# Analysis of the establishment and collapse of celebrity personalities from the perspective of encoding and decoding

Yingcui Luo[1,*]

Qi Yao[2]

[1]Master of Journalism and Communication, School of Literature and Journalism, Chongqing Technology and Business University

[2]Network and New Media, School of Literature and Journalism, Chongqing Technology and Business University

*E-mail: 1425714596@qq.com

Corresponding Author

## Abstract

In recent years, the phenomenon of "personality collapse" of celebrities has appeared many times and attracted the attention of the public. Celebrities in the entertainment industry already have a set of patterns, and celebrities in the production business perspective are now mostly "standardized". Celebrities have become as wholesale and uniform as commodities. This article observes the establishment and collapse of celebrity personalities from the perspective of encoding and decoding. This article first analyzes the status quo of celebrity character design and the active participation of fans in celebrity character design. In addition, this article also studies the different interpretations of fans after the collapse of celebrity personalities. By exploring the mode of shaping celebrity characters, this paper puts forward suggestions on the defects in the process of shaping celebrity characters. For celebrities, they should strive to build a differentiated personality, recognize their positioning, and find their strengths. For fans, they should remain calm and rational, and constantly improve their media literacy. The contribution of this paper is that this research understands the influence of popular culture on fans' lifestyles and social development, and has a certain breakthrough in the existing research on fan cultural behavior. In addition, on the premise of learning from Western fan culture theory, this paper expands the scope of application of traditional theories and conducts more localized and targeted research.

*Keywords*: *Encoding and decoding, Personality, Fans*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research background

In recent years, the phenomenon of "personality collapse" of celebrities has appeared many times and attracted the attention of the public. At the beginning of 2019, Zhai Tianlin's academic fraud let him became a joke ; Wang Yuan's smoking in public places made his sunny boy's personality affected; there are also Tong Zhuo and Xue Zhiqian. And Zheng Shuang's surrogacy attracted the attention of the public. Celebrities, as public figures, should take should take social responsibility。 However, in recent years, the collapse of celebrity personalities has occurred repeatedly, becoming the focus of social attention and attracting public attention.

### 1.2 The purpose and significance of the research

### 1.2.1 Research purpose

This article will learn the process of the establishment and collapse of celebrity personality from the perspective of encoding and decoding. Through the analysis of individual cases, this article explores the different encoding and decoding actions of fans in the process. It is hoped that this article will bring reflections on related industries.

### 1.2.2 Research significance

This paper analyzes the construction and collapse process of the celebrity personalities. On the one hand, they were popular at the time. On the other hand, this article learns the problem from a critical and reflective perspective. The process of construction and collapse hopes to suggest some radical groups to regard celebrity rationally. Secondly, this article understands the problem of celebrity personality design and cause industry reflection.

In addition, celebrity personality construction is a process of individual impression management, as well as a process of individual strategic selection and presentation. With the development of society, celebrity personality becomes increasingly complex This study focuses on the role of the fan audience in this process. Through a comprehensive analysis of the process, the scope of application of traditional theories has been expanded, and more localized and targeted research has been carried out.

### 1.3 The theory and concept definition

### 1.3.1 The theory

Hall put forward the theory of encoding and decoding in "Encoding and Decoding in Television Discussions"(Fan Yi,2020). Hall believes that the producers of TV programs actively encode things into codes, and give the programs "meaning". This process is called encoding. Secondly, he also proposed that the audience will interpret the "definition" constructed by the media according to their different understanding.

This process is the decoding (Lu Peng & Zhang Yuan,2019).

### 1.3.2 Concept definition

The word "fan" comes from the English, its original meaning is "fan", and it represents an emotional state. Since the second "Super Girl" in 2005, "fans" have become gradually become synonymous with star chasers (Xiao Chunli,2017). "Personalities Construct" refers to the character setting in fiction, comics, and virtual characters in games (Fan Xiaoqing,2018). Nowadays, it is extended to the scope of real life, and it is often referred to the specific image that the celebrity shows in reality (Chen Jing& Zhou Xiaopu,2018). The personalities collapse discussed in this article is mainly the second meaning.

### 1.4 Research methodology

Firstly, document analysis. By reading literature and materials related to celebrity character design，we can analyze the construction and collapse process of the celebrity personality. Secondly, case study. The Zheng Shuang incident is elected as the main analysis object. The reasons as follows. On the one hand, the incident is relatively fully developed; on the other hand, it is typical and can represent many commonalities of such cases: the cause of the collapse of the personality not only involves moral corruption, but also touches the red line of our country's law. Finally, participatory observation. The author observed the fan activities through various online platforms, and specifically paid attention to related communities such as Baidu Tieba and Weibo groups. Observing the activities of fans for more than 3 months，The author hope to find out the different interpretations of the fans.

## 2. The current situation of the construction of celebrity personality

Celebrities can build personalities through impression management, but due to the Internet technology, there will be a phenomenon of "scene resolution". When using social media, the audience will bring celebrities personality construction difficulty.

There are no more than three ways for celebrities to construct character sets. Firstly, using film and television to shape the personalities. Secondly, by participating reality shows，and using repetitive behaviors to strengthen the character setting. Thirdly, through social media such as Weibo, increase the exposure of personalities. There are two main reasons why stars build their personalities. First, with the advent of the era of mass consumption, celebrities have become the consumption of fans. Celebrities and commodities also have the characteristics of wholesale and standard. Various companies use the media to recode the celebrities personality that is widely loved by everyone. Besides, fans will re-decode the characters. After being decoded by fans, it meets the consumption needs of different fan. Second, fan culture becomes more popular. Fans no longer interpret passively, but actively participate. The new media enables not only a one-dimensional communication between fans and stars, but a timely interaction.

## 3. Active participation of fans in celebrities personality construction

Jenkins believes that fans are not just "poachers", they are also "nomads". They are always on the move, "neither here nor there", they don't just accept an existing interpretation but create new meanings (Tao Dongfeng,2009). In his articles published in the 1970s, Hall discussed the different stages of "encoding" and "decoding" in the process of meaning creation (Yang Mingming,2020). The audience's interpretation of the text includes dominant decoding, negotiated decoding and oppositional decoding. No matter which way，it is to attract the attention of fans. In the process, different decoding methods make fans form different fan groups. There are mainly two types of fans:

### 3.1 "Consumer" fans: accepting celebrities personality

"Consumer" fans will fully accept the celebrities existing personality, and obey the existing symbols, a well-built personality. This type of fans is also our most common fans. Their individual strength is small, but the number is the largest. Unlike "Producer" fans who can do advertise for their idols, they silently like their idols, but their role cannot be underestimated (Zhao Lei,2019). These fans are often the main force to increase exposure for idols. They continue to contribute exposure to continuously improve the influence ranking of idols.

Fans who have accepted the celebrity personality will often take the initiative to collect information about the celebrity. Weibo Chaohua, Douban Group, Baidu Tieba and other platforms have become the main channels for collecting information, communicating and discussing. Taking Weibo Chaohua as an example, Chaohua check-in will also be ranked. If the score is higher, the status will be higher. Chaohua often publish content directly related to their idols, but these contents are not produced by themselves, but are more reposted.

### 3.2 "Producer" fans: re-creation of celebrities personality

While the media outputs symbols to the audience, the audience is both a consumer and a producer. "Consumer" fans will directly accept the celebrities personality that has been set up, while "producer" fans are different. They have independent initiative and will not accept all the celebrities existing personality, but to use existing personality to create new meaningful personality.

"Producer" fans mainly re-create and interpret celebrities personality through the following three ways. We take Zheng Shuang and Yang Yang's TV series "A Smile Is Very Alluring" as an example to analyze the fan creation behavior:

Firstly, fans supplement the celebrities personality. Zheng Shuang plays Bei Weiwei in the TV show. She is beautiful, active, sunny, and straightforward. In real life, Zheng Shuang is bright, innocent and outspoken, which is matching in the show. In order to learn more about Zheng Shuang, fans will find the roles played several years ago to supplement the existing characters. For example, in "Watching Meteor Shower

Together" in the early years, the positive and brave Chu Yuxun's image once again strengthened Zheng Shuang's straightforward and sweet design.

Secondly, fans produce videos. Before Zheng Shuang's role in "A Slight Smile is Very Alluring", she also played several other well-known TV series, such as "Watching the Meteor Shower Together", "The Summer Has Not Come", etc. The fragment in different shows are edited together to express their love. Searching on different video, there will also be some video fragment about Zheng Shuangs interviews, variety shows and other video fragment for collage. Fans once again participated in the establishment of Zheng Shuang's personality design.

Thirdly, fans will use pictures to make jokes. Fans will recombine and define Zheng Shuang's image in variety shows or interview reports. During the whole process, fans will exert their own subjective initiative, reconstruct the text and generate new meanings.

## 4. Different interpretations after the celebrity personality collapse

"The personality construction of by the media can easily form the emotional pursuit, which leads to emotional sustenance and personality trust. Once the personality is destroyed or disintegrated, it will deceive the audience and fans. We call it "personality collapse". The stronger celebrity personality construction at the beginning, the greater the impact after the collapse, and the stronger the "absurdity" and unreality with fans" (Jiang Ming,2016). With the continuous development of social media, the audience is no longer a simple passive recipient of information, but an active participant with more independent. The personality design is to define the whole celebrity, but this simple description cannot completely describe a complex one. Once a celebrity makes a change which is different from his existing personality, many fans will enlarge it, which will lead to the collapse of the celebrity personality.

4.1 Fans' resistance

"The common fans" refers to the fans who no longer like idol and go away from the fan organization when there is negative news about a star. Fan going away is the resistance and counterattack of fans after they discover deception (Feng Li&Lv Lu,2018).

After Zheng Shuang surrogacy events, some fans thought that the "sweet and innocent personality" was broken. On the one hand, surrogacy is absolutely prohibited in our country. If fans continue to follow celebrities, it means that they agree with the values, and this idea is contrary to the mainstream values in our country. There is a huge gap with fans, which leads to disappointment. On the other hand, fan culture has always been considered a niche culture. When the celebrity personality collapses, if you continue to follow your idols, you may be labeled as a "brain fan". So in order to avoid the pressure of public opinion and protect yourself from being isolated by the mainstream culture, fans often go away.

## 4.2 Fans' refactoring of symbols

After the celebrity collapse, some fans will go away, but some fans will continue to support their idols, and such fans are called "loyal fans", and they tend to gather quickly and actively reconstruct the personality of idols.

Hall believes that different audiences have multiple methods. "adversarial decoding"is to completely distort the original meaning of the text and create a new meaning. "loyal fans" will use this decoding method when their idols personalities collapse. The first is the reinterpretation of behavior. When Zheng Shuang participated in "Please Refrigerator", Guo Jingming asked, "Did you have particularly difficult time during filming?" Zheng Shuang replied, "No, if you don't want to do it, you won't do it anymore." It is obviously the image of an actor who doesn't work hard. But it was set by fans as a character with "sincere and dare to tell the truth". Fans completely rejected the original textual meaning and reinterpreted the idol's textual meaning. Second, the fan bonds have been strengthened in the crisis. Fans usually go through the following steps to reconstruct the personality of idols. Firstly, fans will try to deny or clarify the facts before the fact is confirmed; secondly, if the incident is confirmed, the fans will pretend to be poor. When Zheng Shuang's surrogacy event first appeared, fans would deny the event, thinking it was malicious slander by the man; until the incident is confirmed, fans would say that their idols were suffering from mental illness, etc. After the crisis, the fan group was able to re-cleanse and confirm their identity. During the whole event, fans appeared as a strong, united and organized force, while the group was further consolidated, and the support and maintenance of idols became firmer.

## 4.3 Fans' reverse construct of celebrity characters

The opposing fans refer to those who are opposed and pay attention to the shortcomings and deficiencies (Li Jianwei&Wang Yiran,2018). The opposing fans cannot be regarded as a type of fans in the actual sense. Different from the "loyal fans", such people are often spread bad news aobout the celebrity, regardless of whether it is true or false. Generally speaking, there will be a lot of the opposing fans after the personality collapse. Most of them are the "loyal fans" before. The negative effects are often greater, because they know more about than ordinary people.

For them, in order to reversely construct celebrity characters, it is necessary to fully understand the existing personality. Only after mastering enough other materials can it be accurate smear.The comments and actions of those fans are based on existing star works. The existence of the Internet enables those fans to connect and actively collect relevant materials about the celebrity, then reproduce it. Re-interpret the meaning of the text.

## 5.Conclusion and Discussion

With the development of social media, fans have more independent initiative, which plays an irreplaceable role in the establishment and collapse of celebrity personality. They gather together through the Internet and become a group. Because of

various rules in the community, they introduce their idols to the outside world. As a simple and easy-to-understand label, personality is important. However, the label is also fragile, and the symbols cannot fully represent the complete individual. Therefore, "personality collapse" is common, and the negative effects that follow are also worth considering.

## 5.1 The progressive significance

First, it meets the differentiated needs of the society. Different audiences have specific understanding for different cultures, and a variety of celebrity personality can meet the different needs of different audiences. Due to gender differences and cultural differences, fans can construct a variety of characters to satisfy all fans' fantasies.

Second, to meet the social needs of fans. As mentioned above, fans are prone to substituting themselves into film and television dramas, thereby confusing virtual characters with real-life characters. The personality of the celebrity often affects the fans. The personalities of these celebrities often affect fans' views, attitudes. Fans are constantly infected by popular culture in the process, learning knowledge and skills, mastering social experience, and transitioning from a natural person to a social person.

Finally, bring social culture and economic benefits. With the development of the star-making industry, subcultures such as fan culture have gradually emerged. In the past, fans were a crazy and unorganized group, which used to be full of vulgar culture. But now they pay less attention to vulgar culture. In addition, the fan economy brought by fan culture should not be underestimated. The economic benefits brought by various products with celebrity symbols are also worthy of our attention.

## 5.2 Reflection

Fans waste time and energythe about construction of celebrity personality. Correspondingly, every collapse of celebrity personality will destroy the trust between fans and celebrity, and the negative impact will be huge. The so-called "The house collapsed", we discuss the corresponding reflections and countermeasures from both the celebrity themselves and the fans.

For the celebrity，they should strive to build differentiated personalities and continuously improve themselves. In the Internet age, many celebrities have become popular overnight, but this does not mean that they are always. Celebrities should recognize their own positioning, improve themselves. In addition, celebrities should pay attention to the management their own personalities, and avoid adverse effects on fans and society. For example, Wang Yuan was exposed to smoking and drinking. Although it is harmless, he will also set a wrong example for fans. Zheng Shuang's surrogacy even break Chinese law and caused serious harm to fans.

For fans, they should be calm and rational, and constantly improve their media literacy. Some fanatical fans will do some extreme behaviors, causing trouble to the celebrities. In addition, excessive fans are also prone to do excessive things. Therefore,

in the process, fans should calm down and be rationally, not blindly or aggressively, and avoid excessive behavior.

## 6. References

Fan, Y (2020), Analysis of positive dissemination effect of social media——Based on Hall's coding and decoding theory, *Journal of News Research (23)*, 57-58.

Lv, P, Zhang, Y (2019), Interpretation from the Sociological Perspective of Teenagers Fans Culture, China Youth Studies (05), 64-72.

Xiao, C, C (2017), An Analysis of Weibo's Quasi-Social Communication——Taking the "Personality Collapse" of Entertainment Stars as an Example, Today's Massmedia (12), 25-26.

Fan, X, Q (2018), Interpretation of Communication Studies of "Personality Collapse", Today's Massmedia (03), 49-50.

Chen, J, Zhou, X, P (2018), The relationship between rules and symbols: Another research perspective of game communication——Taking "Honor of Kings" as an example, Contemporary Communication (04), 41-44.

Tao, D, F (2009), Research on Fan Culture: A New Expansion of Reading-Reception Theory, Social Science Front (07), 164-172.

Yang, M, M (2020), Carnival and Gaming: A Study of Fans' Supporting the List under Participatory Culture, Journal of News Research (07), 66+68.

Zhao, L (2019), Analysis of the Causes of the "Personality Collapse" of Celebrities from the Perspective of Communication, New West (32), 104-105.

Jiang, M (2016), Research on Chinese Fan Culture from the Perspective of Popular Culture (PhD Thesis, Jilin University).

Feng, L, Lv,, L (2018), The self-presentation and identity of the reversal fans, Media Observer (07), 93-98.

Li, J, W, Wang, Y, R (2018), Taking off and stepping back: A reversal fan behavior study, *Journalism Lover (09)*, 13-17.