

6. Do you think that Kim Kardashian's sexy clothing style would look the same on you or your female friends?

7. Do you copy the outfits of famous bloggers/internet stars/celebrities' lifestyles and take photos similar to them on your social own media platforms?

8. Do you agree that the values of people with as many affairs/love/close relationships as Kim Kardashian are worth learning from?

9. Do you want to follow the gossip which is related to online celebrities such as Kim Kardashian?

10. Do you agree that the status of star/celebrity/wealth girl is more likely to be followed on social media platforms?

11. Are you curious about or do you follow online content with words about luxuries such as luxurious houses, wealthy girls, or luxury cars?

Part 3 deals with the concepts of social Background & Male Gaze

(Select gender MALE for the second question)

1. Do you think it is appropriate for some men to use impolite language and male gaze when talking about famous and sexy women like Kim Kardashian?

2. Would you like to have a sexy girl like Kim Kardashian as your girlfriend/wife in the future?

(Select gender FEMALE for the second question)

1. As a woman, do you resent the impolite way in which some men treat famous sexy women like Kim Kardashian when talking about them and their sexy appearance?

2. Do you get offended when your boyfriend talks with you about sexy girls such as Kardashian?

## 4. THE IMPACT OF SYMBOLS AND THE MALE GAZE

Overall, the results show that people know Kim 39.91% for her attitude towards relationships, 69.48% for her lifestyle, 44.37% for her body image, 51.64% for her beautiful appearance, and 49.30% for her style of dress.

It can be seen that the male figure for the male gaze is close to 50%. Comparing this with the 65% aversion level for women, it can be contrasted that women are more averse to the male gaze, while men are more used to such social awareness.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Overall, 77.46% of the 418 subjects are actively aware of Kardashian-related messages. There are also varying degrees of interest in the important messages sent by all five Kardashians. The most known about is Kardashian's wealth, with her status as a wealthy celebrity known by 69.48% of the subjects. The symbol of makeup style is also followed by 51.64% of people. In addition to this, in terms of ranking from highest to lowest attention received, 49.3% are concerned with Kardashian's sexy clothing style and her charming body, and 44.37% are concerned with Kardashian's fitness messages, while 39.91% are concerned with Kardashian's gossip. Therefore, data shows that the symbols conveyed by Kardashian's iconic social media platforms have left an impression on viewers and that these symbols have been relatively successful in getting out there and being remembered by the audience. The reason for that success is not limited to the function of digital media promotion but also getting the sexual function of the female body involved. This is a hint for the male gaze effect.

From the view of the more specific impact of symbols, there are 3 more obvious findings: Firstly, in terms of imitating celebrities, viewers filter for different symbolic signs. Data shows that makeup style ranked second in terms of attention, with more than half of them paying close attention to Kardashian's makeup style. Sexy body and clothing style is the third most popular and also received a lot of attention from viewers. However, in the judgment of how they are influenced by beauty, 71.36% think that they would like to learn from the facial beauty styles of celebrities such as the Kardashians. However, in the questions related to the attitude test on imitating Kardashian's body and dressing, only 31.46% think they would be able to dress the same way as those around them in reality, and almost 70% thought it would not bring the same effect as Kardashian. In addition, only 43.19% of people are willing to copy what she wears and post it. This set of comparisons shows that people have their filters and judgments about the symbols that celebrities convey and do not just copy them all. The beauty approach is easier to learn than body management which requires rigorous training. Not only that, make-up techniques can be applied to other make-up styles as well, making it easier for people to learn make-up than to work on their bodies, and it is a more effective investment in themselves as it can have more positive effects and applications. The easy way is easier to imitate and spread, the symbols that can easily help to construct the viewer's expression and performance are more likely to become learned and passed on, and such symbols will influence the viewer's self-expression. Besides, those symbols that are difficult to imitate can be noticed but the amount of imitation and being transmitted may be less because they are non-collectively symbolic performance props.

Secondly, the data shows that 57.04% of people agree that the Kardashian's makeup way does not fit their aesthetic at all, and 60.33% of them believe that their aesthetic will not change because of the influence of celebrities such as the Kardashians, yet 71.36% still say that they are willing to learn from the beautiful style of celebrities such as the Kardashians. Data shows that the social symbols of celebrities have a subtle influence on the attitudes of viewers as well, even if they don't like the actor's performance, they will inadvertently imitate it. The feedback from the audience is not always positive

about the performance, but even if the celebrities' show as actors are not loved, these performances become influential in affecting the audience and the audience's performances, and this symbolization is passed on to some extent. And the social context is one of the main reasons why people do this. Because it is socially popular and accepted, people will learn from these actors and add these elements to their performances. According to the psychosocial theory, people are influenced by group psychology and public opinion in a crowd and change their perceptions. Not only this, but it is also a reflection of the significant effect of the mimesis effect.

The last part of the questionnaire shows that both men and women are aware of the existence of the male gaze in the contemporary social context. 48.72% of men think it is appropriate for men to spy on women such as the Kardashians and 42.02% of men would like to have such a partner in the future. This is not only a reflection of men's love for the performances of actors such as the Kardashians on social media platforms but also shows the fact that the male gaze is not only a legacy of traditional society but is also affirmed and passed on in today's society. From a female perspective, 65.06% of women are aware of male voyeurism, reflecting that women's awareness of the male gaze has increased over time and that they have become more aware of their feelings of disgust and even resistance. In addition, 70.57% of women think they do not resent their boyfriends mentioning celebrities such as the Kardashians, which also shows that women are not very hostile towards women and that there is a strong tolerance among women.

This also reflects the fact in the new media age, the identity and performance of the participatory performance are most important [10]. In today's participatory culture, the public has a set of accepted elements of expression and the viewers have their viewing habits. At the same time, the user's ability to watch is determining the content of the new actors' performances. Flat and uninteresting content does not attract an audience, and it is altruistic content that can be followed and imitated by more people, which is redefining the delivery of theatre. Interaction on social platforms stacked with followers is a new era of participatory culture, excluding the interaction between celebrities and viewers, there is also comparing among celebrity netizens themselves. Therefore, in the era of the 21st century, the power of audience viewing has a counter-propelling effect on celebrities' performances, as celebrities will focus on hot topics and produce content on current topics with interest from viewers, to attract more viewers to watch and enjoy. Thus, in a world dominated by participatory culture, the value of symbols goes from both audience and actors' sides.

Moreover, compared with in the past, audiences are more practical and have more choices, in the new media age it is the stage and subject itself, not the audience and

the actors. This is the new era of reconstructing and updating the dramatical theory. In participatory culture communication, the audience and the actors shape the media together. The systemic mechanisms of the media platform also guide the behavior and attitudes of actors and audiences. In this era, actors, audiences, and imitators are emerging and they will continue to influence each other and evolve.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In the participatory culture of the new media age, the celebrities as actors and the viewers as the audience are influencing each other in attitude and behavior, the actors triggering the audience to imitate, and the audience allowing the actors to continue the new performance on the stage of the hottest topic. It updates dramaturgical theory, which is a new era that places more emphasis on performance and staging. In other words, it is the development of social media, and social media changes the behavior and attitudes of people in an era. The article does not go into much detail as to how social media demonstrates this power. However, scholars interested in dramaturgical theory and the audience-actors relationship in the new media age of social platforms can draw inspiration from this study. Finally, based on this research, the interaction between actors and audiences can be further investigated and more research projects on the influence of social media in the new age can be further developed.

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