

# Study on the Image Construction of Korean Popular Talk Show Variety Artists

## -- Taking Nothing Much Prepared as an Example

Yuhan Jiang\*

High School Attached to Northeast Normal University, Changchun, Jilin, 130021, China

\*jyhamiee965324@outlook.com

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### ABSTRACT

As an extremely important part of the development of Korean pop culture represented by the Korean "idol" industry, the artiste image is supported and loved by a wide range of fans for its strong style, vibrant and visually appealing, and trend-setting beauty. As an entertainment medium in the new era, variety shows have also made a significant contribution to the development of the Korean cultural industry. Therefore, the image construction method that takes "the contrast of the artist's image" as the main entry point can maximally amplify the artist's own charismatic focus under the angle of variety show shooting, especially under the interview nature of the conversation camera, which not only allows the audience to understand and comprehend the artist, but also gives the artist a space for better emotional communication with the fans. It also gives the artiste a space to communicate with their fans emotionally.

### KEYWORDS

Variety Shot; Artiste Contrast; Image Construction; Nothing Much Prepared.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

When it comes to the crucial role of culture in a country, economy is the foundation, politics is the central expression of economy, and culture is the reflection of economy and politics. After the financial crisis hit the Korean economy in 1997, the Korean government put forward the strategic policy of "culture as a nation" in 1998, and established the culture industry as a pillar industry for the development of the Korean economy in the 21st century. From the end of the 20th century to the 21st century, "Hallyu culture" has become one of the synonyms of the Korean culture industry, and Hallyu artists with concepts reflecting the nature of the times, singing and dancing performances full of visual impact and vitality, as well as the beautiful image of leading the fashion trend have been loved by the fan groups around the world and have gradually become one of the main markets of the global pop music industry. At the same time, South Korea's film, TV drama and variety show industries have also gradually come into the field of vision of the related industries in the East and West, and have a strong influence in the world's film and entertainment industry. Therefore, looking at the development of the Korean entertainment industry from a macro perspective, the "Hallyu culture" shows that the prevalence of the Korean music culture industry and the development of Korean variety arts and other film and television fields are complementary and indispensable.

"Cultural communication is the communication of symbols, and among all cultural symbols, the star is a special symbol [1]." In terms of the fundamental elements that support the popularity of Hallyu

culture, the emergence of "idol" as a representative concept that leads the Hallyu trend is the most direct reason why Hallyu culture has been sought after by young people in a wide range of music markets around the world. The image of the artist represented by the "idol" is the main measurement factor for the agency to launch a K-pop group and the important reason why it is loved and pursued by the fan groups, and the most typical form of constructing the overall image is to use the contrasting image of the idol artist on and off the stage as the entry point to create a complete and unique set of images that are not the result of a single assembly line aesthetic choice. In terms of the development of the Korean variety industry and related film and television fields, idol artists, who represent the aesthetic leadership of the "K-pop wave", also indirectly determine the characterization of a popular variety genre and the creative filming methods related to the content of the variety show. Unlike the visually striking images of artists on the stage, the contrasting images of artists under the camera of variety shows have become one of the direct ways of constructing the image of artists under the development of the entire Korean cultural industry.

Based on this, this paper will take the Korean popular interview variety show "Nothing Much Prepared" as an example, and use the contrast between the images of artists on and off the stage as the main entry point, and compare the character traits and part of the private life of artists who are pop idols by their profession, which are presented through the camera with the nature of the interview, with the strong style of pop idol artists, which is presented with the nature of the audience, which is shown by the artist in his/her daily work, in order to investigate how the Korean popular variety show creates a unique artist who represents different concepts of idols from the perspective of such stylistic differences. By comparing and contrasting the image of the idol artist with that of the artist in his or her daily work life, and by substituting and participating in the construction of the artist's image, the study explores how the Korean popular variety show creates a unique image of the artist from such stylistic differences that represent the nature of different concepts of the idol.

## **2. ANALYSIS OF THE ARTIST'S IMAGE UNDER THE PROGRAM 'S LENS**

Based on the reciprocity between the Korean variety film and television fields and the development of the Korean music and culture industry, when faced with the choice of portraying the diverse images of idol artists, variety shows have always been able to highlight the differentiated images of different artists to the greatest extent possible, and at the same time, indirectly extend the personalities portrayed by other artists.

The variety show "Nothing Much Prepared" features the returning members of the K-pop idol group and is hosted by Korean artist Lee Young-ji, whose cheerful and lively personality drives the atmosphere of the recorded guests through light-hearted interviews, which seem to be an exchange between friends, discussing everything from daily life stories to life aspirations. The guests' participation in this variety show serves to promote the group and their music, as well as providing a platform for the fan base to learn more about their idols.

### **2.1. The Approachable Artist Image**

The variety show "Nothing Much prepared" takes the perspective of a dinner party between friends as its starting point, and deepens the diversified images of artists and guests through three basic segments: guest appearance, game and drinking, and in-depth chatting. From the appearance of the guest to the introduction of the guest and the introduction of questions, host Lee Young-ji's lively and outgoing personality and his relaxed hosting style allow viewers to quickly enter into a relaxed and enjoyable conversation with the guest and feel closer to the guest due to the new "everyday" image of the guest artist during the game segment. For example, the host played a drinking game of "German heart disease" with the guest Kim Seok Jin, which fully demonstrated Kim Seok Jin's

hilarious image outside of the label of "superstar", and the "Kitty Pirate Game" with the guest Kim Jisoo showed Kim Jisoo's lively and cheerful personality like a sister next door under her cool appearance, and also the "Lie Detector Game" with guest An Yu Jin, etc. All of them completely removed the stereotype of "being an artiste, so he/she is super distant" behind, and the natural, everyday joys and sorrows of an entertainer are shown to the viewers, and the viewers may love the entertainer even more because of this sense of closeness.

## **2.2. The Sentimental significance of "alcohol"**

As the saying goes, "Truth is at the bottom of the decanter.", of course that the program 's choice of theme in defining "Nothing Much Prepared" clearly reflects this saying. As a variety art platform that enables viewers to know more about the artistes, the most direct way to achieve this is for the artistes to differentiate themselves from their on-camera persona and show viewers their true feelings, understanding and knowledge of ideals and life in the program. In this sense, a scholar has pointed out the performative model behind it as follows: "The individual must endeavour to make the impression he conveys in the situation consistent with the personal qualities actually given to him in proportion to the role.' (Goffman) He also divides acting into two kinds of acting, one in which one is unaware that one is acting, i.e. unconscious acting, and the other in which one is aware that one is acting, i.e. conscious acting. Goffman calls the former type of performance 'sincere' performance and the latter 'cynical' performance. The online persona is precisely the latter kind of performance, an 'effort to present oneself to others in order to make them see us as we wish to be seen' (Goffman), a performance with a so-called "mask" made of symbols, or a pattern of behavior that meets the expectations of the public and is approved by the society according to the requirements set by the persona [2]." On this basis, because of the role of "alcohol" as a typical emotional element in the program 's talk segment, regardless of whether the guest is sincerely conveying his/her own perceptions and feelings, or is consciously performing in order to present a consistent image that meets the expectations and approvals given to him/her by the society, the audience may subconsciously believe that what he/she says while drinking and possibly getting drunk is true. Moreover, in this emotional atmosphere, the artiste has a rare opportunity to reveal his or her inner self, which has been closed off due to external attention and judgement, and this plays a prominent role in fostering an empathetic connection between the audience and the artiste.

## **3. ARTIST PERSONALITY SHAPED BY A SENSE OF CONTRAST IN PERSONA**

### **3.1. Distance Determines the Artiste's Attraction Quality**

Regarding the significance of the sense of contrast in shaping the artist's image and personality, some scholars have pointed out that: "The way of shaping the star includes at least two levels: one is from the perspective of occupation, i.e., the star's performance of the role as an actor on the screen, and the other is the image shaping of the star as an individual off the screen, including the star's role as a "celebrity" and "celebrity" which is widely noticed by the society. The shaping of the star's image is carried out between many intertexts, and it is especially important that the star's private life is involved in the shaping of the star's identity [3]." Looking at the idol groups developed under the operation of the Korean entertainment system, it apparently reveals that most of the time in the "business" stage of the artists are showing their strong style as performers through the camera, such as the mature imperial sister style, the cold goddess style, the attitude of "Girl Crush" style, and so on, which incorporates the entire concept and spirit of the group. Based on this, the main types of fans of these idol groups can be divided into four categories - sound source fans, passer-by fans, die-hard fans, and black fans - excluding black fans, which are hardly influenced by the artist's style and persona, and sound source fans and passer-by fans, which have a high potential to become die-hard fans who

support the artist's career the most. As for the artist's fan absorption qualities, from the perspective of the fan circle, the greater the distance between the fans and the artist, the weaker the artist's fan absorption ability. For one type of fan, an idol is a being that can provide full emotional value, and if the idol is always out of reach, on the contrary, the fan will no longer consider the idol as a special being for him/her due to the huge gap in his/her heart. Therefore, if an idol can take the initiative to push open the door of "unknown and distance" between the idol and his or her fans, the idol's charisma in the eyes of his or her fans will be enhanced even more.

### **3.2. The Revealing Role of Persona Contrasts in Nothing Much Prepared**

Before analyzing the role of artists' contrasting personas, I conducted group interviews with the audience of the K-pop wave and this Korean variety show around me, using the question "What are the contrasts between artists' costumes, personalities, and personas inside and outside of this variety show?" as the starting point. According to the results of the interviews, 70% of the interviewees believed that the artists' performances in this variety show enriched their images and made their single images more diverse and real; more than 90% of the interviewees said that they changed their stereotypes of the artists through this variety show and deepened their understanding of them; for example, one interviewee said that he saw the relaxed casualness, mature style of dealing with matters, profound thoughts and sincerity and humility when they looking at the identity of their own superhuman artists under the extremely confident and handsome appearance of these artists, they are really role models worthy of learning from; and almost all of the interviewees said that because of seeing such a thoughtful and delicate side of the artists, they felt that the "spiritual distance" between these artists and themselves had just become more intimate, and that they realized that it is such difficult for the artists to be different from the ordinary people, and that it is difficult for them to express themselves. One of the interviewees, after watching the episode where artist Kim Seok Jin appeared as a guest, said to me in the interview, "In this show, Kim Seok Jin was always at the tipping point between being an ordinary person and a superstar, but the good thing about this show is that it allows artists to put aside their baggage and return to themselves, allowing others to realize that they are not just Idols, but different versions of themselves. Of course, due to a variety of factors add up, after all, this is a recording program, so your own words, what you do is constantly amplified, no matter how open heart, their own labels still always exist, which must be very heartbreaking and difficult. The living environment of artists is so hard, it's really unimaginable for ordinary people, especially in the Korean showbiz industry where the pressure is huge and the competition is extremely fierce, but they also have to keep on polishing themselves to make their fans happy, and Kim Seok Jin as an artist "JIN" also mentioned this in the program, and I realize that in most cases, when artists go out and amplify their idol attributes, they almost cover up and give up their own ease and authenticity, but instead, it's a way for them to protect themselves."

## **4. RETHINKING THE STANDARDIZED AESTHETIC IMAGE OF THE IDOL**

Since the early days of the development of the Korean pop culture, idol artists, as one of the representatives of the K-pop Wave, have been carrying and accepting the adoration and infinite imaginations given to them by the audience. A scholar studying the "industrial type" of idol production dominated by the logic of capital pointed out: "In the idol production system embedded in the logic of capital, the idol shifts from the masterpiece system to the 'persona' system, accepting the image planning carefully arranged for it by the agency. As the positioning of an idol's image, the persona directly frames and constrains its presentation to the public. Once accepting the persona, an idol cannot do as he or she pleases, but can only 'play' the role set for him or her by the capital in front of the public, and the construction of his or her gender image also originates from this motive [4]". And from a certain point of view, the audience's aesthetic orientation is one of the main reasons for constructing this persona that represents framing and constraint. On the one hand, the audience has

spontaneous aesthetic expectations for idol artists; while the agency will always make various adjustments and management for the artists in order to satisfy the audience's aesthetic demands for the idols when forming the idol group and constructing its image. In order to create an idol that best meets the public's aesthetics, the artiste must be "well-built", "tall and leggy", "fair-skinned", etc. Therefore, no matter how different the concepts and styles of the different idol groups are, the appearance of all the artists must be perfect and impeccable.

However, as people's emotional and affective needs are growing, it seems that viewers no longer need the perfect idol who is "handsome without any human warmth", but rather hope to find the courage and confidence to pursue their dreams through the power of an idol to ease their own confusion and uncertainty about life. Furthermore, when we look into the survival mode of idols who exist only for the sake of the audience, many artists have been working and living in a persona that represents the aesthetics and expectations of their fans, unknowingly losing their own thoughts and needs as human beings. When a person exists only to carry other people's feelings and expectations for him, but he is never able to express his helplessness and emotions to others, he will eventually sink into the endless abyss of love that is full of falsehood and emptiness.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This variety show focuses on the subtlety and charisma of an artiste as an ordinary person after the "idol" has been removed, and re-creates the artiste's strong distance performing image on a daily basis from the independent perspective of "persona contrast", which brings the distance of communication between the artiste and his fans closer and also compensates for the lack of emotion between the artiste and himself as a human being. Therefore, when shaping the image of idol groups with unique concepts and styles, it is not necessary to create a flawless artiste image at all times, but it is also possible for the artiste to continuously improve the distance between themselves and their fans after their performances full of passion and vitality on the stage, bringing their own human warmth to give their fans more spiritual guidance.

In light of the current development model of the Korean entertainment and music industries, it is important to find a bridge to maintain a stable relationship between artists and their fans from a more diversified perspective, even though the current development model of artists is still influenced by the fan base's independent and expectant aesthetics, and on the basis of the artist's ability to export their emotional value to their fans, it is hoped that artists will also have the opportunity to show their unique charms as their true selves.

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