The Construction of Public Personas in Variety Show

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Abstract. This paper uses Goffman's "Dramaturgy Theory" and the "ME" and the "I" Theory to analyze celebrity personas. It aims to find the basis of celebrity personas and the reasons for the construction of celebrity personas in the digital era. Many stars and their personas in variety shows are analyzed as cases to support the arguments. Regarding the reasons for the construction of celebrity personas, it is found that through image management, celebrities build personas to increase their exposure and trigger public discussion. Furthermore, their participation in variety shows can meet the audience's prying desire and set up emotional ties between them and their fans to gain profit. In this process, the boundary between "frontstage" and "backstage" of the variety shows is blurred and the personas of stars are more likely to be suspected in the environment of new media. This research result contributes to the field of image management.

Keywords: Persona, Dramaturgy Theory, Variety Show.

1   Introduction

In recent years, the number and quality of Chinese variety shows are constantly increasing. Stars usually join in the shows as guests to show the aspects different from their performances in films and stages. However, their behavior in the programs is not necessarily a completely true response. In China, the behavior of some stars in the reality shows has aroused doubts and discussions among audiences. For example, they suspect that some stars make a feint of eating food and catching fish, which are probably prepared in advance by the production teams of the programs. It indicates that stars are also managing their images and creating their own personas at any moment in reality TV programs. On the other hand, the personas of different stars in the same program are making a distinction from each other. It can be found that the personas of stars in variety shows are closely related to their own characteristics in real life. At present, research related to public personas mainly focuses on the issue of the collapse of public personas and its social impact, especially on young people. Through persona construction, it is likely to have short-term and partial expected effects, but in some key problems and time, the personas will collapse because of real exposure [1]. The participation status of fans is constantly improving, which also leads to a stronger negative influence on fans, especially the prejudices and conflicts among fans and the negative effect such as identity crisis caused by the collapse of idol image [2-4].

In this context, this paper deals with the following questions: What is the effect of managing personas in reality shows? What is the basis of celebrity personas in reality? How are they constructed on social media? The paper takes the construction of stars' personas in reality shows as the starting point and studies the motivation and logic behind their behaviors, as well as the extension and development of persona construction in the new media era. This paper uses participant observation, documentary analysis, and case studies to analyze the problem.

It draws the following conclusions: managing personas in reality shows can increase celebrities' exposure and trigger public discussion. It can meet audiences' prying desire and set up emotional ties. When they establish personas, they choose to combine the socialized and idealized "selves" and the spontaneous "ego". With the development of new media, a blurred boundary appears between "frontstage" and "backstage" and the scrutiny of celebrities becomes more extensive.

2   Study on the Behavior of Stars in Establishing Personas

2.1   To Increase Exposure and Trigger Public Discussion

Stars show their unique personas through image management to increase their exposure and trigger public discussion. Goffman's "Dramaturgy Theory" suggests that everyone in the performance area of social life is shaping his image in the eyes of others [5]. Just like the stars in the variety shows, what they present to the audiences on the screen is a unique character created through careful image management. In front of cameras, the stars are in their "frontstage" performance. Their teams, companies, and even fans form a community with a shared future in many ways. They are members of the stars' "drama classes". The stars who take part in variety shows perform within the established range of personas. The performance framework of the "Dramaturgy Theory" proposes that people can consciously control their own behaviors and show behaviors that are more likely to be accepted by others and hide behaviors that belong to their "true selves" but do not meet the expectations of others. In order to create a persona that meets the preferences of the audiences, this persona may be the result of the combination of the socialized and idealized "selves" of the stars and the spontaneous "ego". It was created by the cooperation of the whole "drama classes".

Stars have been alienated into commodities in the entertainment economy during the era of the cultural industry. If they get more people's attention and preference, they will inevitably bring more traffic and gain more notability from it. Setting up differentiated personas can become a symbol of stars. For example, Yu Shuxin, the star from the reality TV program *Youth with You 2*, has rapidly become popular all over the Internet by relying on only one episode of the program [6]. Her exaggerated manner and action, funny tone, and fashionable dress in the program made her a sharp contrast to more than 90 other contestants. Her facial expressions and movements in the program have also been made into emoticons by netizens, which have been widely disseminated. Such a strange character made Yu Shuxin gain great attention and a large number of fans in a short time and she finally won the first place in the competi-

tion at the end of the program. It can be seen that stars and members of their "drama classes" can take advantage of the opportunity to show their personas in variety shows to quickly enhance their popularity and obtain wider dissemination.

However, in the state of hiding their "true selves", there will be the possibility that their constructed personas collapse. The personas set by some entertainment broker-age companies are too far from the stars' original personality, or they deliberately hide some unprofessional conduct. Once such artificial devices are exposed by the audiences, public opinion will ferment, and the performance will collapse and cannot go on. The "selves" that the performers want to hide will be exposed to the audiences, and the images of careful management will be destroyed. In recent years, the immoral behavior of some Chinese stars has ended their career. For example, Luo Zhixiang used to be a famous singer and actor. He caused a big stir after his ex-girlfriend ex-posed his immoral behavior. Luo Zhixiang himself and his behavior were condemned by the public on the Internet. He can no longer recover his images or even have the opportunity to perform a remedial performance. It is difficult to win the trust of the public. As a result, in the post-truth era, with the development of the Internet, how to reasonably coordinate the relationship between the "self" and the "ego" in the per-sonas of stars to better adapt to the stars themselves, is a key issue. Stars, as perform-ers and members of their "drama classes" must pay attention to it.

2.2   Prying Desire and Emotional Ties

Stars in variety shows can meet the audience's prying desire and set up emotional ties between them and their fans. Stars actively manage their images, establish reasonable personas, and cater to fans' preferences. This is not something that should be criti-cized, and it could even be regarded as part of their work. Many variety shows want to get more ratings, actively go deep into the "backstage" life of stars, perfectly cater to the curiosity of the audiences, and satisfy their desire to spy on the "backstage". The audiences' desire to spy is due to the fact that the stars they love are not complete-ly true on stage, which prompts them to deeply understand and explore the "back-stage". Although the audience cannot directly participate in the process of creating stars, the social demand is an important guide for the program group to design charac-ters, and the society with multi-value is eager for the images of different characters [7]. In fact, the demand of the audience is a very important influencing factor for the star personas and program content, because the audience's attention is the benefit for stars and program production teams. For example, in a singing program named *Sing-er*, several groups of singers perform in singing competitions [8]. The program's frame focuses not only on the stage, but also on the entire process of song selection, adaptation, rehearsal, pre-competition preparation, post-competition elimination, and so on. Such program content not only shows the singers' singing performance process on the "frontstage" but also shows their relaxed or nervous state on the "backstage". The personal characters of the stars become fuller, and the space for "performance" is extended from "frontstage" to "backstage".

Some performers choose to maintain a consistent personality on the "frontstage" and "backstage", while some performers show various aspects on different "stages".

For example, a cool singer on the stage will show his gentle and wooden side in the reality show, and a talk show actor who brings happiness to countless audiences on the talk show stage will show his negative attitude towards life in the reality show. These contrasts within the acceptable range of the audiences to a certain extent, enable fans to find that their idols originally have changeable feelings, and are closer to the real images of fans in real life. After all, what the audiences see on the screen is captured by the cameras. Everyone in front of the cameras has a desire to perform and subconsciously tries to control his spontaneous "ego". Therefore, the personal images of the stars always have a sense of distance from the stars themselves and the audiences. Variety shows, especially reality shows, focus their cameras on the stars in specific situations. Viewers try to get a deeper understanding of their idols by watching such programs, immersively going through the same experience as idols and experiencing their emotions.

Moreover, the drama and storytelling in variety shows are also the highlights that attract the audiences. After the story editing and arrangement of the shooting materials by the creators, the programs with emotion-oriented content are finally presented to the audiences in front of the screen. It is precisely in such variety shows that the personality of stars will become more three-dimensional and fuller under the touch-up of the plot. Stars not only play themselves but also the role of "characters" in the stories. For example, in the talent show *Produce 101*, the contestant Yang Chaoyue was a girl who was born in the countryside, sang out of tune, danced, and missed shots, but she was particularly outstanding in appearance [9]. Although she entered the worst class F at the first rating in the program, she owned a large number of video clips that showed her outlook and hard practice. In addition, her upright character and outstanding appearance made her popular and she gained a large number of fans. She won the second place in the final. When she gave her speech on the last night, she did not hide anything but bravely released her emotions, and the sobbing video also became a classic picture. This is also a route for celebrity persona. When the stage is full of well-packaged and perfect superstars, more simple and grounded personages will open a new path. The success of Yang Chaoyue presented in the program is similar to the transformation of an ugly duckling. She persisted from the worst grade F to the final stage, with great progress. Many people were moved by this process. When the personas displayed by stars in variety shows meet some expectations of fans and trigger emotional resonance among fans, fans and stars will form an emotional connection, and fans will place their emotions on their idols. As a result, the connection between stars and fans will be strengthened, and the audiences' rating of the programs and commercial value will naturally be further explored.

3   New Development in the New Media Environment

3.1   A Blurred Boundary

According to media situational theory, a change in the media will result in a change in the social environment, which will lead to a change in human behavior [10]. The channels of information transmission have changed dramatically in the context of the

continuous advancement of science and technology, in particular the network information technology. The network media have developed and differentiated rapidly. Different forms of media will integrate with each other, and multi-screens will interact with each other, breaking the traditional form of information transmission. Variety shows were originally played on TV, and the dissemination of such information was unidirectional. The development of new media enables mass production of network variety shows the bi-directional dissemination and interaction of content on mobile phones, computers, TV, and other terminals. The flow of data is more convenient and freer. For everyone, the boundaries between his private space and public platform on the Internet will become blurred, and stars are no exception.

Stars can choose to post their comments, photos, and videos on different online platforms. For example, the star Ouyang Nana often sends elaborately edited videos recording daily life on her Weibo account, some of which are about cosmetics and goods she has recently purchased, and some are about the process of traveling. The style of Ouyang Nana's videos and all the pictures and texts give people a sense of closeness, especially for her fans, that is, the youth group. It seems that she is a friend who lives a very delicate and full life and is versatile in reality. This is why Ouyang Nana took the initiative to show her "backstage", that is, her side close to life on the stage, to more audiences. However, it is undeniable that every message, picture, and video posted on the online social platform are polished and reviewed by the entire team, which inevitably has a certain performance element. For variety shows, the development of media forms has greatly increased the number of network variety shows, and the communication forms of program content have become more diverse and flexible compared to single TV communication.

At present, all links of variety shows, including early publicity, content marketing, comment interaction, and late feedback can achieve media integration. Viewers can watch some behind-the-scenes looks and videos shot by the program guests on the official Weibo accounts and video platforms of the programs, which can reflect the status of stars on the "backstage". In addition, there will also be some fans who will spontaneously take photos of the stars, and the content will be released on the Internet platform as the material for "backstage" display. Although these so-called contents that show the "backstage" status of stars are not in the process of recording programs or shooting movies, they require the stars to create relatively stable and positive images in front of fans. Therefore, in front of all the cameras, either in the studio or on mobile phones, they will manage the images and shape the personas. This makes the boundary between the foreground and the background gradually blurred, and the audiences may have their own interpretation and judgment.

3.2   Wider Examination

Goffman believes that people should not apply "frontstage" behavior to the "backstage", nor "backstage" behavior to the "frontstage" but should show their due behavior on different occasions to make it conform to the norms of society under the standard, that is, the rules of social role behavior [5]. However, in the new media environment, it is more difficult to maintain stable personas which are more likely to be sus-

pected. In the face of the huge benefits brought by personas, some stars confused the boundaries between the "frontstage" and "backstage", and the "frontstage" and "backstage" behaviors could not be consistent, resulting in a sharp rise in the collapse coefficient of the personas. The phenomenon of immorality, anomie, and even illegal crimes in the entertainment industry is not uncommon, which has been repeatedly prohibited and refreshed public awareness [11]. Compared with traditional media, the dissemination of information in new media has changed from one-way communication to bi-directional sharing. More people online can join in the supervision and examination of the stars. In the digital era, every small detail of behavior will be magnified infinitely. Once something new comes along, it will spread rapidly. For stars and their "drama classes", this requires them to adapt to the changes in the new media environment. When shaping the personas, they need to not only cater to the needs of the audience but also consider the professional quality, external image, and personality characteristics of the stars themselves, so as to truly combine personal characteristics with image management.

4   Conclusion

The establishment of personas in the variety shows is not groundless but has special meanings. In the social context of popular culture and consumer culture, brokerage companies sell stars to fans as symbolic commodities by creating personas, with the ultimate goal of obtaining more benefits. A growing number of stars consider image management and persona construction as their job requirements. However, it is undeniable that more and more people, either stars in the culture and entertainment industry or target audiences of mass culture, lose themselves in this process. The stars and their operation teams want to increase their exposure and trigger public discussion in variety shows and set up emotional ties between them and their fans through image management. Audiences satisfy their desire to spy by watching the stars' daily life. With the development of digital technology, new mass media communication methods have injected new vitality into variety shows. Internet variety shows and self-made videos rise to the proper time and conditions. The images of stars on "backstage" are showed to the audiences through more diverse communication channels. It makes the current boundary between "frontstage" and "backstage" of the variety shows blurred. The phenomenon that stars establish their personas in reality shows is likely to continue to exist in the next generation with the current situation of the entertainment industry. The setting of stars' personas cannot be divorced from reality, otherwise, when the persona collapse, the fans will feel betrayed and cheated. The trust established previously will no longer exist. It is very difficult to get the trust and support again. It is necessary for stars to take social responsibility as public figures sticking to their professional ethics and bottom line of value on the both "frontstage" and "backstage". In this way, they can get people's love and respect and arouse people's empathy with their own personality charm.

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