Cultivating Connection: A multimodal discourse analysis of exploring the intersection of agricultural themes and idol-making in *Become a Farmer*

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Abstract. This article delves into the complex dynamics of the online variety show *Become a Farmer*, which departs from conventional norms by blending themes of agricultural reality and celebrity culture. Employing an extensive multimodal discourse analysis, it explores the intricate interplay between the show's diverse topics, the idolization industry, and the reshaping of guest identities. The show's achievement lies in its capacity to challenge stereotypes, providing audiences with a profound comprehension of traditional farming culture while evoking emotional connections through the reinterpretation of rural time and space. Additionally, this paper investigates the evolving fan-program relationship, where fans shift from passive consumers to active prosumers, actively participating in the show's storytelling and extending their influence beyond its airing. This analysis reveals the transformative potential of variety shows, as the idol industry, through the redefined idol-fan relationship in the digital age, subtly infiltrates niche genres of variety shows.

Keywords: variety shows; multimodal discourse analysis; Chinese farming culture; emotion connection; idol industry; fans

1   Introduction

At the beginning of 2023, a unique variety show named *Become a Farmer* (种地吧) burst onto the scene, centering entirely around the world of farming. It handpicked 10 participants out of a pool of 200 eager candidates, who were then tasked with immersing themselves in the agricultural lifestyle for a substantial six-month period. The show's themes and concepts initially stirred significant controversy upon its debut. A large number of netizens worried that this was another show of consuming farmers under the banner of paying attention to agriculture. However, as the program unfolded, opinions began to shift, with an increasing number of viewers embracing the show's authenticity. In fact, more and more netizens even advocated for extending the program's duration. The show independently carried out a large number of guests and narratives in the program, including memes, videos, and various derivative works. After diligently watching all 50 episodes and additional related materials on iQiyi, which

weren't included in the formal program, it became evident that *Become a Farmer* not only brought refreshing themes and formats to the table but also emphasized the collaborative efforts and interactions between the 10 participants and their fans. Beyond merely presenting live broadcasts and the guests' perspectives, the program consciously sought to bridge the gap between the audience and itself.

In recent years, vertical variety shows have garnered considerable attention. The emergence of the "slow variety" format has markedly shifted the focus away from conflict-driven narratives that were characteristic of traditional variety programs. Simultaneously, the practice of idol-making variety shows has been curtailed, prompting a significant overhaul within the star-making industry. As noted by Yin and Liu (2017), an exceptional program not only provides a channel for projecting anxieties within a specific audience but also generates real-life social discussions.[1] Despite agriculture's enduring importance in the country, there have been relatively few endeavors in this field, and even fewer related studies. Wang (2022) has contended that the conventional idol variety shows, which have faced bans, leaned excessively towards the industrial production of idols while neglecting their cultural communicative role.[2]

The theme of *Become a Farmer* represents a pioneering experiment, yet the depth and commitment required by this subject matter initially seemed challenging for audiences to readily embrace. The presentation of an idol show within this context appeared somewhat incongruous, raising doubts about its sincerity. However, as the show continued to air, it managed to dispel many of these negative preconceptions. Both the producers and the platform invested substantial efforts in dispelling these reservations by reshaping the identities of the participants and facilitating numerous opportunities for cultural empathy and audience interaction. Upon analysis, this study posits that the relationship between the idol industry and the fan economy is akin to an emotional game. It revolves around the constant establishment of empathy with the audience and the incorporation of ideas to elicit emotional engagement from the viewers. This dynamic is vividly illustrated in the *Become a Farmer* variety show. Consequently, this study aims to dissect the video content through Multimodal Discourse Analysis, with the hope of unraveling the interactive mechanisms and operational impact between the idol industry chain and its devoted fans.

2   Literature review

2.1   Diverse subjects explored in the online variety show

As noted by American scholars Merrill & Lowenstein (1971), the evolution of mass media was destined to follow a trajectory of specialization and diversification. [3] It was observed that programs increasingly gravitated toward more vertical themes, grounded in profound insights from real life. It became evident that only those network programs infused with freshness and attuned to contemporary topics became the "harbingers of interest" for young audiences, offering them novel realms of exploration and emotional engagement (Zhou, 2023).[4]

Themes related to music and lifestyle in TV shows continue to reign supreme (Enlightent, 2023)[5]. Meanwhile, the slow variety show genre has transitioned from being

a novel concept to a high-rating template. Given that vertical variety shows inherently possess a sense of professionalism and specificity, it becomes essential to strike a balance between creating an atmosphere that is both pleasing and light-hearted while maintaining a sense of intimacy and everyday enjoyment (Yue, 2022)[6]. This is exemplified in musical online variety shows like *Super Vocal* and *Infinity and Beyond*, where the competitive edge has softened in favor of fostering a harmonious and unifying atmosphere (Li et al., 2021)[7]. On the other hand, shows focused on lifestyle, such as "Back to Field," strive to construct a utopian rural lifestyle, offering urban audiences an enticing vision of serene countryside living devoid of pressures.

Variety shows that previously ventured into the agricultural theme often fell short of expectations. They tended to downplay the seriousness and toil involved in farming, overlooking the challenging aspects of agricultural life. Consequently, depictions of agricultural cultivation inadvertently perpetuated casual and overly relaxed stereotypes. However, *Become a Farmer* emerges as a trailblazer by confronting these utopian fantasies head-on, emphasizing authentic agricultural production. This represents a significant stride forward in both the production techniques and content of the show, earning it unexpected acclaim.

Furthermore, *Become a Farmer* boldly adopts diverse formats, including live broadcasts with merchandise integration, a rarity in the variety show landscape. This approach amplifies the show's intellectual property's derivative value. Importantly, the program steadfastly concentrates on agriculture and cultivation, avoiding the temptation to fabricate rural life, and instead, candidly portraying the hardships and rewards inherent in agriculture.

2.2   Idolization industry chain to the invasion of variety shows

Despite *Become a Farmer* primarily focusing on agriculture, a seemingly distant subject from traditional iconography, the idol industry chain played an indispensable role in the show's success. Delving into the backgrounds of the show's participants and examining their post-show outcomes reveals a common thread: they were already involved in the entertainment industry, boasting some prior performance experience, yet had not achieved stardom. However, following the program's broadcast, there was a notable surge in their individual fan bases.

The idol industry chain within the realm of celebrity culture can typically be segmented into three layers: the upstream incubation layer, which comprises entertainment companies responsible for nurturing and managing stars; the midstream production and operation layer, concerned with creating star products and managing advertising initiatives; and the downstream channel layer, primarily comprising social media and online video platforms, where fans actively engage in supporting their beloved idols, acting as enthusiastic participants and cultural entertainment industry creators (Fiske, 2010)[8]. Concurrently, these platforms provide fans with a virtual space to come together, facilitating the swift formation of communities. These communities serve as hubs for fan activism, allowing members to express their cultural preferences, share insights through organized activities, and construct a collective identity (Jenkins, 2012)[9]. Over time, the dynamic between fans and idols has evolved from one-way adoration of individual

idols to group psychological identification among fans in online communities, culminating in the formation of fan circles and the development of para-social relationships akin to real intimate connections (Liu & Shi, 2022)[10].

In recent years, the idol industry's presence has waned in cultivation variety shows due to restrictions imposed by the "Notice on Carrying out Comprehensive Management Work in the Field of Culture and Entertainment" (National Radio and Television Administration General Office, 2021)[11]. Consequently, the industry has been compelled to pivot and adapt to new approaches in line with evolving policies. This shift entails the exploration of themes and approaches that can evoke a profound emotional connection with the audience. In today's landscape, fans represent the primary audience of the idol-fan discourse system, demonstrating a willingness to invest in their idols (Qi & Su, 2023)[12]. Thus, meticulous efforts to refine and humanize the idol's image have proven highly effective.

While variety shows centered around rural themes may appeal to a broader audience, establishing a strong connection between the audience and their idols presents a unique challenge. *Become a Farmer* courageously defied traditional iconography by selecting a subject matter focused on genuine farming and hard work, seemingly at odds with the conventional idol image. Remarkably, it succeeded in building a substantial fan base, dispelling the notion of incompatibility between subject matter and form. The unconventional reasoning behind this audacious decision by the *Become a Farmer* variety show, as well as the intricate relationship it strives to foster between idols and their fans, remains a relatively unexplored topic in contemporary discourse.

3   Method

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is a method that harnesses various sensory channels, with particular emphasis on the visual and auditory aspects. It involves the utilization of multiple semiotic systems within a single modality or across different modalities. MDA is grounded in the concept that language serves as a social semiotic, capable of conveying significant meaning potential (Halliday, 1978) [13]. This foundational notion has paved the way for the development of systematic-functional semiotics, encompassing not only language but also other symbolic systems. The versatility of MDA has led to its adoption in diverse contexts, spanning society, education, and the workplace (Levine & Scollon, 2004) [14]. In addition, Martin (1992) delved into the concept of "context" from both linguistic and cultural perspectives, adding depth to the field[15].

The online documentary variety show *Become a Farmer*, which gained widespread popularity on iQiyi's official platform, boasts distinctive characteristics. It provides an authentic record of its content, incorporates a real-time platform bullet screen, and fosters immediate communication between fans and guests through live broadcasts. Furthermore, various independent shots from the guests' perspective and their self-uploaded content on social media platforms like Weibo and TikTok contribute to a substantial volume of textual and visual data available for analysis. The show's naturalistic presentation, stemming from its genuine content, generates a significant discourse that

extends beyond mere text. Consequently, a comprehensive reorganization of the intricate symbol system within the data becomes necessary. MDA primarily serves to address the grammatical aspects of various semiotic relationships and aids in comprehending the interplay between visual and verbal communication and its implications for social and psychological dynamics. In this regard, MDA enables a thorough examination of the relationships between the show's guests, the interactions between guests and fans, the role of the platform, and the process of idolization of the guests. All of these facets are particularly innovative in terms of the show's themes and communication formats.

Become a Farmer has accumulated an extensive volume of textual and audio-visual materials, characterized by long-duration episodes, deliberate pacing, and the involvement of multiple guests. Additionally, its online platform broadcast nature introduces two unique perspectives: that of the platform itself and the instantaneous reactions of fans, predominantly through the visual aspects of text and imagery. This rich tapestry of data makes it evident that MDA can be effectively employed to dissect how the show systematically constructs emotional interactions with its audience, tracing the evolution of these interactions through the lens of guest reconstruction and the perception of time and space presented throughout the fan-show interaction process.

4   Findings and discussion

4.1   De-labeling and rebuilding guests identities in the show

Despite the waning popularity of domestic idol variety shows, a steady stream of new stars continues to emerge, demonstrating the resilience of the star-making industry. However, many of these emerging stars remain relatively unknown, leading the audience to gradually lower their expectations of contemporary idols, perceiving them as lacking in ability and responsibility. These perceptions persisted even as *Become a Farmer* made its debut, with initial doubts about the show's potential exploitation of farmers lingering throughout its broadcast.

Challenging stereotypes and embracing diversity is a fundamental prerequisite for cultivating a meaningful connection with the audience. While the initial expectation for the show was to feature amateur talents from outside the entertainment industry, the final selection comprised guests who had already appeared in entertainment shows or had previous work experiences, albeit without significant recognition. This decision appeared contradictory to the show's explicit emphasis on the concept of ordinary individuals and the stringent selection process. Although it's undeniable that the show does contribute to the cultivation of star status, it takes deliberate steps to mitigate stereotypes and build credibility, thereby reshaping the audience's perception of the guest artists.

To achieve this, the show employs a three-step approach. Firstly, the narrator meticulously explains the rigorous selection process, commencing with a pool of 200 candidates, followed by test shoots involving 30 individuals, culminating in the final selection of 10 resident guests. Scenes from the casting process are seamlessly integrated into the narrative to underscore the thoroughness of the selection process. Large

numbers are prominently displayed in the center of the screen, set against a darkened backdrop, ensuring their visibility. This presentation conveys precise information about the selection process on a comprehensible scale, with the camera capturing every detail. Accompanying commentary provides both visual and auditory reinforcement, reassuring the audience about the show's sincerity while still leaving some concerns about the guests' competence due to the evident workload they will face.

The program then harnessed the power of video imagery to showcase the initiative of its ten guests. Their farming prowess, as demonstrated during the test shots, was skillfully presented one by one. This deliberate sequencing aimed to shape each guest into a capable and distinctive figure. Large, attention-grabbing subtitles were strategically employed to accentuate their names, firmly establishing their identities in the viewers' minds. Furthermore, their individual perspectives on the upcoming challenges to be tackled within the 200-day timeframe were succinctly conveyed through brief background commentary, effectively revealing their unique personalities in just a sentence or two.

Each guest was given an average screen time of approximately 6 and a half seconds, featuring in two distinct shots (as illustrated in Figure 1). The collective presentation of all ten guests took the form of a group portrait. Notably, characters positioned beneath similar scenes in a vertical orientation were paired with their own prominently enlarged name labels. This intentional arrangement served to downplay the distinct characteristics of each individual image while dramatically underscoring the collective impact of their shared identity. To eliminate any potential confusion, each member briefly introduced themselves, including their age, with this vital information displayed alongside their character shot on the left side of the screen. Consequently, their basic performance and age ranking took precedence over any vague character identities in the minds of the audience.

Name	Total Shot length	Number of shots
Yiheng Wang	5s22	3
Shaoxi Chen	9s12	2
Yuan Zhuo	6s18	3
Haonan He	4s18	2
Gengyun Li	5s13	1
Dunhao Jiang	3s29	2
Zhuo Lu	8s11	2
Xiaotong Zhao	7s16	3
Yibo Zhao	7s16	3
Hao Li	7s03	1
Average	6s258	2.2

Fig. 1. table of the length and number of shots of each person during their first official introduction (tabulate from episode1 2023.2.4 2min04s to 3min10s)

Nonetheless, maintaining the secrecy of their identities as budding stars indefinitely would eventually invite scrutiny from vigilant netizens. Such revelation could potentially undermine the show's authenticity and credibility in the eyes of the audience.

There was a looming risk that the show might be perceived as a staged platform for unknown stars seeking fame, endangering the carefully cultivated relationship with the audience. Consequently, it was deemed more prudent to judiciously unveil everyone's identities at the appropriate juncture, rather than persistently shield this information from view.

As the program reached the culmination of the rice harvest phase, one of the participants, who also assumed the role of the microphone controller, engaged in a revealing conversation with the ten protagonists. This interaction served as the catalyst for a crucial identity revelation. First of all, the names and representative works of the guests as musicians are shown on the screen through the interviews. Yet, even in this moment of revelation, the show meticulously adhered to its commitment to equal screen time for each participant. The proportions of the singers were prominently displayed in the center of the screen as 40%, while the remaining six actors appear in groups of three on a split screen. Notably, there were no elaborate explanations beyond the simple labels of their names and one representative work.

The ensuing conversation was carefully crafted to foster empathetic dialogue, centering on the arduous and meaningful nature of their upcoming tasks. This strategic approach ensured that their identities as performers became a supplementary asset to their on-camera expressions and talents, rather than a contentious topic that might trigger endless discussions or speculation.

The program diligently executed the de-labeling process through the three steps described above, successfully transforming the ten novices into individuals genuinely committed to learning and practicing agriculture. This deliberate deconstruction of their artist labels laid the groundwork for fostering emotional resonance among the audience. Consequently, the subsequent content of the program found a more receptive audience, facilitating the smooth initiation of a new round of star-making.

The uniqueness of farming programs lies in their foundation in authentic farming, rather than merely constructing a romanticized rural life. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to steer clear of any perception that the program exploits farmers for entertainment. In the early stages, the program focused on erasing stereotypes associated with the characters, effectively establishing fresh, unencumbered identities for them. This endeavor not only challenged the conventional stereotypes associated with competitive idols, which often lacked social value, but also aligned with national policies and traditional culture in cultivating stars with more meaningful roles. This approach allowed the program to make steady progress and cultivate a fan base that resonated with the audience's evolving sensibilities.

4.2   Re-establishing Stable Mental Space and Fostering Interactive Engagement

The displacement of the nearby as a realm of observation is a contemporary social issue frequently discussed today. This displacement often stems from a lack of patience and the unwillingness to engage in thoughtful observation of one's immediate surroundings. The goal of establishing a stable mental space and extending it outward is rooted in the intention to reconstruct our "capacity to appreciate differences and engage in reflexive

thinking" (Xiang, 2022), ultimately welcoming the return of the nearby. In the context of this particular variety show, which spans nearly 200 days of shooting, it becomes imperative to intricately balance the portrayal of time and space. [16] It must evoke a sense of stable refuge away from the hustle and bustle of city life and routine work, all while narrating the collective journey of ten individuals engaged in agricultural production.

In terms of presenting time, the show sought to seamlessly intertwine Chinese farming culture with our evolving perception of time. A distinctive approach employed was the use of daily titles mirroring the 200-day farming calendar. This calendar design, reminiscent of old-fashioned wall calendars, serves as a tool to help the audience track the timeline and the farming plans of the ten guests. The top green text displays the year, month, and day from left to right. The large white text in the middle showcases the number of farming days. The green text on the right displays the day of the week. If there are any special solar terms, they will be marked with white text in a green box at the bottom. The wall calendar symbolizes a bygone era, evoking memories of childhood and the days before electronic devices dominated our lives. It was a repository of dates, accompanied by the ritualistic act of tearing off a sheet—a small yet meaningful ceremony. In the show, the prominence of the calendar date is intentionally diminished, with the focus shifted to the date representing the day's plan, placed prominently in the image instead of the original calendar's central date. This strategic decision serves to alleviate the narrative burden placed on the audience by the straightforward counting of days, resulting in a clearer timeline. The calendar titles are infused with solar terms, which are part of the Chinese farming knowledge system used for timing agricultural activities and understanding climatic changes. This infusion of traditional wisdom offers young urban viewers a unique opportunity to experience an alternative perception of time and fosters a sense of nostalgia.

In the portrayal of space, the program employs a plethora of beautiful, tranquil shots of an uncluttered environment to elicit a slow-paced, emotionally resonant atmosphere. These visuals predominantly revolve around two central themes: the natural beauty of the surroundings and the comforting warmth of home. This approach effectively challenges the stereotype that rural environments are dilapidated, instead crafting a heartwarming perception of an expansive, picturesque setting characterized by simplicity and serenity.

The program consistently prioritizes pure, unadulterated natural landscapes or captivating weather phenomena as the primary means of evoking raw emotional responses (as depicted in Figure 2). By employing unconventional camera angles or capturing meteorological marvels rarely witnessed in urban settings, the program constructs an expansive ambiance through visually striking yet comforting experiences.

Moreover, the show is dedicated to showcasing the houses and residential environments of its subjects (as illustrated in Figure 3). In stark contrast to the emphasis on capturing the beauty of natural landscapes, the portrayal of the living environment places a heavy emphasis on juxtaposing the urban hustle and bustle with the tranquil rural lifestyle or highlighting the contrast between the harsh external climate and the cozy warmth within the home. This deliberate juxtaposition serves to establish a sense of enclosed space and a deep-seated feeling of belonging within the audience.

Fig. 2. (screenshots from episode6 2023.2.25 1h09min42s& episode39 2023.6.22 56min50s)

Fig. 3. (screenshots from episode9 2023.3.9 18min06s)

Furthermore, the program cleverly incorporated aerial views to illustrate the division and progression of the fields during the farming process. It is usually presented in two ways: a split screen in the field panorama with a close shot of the guest during farming, or with text showing the farming progress. This strategic choice served a dual purpose. Firstly, it was a narrative device employed to prevent the audience from becoming fatigued by the repetitive nature of farming tasks. Secondly, it contributed to the construction of the overall spatial context, allowing each field to be methodically and progressively showcased. While the show's ground-level shots of picturesque landscapes provided a sense of immersion, the use of aerial perspectives in conjunction with informative commentary from a knowledgeable guide or authority figure played a crucial role in creating a feeling of familiarity and control. This sense of familiarity and control was particularly significant, given the audience's daily exposure to the chaotic and overwhelming urban environment.

The show masterfully integrated elements of traditional Chinese culture into its depiction of time and space, all while staying true to the central theme of agriculture. By capturing the authentic beauty of real landscapes, it invoked memories of the land and culture that are deeply rooted in the Chinese people's heritage. The inclusion of calendar titles and the presentation of scenic shots elicited genuine emotions from the audience, creating a profound connection to the material. This nonfiction portrayal of rural life, seemingly distant from the everyday urban existence, provided the audience with a unique opportunity for introspection. It encouraged viewers to contemplate the differences and similarities between urban and rural experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of these two facets of Chinese life and culture.

4.3   Fans as Emotional Labor Prosumers

The program not only shattered stereotypes and successfully established the identity of the new farmers, thus gaining the audience's acceptance and trust, but it also achieved a deep emotional resonance with the audience through its masterful reconstruction of rural time and space. As the program unfolded, the audience transitioned from passive recipients to enthusiastic fans who actively engaged with the program platform.

Indirect (the point-of-view shots from their vlogs presented in the program) and direct (the release of other materials, the live broadcast related to various platforms) interaction methods are adopted in the show *Become a Farmer* to strengthen the connection with the audience. These strategies deepened the audience's appreciation for the distinctive documentary characteristics of this variety show and guided their emotional journey toward the genuine sentiments conveyed in the program. Additionally, the active participation of the audience played a crucial role in the ongoing promotion of the program.

Simultaneously, the relationship between fans and the show underwent a significant transformation, evolving from passive consumers to active producers. The evolution of the internet has empowered individuals with personalization and increased participation across various domains. Users are no longer passive recipients but rather active participants in the production process, often referred to as "fans" or "followers." Henry Jenkins (2012) introduced the concept of "poaching," drawing from Michel De Certeau's work, to describe fans who engage in active reading and production behaviors.[17] Online fans have become "prosumers," actively contributing to the creation and dissemination of the show's content and services. This concept, initially proposed by Toffler (1980), encapsulates the multifaceted behavior of consumption and production.[18]

With the program's broadcast, a dedicated fan base for the show and its permanent guests gradually took shape. Taking Weibo and TikTok as primary promotion platforms, it is evident that certain fans began to surge in number during the program's first official month of broadcast, with consistent growth starting in May. A subsequent surge usually occurred in the middle to late July (as shown in Figure 4). This pattern aligns with the times when the ten guest participants in the program obtained business licenses and several program-related activities concluded. During these periods, fans transitioned from being mere recipients and consumers to active participants, contributing significantly to the program's popularity and success.
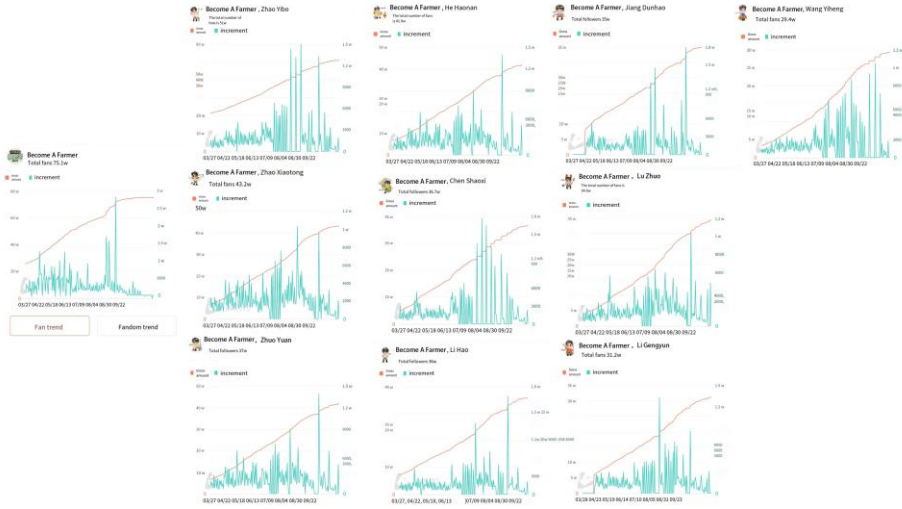
Fig. 4. ten guests' fan data for the last six months on TikTok by Chan Mama (a statistical website for Tiktok, retrieved from: https://www.chanmama.com/bloggerRank?keyword=%E7%A7%8D%E5%9C%B0%E5%90%A7&author_type=0)[19]

Given the program's extended duration, multi-faceted perspectives, extensive content, and diverse platforms, a significant number of fans have emerged as skilled organizers of the material timeline. However, any non-linear editing within the program's timeline has often been interpreted by netizens as malicious manipulation, creating contradictions and transforming the role of fans from passive observers to spontaneous supervisors and arrangers. In this program, fans have exhibited a keen interest in exploring the interpersonal dynamics among the ten characters through material analysis. They have contributed a multitude of derivative works across various platforms, enriching the characters' personalities from various angles. Fans have categorized the characters based on their own interpretations, meticulously detailing their interactions. This heightened motivation during the creative process has yielded impressive results.

Simultaneously, iQiyi, as the program's producing platform, has curated and organized a vast array of relevant materials, grouping them into five collections: collection of shows episodes, a compilation of highlights of the current episode, all other clips that didn't make it into the feature film, personal narrative clips from all the guests and a collection for derivative works. Additionally, iQiyi introduced a new collection column called "Full-Score Derivative", which encompasses official and fan-generated secondary creations related to the program. This includes edited performances of the ten guests in different contexts, reactions from vloggers to the guests' performances, and sneak peeks contributed by the fans themselves. iQiyi has also launched a Derivative Competition discussion topic on Weibo, encouraging the audience to engage in spontaneous derivative creations for promotional purposes. Furthermore, they have established a second creation column within Weibo's super words feature, incentivizing netizens to produce secondary creations in various formats. These initiatives not only bridge the gap between the audience and the program, fostering a sense of active

participation, but also enable the audience to immerse themselves in the process of scrutinizing details within the editing process and appreciating the intricacies of the idol-fan relationship.

The continued development of the idol cultivation industry across various themes appears to be intrinsically tied to the dynamic interaction between fans. It resembles an intricate emotional game, where organizers and platforms consistently furnish fans with the necessary content and emotional groundwork. This is achieved by providing fans with materials and platforms to openly express their sentiments about the show while nurturing a para-social intimate relationship between fans and the program. Through this mechanism, fans willingly engage in emotional labor, actively contributing to the fan culture ecosystem.

In the unique case of the show *Become a Farmer*, which explores an unfamiliar subject matter and involves close-knit shooting, the program not only brings joy to fans through the depiction of intimate relationships but also gratifies them by revisiting cultural knowledge, reinforcing confidence in farming culture, and showcasing public welfare values. These additional dimensions further amplify fans' voluntary participation in emotional labor. Simultaneously, the outcomes of fan creativity naturally impact the program's publicity. In this scenario, the producers directly integrated fan creations into the platform's promotional materials, bolstering fans' confidence and establishing an enduring external publicity mechanism that continues to operate long after the program's initial broadcast.

5   Conclusions

Become a Farmer stands out from other slow variety shows as it places a unique emphasis on authentic farming and agricultural experiences. It represents a bold new endeavor in the realm of star-making, where the producers skillfully concealed the entire process, resulting in the successful creation of ten new stars. The program not only achieved its primary objectives but also offered the audience a profound exploration of Chinese traditional farming culture and a meticulously planned, hopeful emotional journey. This process involved reshaping the audience's preconceived notions of idols, transforming them into individuals with untapped potential. It also entailed redefining the audience's perception of time and space, fostering emotional connections, creating dependable and recognizable program content, and retaining control of the primary content on the hosting platform. Additionally, this process guided the audience's gradual transformation into devoted fans of the program. Even as the program neared its conclusion, with the guests needing to sell their agricultural products, the audience willingly engaged in material consumption, forming an integral part of the overall marketing model.

Undoubtedly, this program has made significant strides in developing the idol industry chain, promoting farming culture, and introducing a long-term variety narrative mode, all of which have received positive responses from the audience. However, this has also raised the emotional threshold for the audience. While the program's initial popularity may wane over time, the game-like interaction between fans and the program

will continue to play a pivotal role. Consequently, fans will seek out the next objective and return to the emotionally fulfilling experience that this show provided. The true challenge lies in how other programs can sustain the same level of emotional depth achieved by this unique variety show.

While this paper predominantly analyzed the variety show through the lens of video text using multimodal analysis, with a focus on exploring how the program's producers cultivated empathy with the audience amid the seemingly contradictory content of agricultural themes and idol-making, it is crucial to acknowledge that the active participation and initiative of fans also played a substantial role. In future research, a deeper examination of this aspect, exploring fan engagement and agency, will be conducted to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in such programs.

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