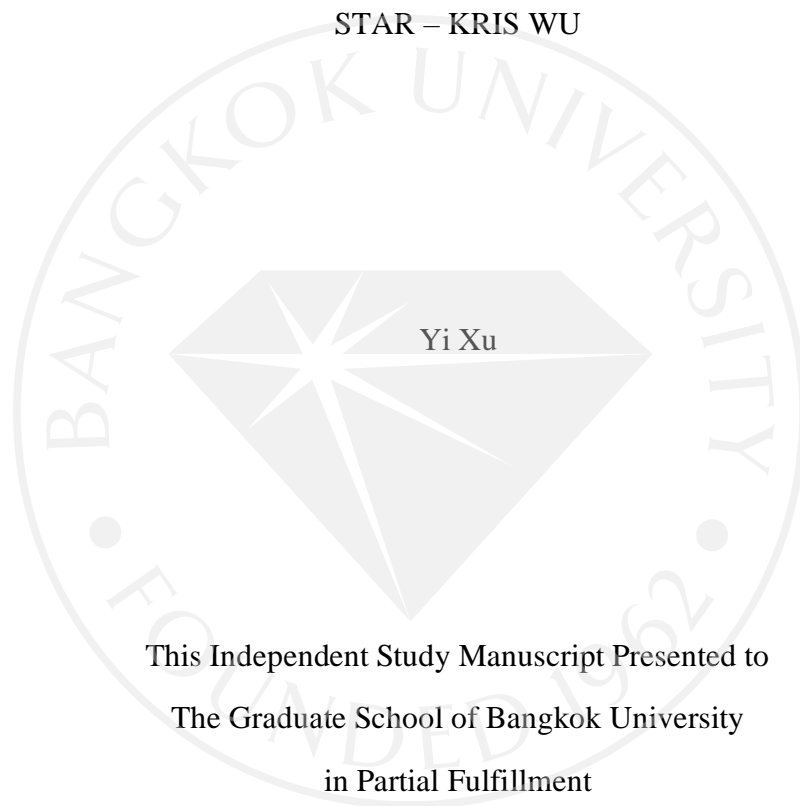


PORTRAYAL OF STAR IMAGE VIA DIGITAL MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT  
ON FANS' ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR : A CASE OF A CHINENE  
STAR – KRIS WU



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### **ABSTRACT**

The concept of star originated in United States movies and was used to refer to actors with high prestige. Now the concept of star no longer refers specifically to actors. Singers, hosts and even Internet celebrities on social media can be called stars. This study chose Kris Wu, who is discussed by the public because of his illegal behavior, as the research object. This paper analyzed the image formed by his fans from four aspects: promotion, publicity, work products, criticism and commentary, and the change of fans' attitude and behavior towards him before and after his illegal behavior. This study used semi-structured interviews with 10 participants who are still supporting, and does not support Kris Wu. The results are compiled based on the responses of the participants. This paper also roughly discusses the motives behind fan behavior.

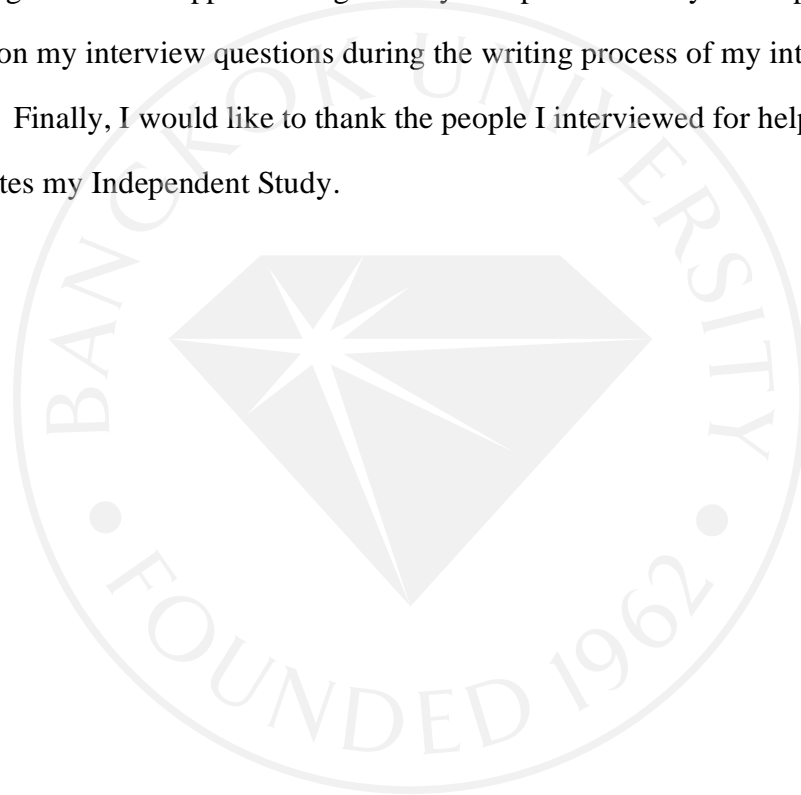
*Keywords: Kris Wu, Digital Media, Star Image, Attitude, Behaviors*

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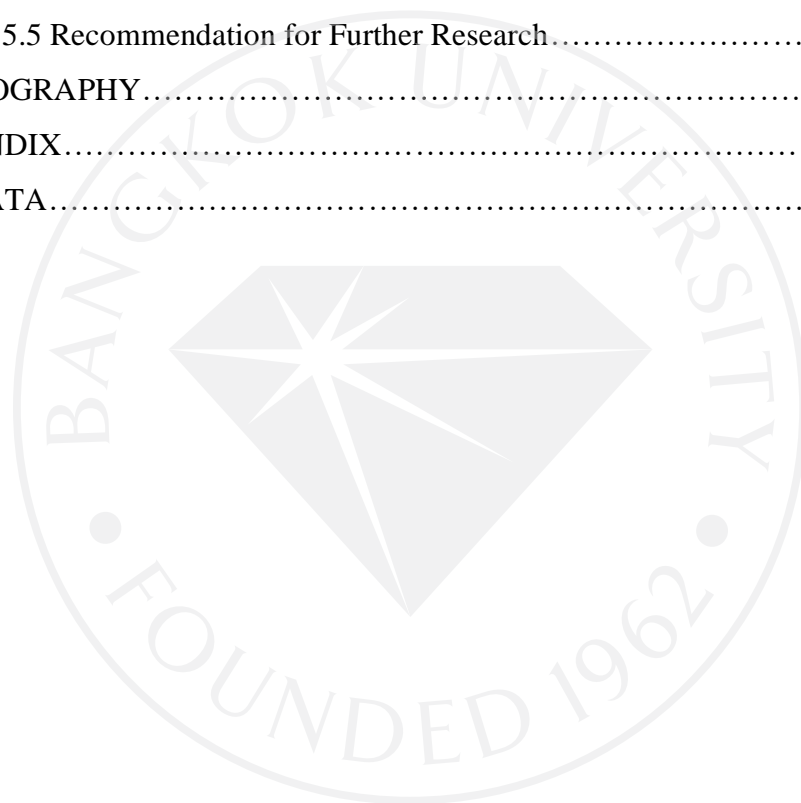


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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This study will analyze the image of stars in digital media and the change of fans' attitude and behavior after the change of star image from the perspective of fans. The introductory chapter of this study will consist of six parts as follows:

- 1.1 Rationale and Problem Statement
- 1.2 Objectives of Study
- 1.3 Scope of Study
- 1.4 Research Questions
- 1.5 Significance of the Study
- 1.6 Definition of Terms

### **1.1 Rationale and Problem Statement**

With the rapid development of digital technology in China, the way people get information has been changed, from one-way communication via traditional media to two-way communication through several digital media platforms. Everyone can become both a receiver and a sender of information. The formation of digital media is to digitize the sound, picture, text and image and spread them in the form of digital information (Zhou & Liu, 2017). Compared with traditional media, digital media has broken its inherent limitations. Social media have become a source of large amount of information and been used to promote the image of stars. Therefore, it's become difficult to manage the information on digital media due to the huge number of users and also information.

On digital media, people can spread digital words, sounds, graphics and images, and interact with audiences online. Therefore, China's entertainment industry has developed into an industrial ecology with the whole industrial chain layout of film,

drama, comprehensive and music. According to the Statistical Report on Internet Development in China compiled by China Internet Network Information Center (China Internet Network Information Center, 2022), the number of Internet users in China reached 1.032 billion, an increase of 42.96 million compared with December 2020, and the Internet penetration rate reached 73.0%, an increase of 2.6 percentage points compared with December 2020. Social media platforms, especially video platforms such as Bilibili and iQIYI, have been vigorously developed and used by Internet users in China. Besides general users, stars have begun to make their own accounts on these platforms. They personally interact with fans by publishing their own relevant information, communicating and interacting with fans, which breaks the barrier under communication via traditional media channels.

Since the star's image has changed from single flat to vivid dimensional, relationships between stars and their fans have become closer. The emergence of fan economy and fan culture have become an important focus of attention in the entertainment industry in China (Tong, 2021). For official organizations, public figures must be positive and play a positive guiding role for their fans, because the ideological work of the Chinese government pays great attention to positive aspects (Chen & Wang, 2020). Every move of idols in daily life may become the learning and imitation behavior of fans. However, there have been many illegal events and negative behaviors of entertainment stars or fans on various platforms in recent years, which led the Chinese government to launch a "Qinglang" campaign.

Qinglang campaign is clearly implemented between digital media and entertainment industry. Its activities were aimed at rectifying network violations and striving to effectively curb the breeding and spread of network chaos. Specific to the Qinglang campaign, the government officially launched a two-month special campaign of clearing and rectifying the chaos in the fandom in June 2021. This campaign focused on several topics related to stars, for example, a star list on digital

media platform (ranking the popularity of stars according to the number and activity of fans), hot topics (topics involving stars, ranking according to the number of blogs, page views and comments), fan community (the gathering place of fans on the digital media platform), and lastly interactive comments and control comments.

Comprehensively, the aim was to clean up all kinds of harmful information such as tearing and abusing each other, pulling and stepping to lead to online war, provoking confrontation, insulting and slandering, spreading rumors and attacking on the social media platforms.

Given the fact that digital media play a certain role in shaping star image, and it also has impact on fans' attitude and behavior (Yang & Liu, 2020). In China, there have been several cases of celebrities suspected of breaking the law in recent years. This has led Chinese authorities to ban those celebrities from appearing in the public as well as to work in the entertainment industry. Although they are forbidden to appear in the public, they still have fans to support them via social media. It has become questionable why some fans still support those stars even when they are suspected of breaking the law. To the best of our knowledge, most studies on star image have focused only on the positive image of stars and have never studied the fan groups whose star image has changed negatively. There are few studies that analyzed the changed or unchanged perception of fans, and this fan group has rarely been deeply investigated. Therefore, this study intends to fill this research gap by examining the star image in the eyes of fans, and fans' attitudes and behaviors towards the star being portrayed negatively in digital media.

## **1.2 Objectives of Study**

This study aims to find out the perception of star image as well as fans' attitude and behavior towards the star. The objectives of this study are described as follows.

1.2.1 To examine the image of the Chinese star in digital media among fans.

1.2.2 To examine fans' attitudes towards the Chinese star before and after he broke the law.

1.2.3 To examine fans' behaviors towards the Chinese star before and after he broke the law.

### **1.3 Scope of Study**

The researcher analyzed Kris Wu's image on digital media platform among his fans. Specifically, this study investigated whether and what changes have taken place in fans' attitude and behavior towards him after his illegal behavior. The case study chosen in this study is Kris Wu's fan group, including the person who continue to support him after his image changes and those who no longer support him.

This study used a qualitative approach by conducting in-depth interviews with ten informants who are Kris Wu's fans. The interviews cover questions about the image of Kris Wu, and the attitude and behaviors among Kris Wu's fans. The ten fans including 5 persons who are still Kris Wu fans and another 5 persons who no longer support Kris Wu.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

In order to achieve the research objectives, three research questions are formulated:

RQ#1: What is the image of Kris Wu in digital media among fans?

RQ#2: What is the attitude of his fans towards Kris Wu before and after his illegal behavior?

RQ#3: What are the behaviors of his fans towards Kris Wu before and after his illegal behavior?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study aims to understand the image of Kris Wu on digital media among his fans as well as fans' attitude and behavior towards Kris Wu's illegal behavior. As this study also explored fans' supporting motivations, its findings will help to understand the reasons of such fan groups' continuing support for a misbehaved star.

In China, especially in the academic research on stars and their influence, many researchers choose positive stars to study, from which to see fan economy and fan culture. Few researchers choose to study negative stars, let alone the fan base behind such stars. For negative stars, it's more just critical media coverage, and more groups choose not to talk about or even hide their praise for such stars. This study chooses this blank to carry on the research. The researchers believe that star idols have power and huge influence on the fan group through their negative portrayal. Therefore, the star and his company can strengthen their own moral behavior and quality as well as the law-abiding requirement, which brings more positive influence to the fan. On the other hand, it is also hoped that the media group can realize the fan group more comprehensively and actively guide the positive values and positive energy of the fan group.

### **1.6 Definition of Terms**

The definition of terms in this paper are defined as follows :

#### **1.6.1 Star**

Star is famous for its public performances on the screen and other media and is regarded as an important symbol within and between various cultural groups (O'Sullivan et al., 1994). The star is the constructed personage through various media texts (Dyer, 1979). In this study, the star is Kris Wu.

### 1.6.2 Fan

Jenkins (1992) regards fans as readers who actively use the text to reread the text for different purposes, and also audiences who turn the experience of watching TV into the participatory culture. Duffett (2013) proposed that fan should have an emotional connection with the star. In this study, fan is a group of people who follows and likes Kris Wu.

### 1.6.3 Digital Media

Digital media refers to information carriers that record, process, disseminate, and acquire processes in the form of binary numbers (Liu, 2003). Social media and video platforms are the development products of digital media. In this study, the digital media refers to the platform where Kris Wu's fans can follow and access to his information, such as Weibo, Tieba, Douban, Bilibili, and Instagram.

### 1.6.4 Portrayal on Digital Media

Portrayal on digital media is the way something or someone is depicted or represented on a digital media platform, and others can learn about it or the person through digital media. In this study, this term refers to the form in which stars are presented and disseminated on digital media, and fans have learned a series of opinions such as impression and love formed by the information of this star through digital media.

### 1.6.5 Image

Image refers to the sum of a person's beliefs, thoughts and impressions about a specific object, which can be defined as personal cognition of the target object, fact or state. Image is the individual of the target object (Zhang & Liu, 2020).

### 1.6.6 Star Image

Star image refers to the star's appearance, character, quality and ability of the character, portrayed via various digital platforms. In another word, stars construct their own image through the processing of digital media platform. Therefore, the

image of the star can be said to be a kind of social formation that is disseminated through the media and accepted by others (Shi, 2016).

#### 1.6.7 Attitude

Attitude is a feeling, belief, or opinion of approval or disapproval towards something (Ford-Martin, 2010). In this study, this term refers to fans' opinions and feelings about Kris Wu on digital media.

#### 1.6.8 Behavior

Behavior means an action or reaction that occurs in response to an event or internal stimuli (Ford-Martin, 2010). In this study, behavior means fans' overt actions or reactions toward Kris Wu including forwarding, commenting, praising or producing the content related with Kris Wu on digital media platforms, and buying products endorsed by Kris Wu.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter summarizes the relevant literature and previous research on star image, star image model, fan behavior, fan attitude and star-fan interaction. Moreover, this chapter also explores the theoretical research framework based on the above content. This chapter consists of the following:

- 2.1 Review of Related Literature and Past Studies
- 2.2 Review of Related Theories about Online Interaction (with Fan)
- 2.3 Conceptual Framework

#### **2.1 Review of Related Literature and Past Studies**

##### **2.1.1 The Portrayal of Star Image**

In 1913, the concept of star has begun to appear due to the emergence of mass media. Cordoba & Xiao (1995) pointed out that the stars produced by the star system are highly personalized, and not standardized. Actors and actresses received the attention of the public by playing their role in movies, and then gradually became a celebrity by accumulating a lot of attention. Some people can become a star because of their talent, and this talent can be described as their own physical appearance, acting talent, and their performances in films (Dyer, 1979). In the era of traditional media, stars did not have a full self, and their image was nothing more than an exclusive endorsement disseminated through film culture (Xiong & Wang, 2018). However, along with the development of digital media, stars have begun to actively shape their self-image, and communicate their lives and experiences by sharing pictures and texts on social media platforms (Chen, 2016). The self-construction of star image is becoming more and more common, and the symbolic characteristics of star image also show the evolution trend of difference.



According to the literatures, star image was divided into a personalized personal image and a role image (Liu, 2017; Shi, 2016). Role image refers to the image formed by stars participating on-screen and in TV dramas. Films are usually constructed around the image of stars, which the stories sometimes were written to describe specific characteristics of the star, so sometimes stories are selected to maintain the image of the star (Dyer, 1979). The image characteristics created by the off-screen media directly affect the star's role choice on the screen, and the role playing on the screen in turn strengthens the image characteristics in the star's life. This interaction from top to bottom will unify the star's image (Liu, 2017). Personal image refers to the image of a star outside the screen role performance. Under the traditional media, only stars' works propaganda, private gossip and personal interviews are reported. Only personal interviews have the opportunity to express their true selves (Liu, 2017). In the digital media age, however, stars can express themselves by posting information on social media platforms or participating in reality shows to show their true personality characteristics.

Dyer (1979) has noted that the image of star is manufactured through media texts and is a composite totality constructed by a plurality of promotion, publicity, films, criticism and comments. During the star system, stars were affiliated with film studios, which would find and create such stars for the specific roles needed for the film and make them to be regular actors for this type, making their image fixed (Dyer, 1979). However, nowadays, stars are no longer affiliated with a particular film studio and their identity has a multi-dimensional nature (Xiong & Wang, 2018). Therefore, when analyzing the star image, it is necessary to consider his multiple identities.

### 2.1.2 Kris Wu: A Star Chosen as a Case Study

This study focuses on Kris Wu, the star whose image is not positive at all the time. The author analyzes Kris Wu's image constructed by fans through digital media channels.

In 2012, Kris Wu officially appeared in Korea as an EXO member. After terminating his contract with a Korean brokerage company in 2014, he officially came to China's entertainment market to develop. He has many fans, and his account has 50 million followers on Weibo platform alone in 2021. He has become the global brand spokesperson of several luxury brands such as Burberry, Louis Vuitton, and Bulgari. In addition, topic labels related to him often appear in the forefront of social media hot topics. Kris Wu is not just a singer; he also acts in movies, so the analysis of Kris Wu's multiple image roles would contribute to the deeper analysis of star image.

In 2021, his illegal behavior related to suspicion of rape was reported to the Chinese authorities. After this news was spread out, some of his fans did not longer support him, while others still support him. The latter group believes that Kris Wu is innocent, and even attacks the official institutions.

### 2.1.3 Star Model

In order to examine the image of Kris Wu, the Dyer's star model modified by Michael (2007) was employed in this study. Michael (2007) uses Dyer's star model to analyze a singer image and modifies the model into four areas: promotion, publicity, work product, and criticism and commentaries.

The first area is promotion. It can be defined as media material deliberately produced for the image of the star, including advertisements, launches, photographs, and productions, etc. (Michael, 2007). The purpose of these materials is to promote the image of the star to the general public. These materials are consistent with the image designed by the company (Dyer, 1979). Dyer (1979) states that capital manipulates the creation of the star's image, such as the discovery of newcomers.

The second area is publicity. It refers to the portrayal of the star by the media, i.e., the media coverage of the star. Publicity is different from promotion because it is not deliberately doing the image of the star (Dyer, 1979). With the development of digital media, most media institutions have their own accounts on different social

media and video platforms where they can post relevant content. Publicity is important for celebrity image building (Michael, 2012), especially official media coverage of celebrities. Especially now, the entertainment industry is constantly introducing new people, and the information spreads quickly and widely in the digital media era. In order to keep the popularity of stars' personal traffic, it is necessary to keep as much exposure as possible, that is, to increase the possibility of being reported by the media.

After Michael's (2012) modified model, the third media text is work product. Michael (2012) believes that a star's work product is an important thing that determines his celebrity status. Because we can see the star's personal ability from his personal work results. Kris Wu's, as a singer and movie actor, work product is his music products and movies.

The last media text is criticism and commentary. This type of text usually contains a career review of the star or his or her life (Michael, 2012). In particular, the importance of professional evaluation to star image building is self-evident, because it is directly related to the professional recognition of stars in the industry. Those professionals have their own authority, which is equivalent to "opinion leaders" in the industry. Generally speaking, their comments have high credibility, which can guide public opinion for the weak professional public and directly affect the public's judgment on a star's professionalism (Liu, 2017).

#### 2.1.4 Fans

The term "fan" derived from an abbreviation for religious fanatic. This term was first taken seriously in the United States to describe the avid fans of baseball games and later to describe the loyal audience of movies and music (Duffett, 2013). But there has never been a standard academic definition of the word fan. Duffett (2013) suggests that a fan is someone who has a deep emotional belief in someone or something and is actively involved and exploring activities. Jenkins (1992) states that

becoming a fan is not just about loving someone/something, but also about sharing your thoughts and feelings about them and joining a community of fans with common interests. In Mao's (2018) opinion, fans are a group of people who regard an object as a reflection of superego and have the same internalization standard, and they have abundant emotional motivation to carry out active and flexible production or consumption activities. Simply put, people who have a passion for something or someone are fans, and there are no industry boundaries to the definition of a fan. But the term fan is now more about pop culture, the emotion of ordinary people's active participation in pop culture (Duffett, 2013). It is difficult for individual fans to be alone all the time. Emotion is an important support for the pursuit of fans. As Jenkins (1992) said, the motivation of fans is different from simple knowledge sharing. It is not a simple way to understand, but more a kind of communication. Therefore, when studying fans, it is not only a single individual, but also a group of fans.

Fans are people who love what they love, and they may have different experiences and feelings than non-fans. Duffett (2013) argues that fans are more obsessed with their passions. Individual fan has different degrees of fascination with the object, so he or she can be classified according to the degree of fascination of fans. Fans can be divided into four categories (Mao, 2018): Die-hard fans, normal fans, Sasaeng fans, anti-fans. A die-hard fan is a person who is firmly in love with a loved one and is completely loyal to the loved one. Normal fans are people who have something they want in their favorite star but are not yet completely loyal to the star. For the above two types of fans, the advantages of their loved ones are magnified, while the disadvantages are reduced or even ignored. Sasaeng fans refer to people who mistakenly grasp the distance between themselves and their loved ones. Generally speaking, such fans are not accepted by the fan community. Anti-fans are not fans in fact. Although they are very concerned about the information of a star, their purpose is not to love or map the star's things to themselves, even the star is the

opposite of what they are pursuing. Their purpose is more inclined to smear and slander this object. Such fans will magnify the shortcomings of stars while ignoring their advantages.

For stars in the entertainment industry, the more die-hard fans are the better. The less Sasaeng fans and anti-fans are the better. But the reality is that there are more normal fans.

#### 2.1.5 Fan's Attitude

Attitude is a feeling, belief, or opinion of approval or disapproval towards something (Ford-Martin, 2010). Attitudes are influenced by what people know and think about specific things (Chen, 2016). In psychology, attitude has always been an important research object. Affect, behavior, and cognition are components of attitude (Breckler, 1984). The affective component refers to the emotional state of a particular object, which can be differentiated, transient (instantaneous) or intense (Kondrotienė & Bakanauskas, 2022). The behavioral component is the behavior that occurs as a result of an attitude object, or the personal tendency of verbal or explicit nonverbal behaviors formed by observable responses. It involves people's favorable/unfavorable reactions to attitude objects (Jain, 2014). The cognitive component is composed of individual cognition, belief and perception about the attitudinal object. It evaluates the content of the object by experiencing the object directly, evaluating the new and old information, and expressing the content of the object with certain emotional response (certain approval or disapproval) (Kondrotienė & Bakanauskas, 2022).

Attitude is composed of the above three components, but different attitudes account for different proportions of these three components. It is said that fans are people who have a strong love for specific things/people, and their attitudes are more emotional. Fans bring their cognition of stars and their own behavior by their emotions towards stars. The happiness and joy of fans when they see stars or star information are all fan emotions, and emotions are the concrete expression of feelings

(Jain, 2014). Recognition, attachment, worship and so on are the evaluation formed after the fans recognize the star as an object, and they are also the attitudes of fans. Overall, when fans are positive about stars, their attitude is good, both emotionally and cognitively.

Attitudes are subjective and contain subjective evaluations of individuals, so attitudes can change under the influence of three factors: compliance, recognition, and internalization (Kelman, 1958). Compliance means that the rewards or punishments given by society play an important role in the formation and development of people's attitudes. Identification refers to the beliefs and emotions that an individual can change to resemble someone he admires or likes because of his own expectations. Internalization refers to the change of belief and evaluation of attitude object based on the change of personal internal belief and value. Therefore, for fans, when the external environment, self-value and star object change, the attitude of fans towards stars will also change. From the emotional level, anger, sadness, nausea, shock (Jia, 2019) are the main emotions after the change of fans' attitude. From the cognitive level, disappointment and negative evaluation are the main contents after the change of attitude. Complaining, de-powdering, attacking stars (Jia, 2019), etc. are behaviors in fan attitude. When the idol's behavior fails to meet the psychological expectation of fans, fans will be dissatisfied. Under the exaggeration of negative emotions of the group, they vent their dissatisfaction by attacking the idol's character, professional skills, and popularity, so as to achieve psychological balance (Jia, 2019). For fans, such former fans can also be called anti-fans.

#### 2.1.6 Fan's Behaviors

Behavior can be seen as an external manifestation of attitudes. With the advent of the digital media era, everyone can become a sender, so fans have become a more active and creative group. Through a series of media cases, Jenkins (2012) showed the existence and operation of fan culture caused by the change of

communication practice in the new media environment. For instance, fans can share and spread the images, stories and sounds in the media text as the material for creating self and group culture through new media technology. Jenkins (1992) believes that fans will interpret the popular text provided by the media, but will recreate it according to their own interests, that is, from the standpoint of consumers, and reevaluate the meaning of the text.

Through the research on the initiative and productivity of fans, Fiske (1992) believes that the cultural standards of fans can be different from the official standards, and fans also have the ability to participate in the production of texts. He divided the productivity of fans into semiotic productivity, enunciatively productivity and textual productivity. Semiotic productivity is thought to be the production of meaning from cultural goods in terms of social status or social identity. It is a symbol of overall popular culture and is not unique to fan culture (Fiske, 1992). However, semiotic productivity is internal. When meaning is produced and then shared verbally or face to face, then productivity is produced. Textual productivity refers to fans producing texts that circulate in groups, whose texts are not only the production of new texts, but also the construction of original texts (Fiske, 1992).

Fiske (1992) further suggests that most of the pleasure of fans also comes from verbal conversation. Like soap opera fans chatting, they will predict the development of the next story in small talk. They may also write letters and leave messages to the screenwriter to express their thoughts. Soap opera fans produce their own meaning in a moderate way by predicting the next development of the script, which also has certain significance. Thereafter, it may affect the plot trend of the screenwriter and change the final ending (Xiao, 2019).

Nevertheless, verbal conversation is not the only way for attitude and behavior manifestation. Take the Kardashian family, a popular celebrity in western countries, as an example. Their fans love to imitate Kim Kardashian's makeup,

hairstyle and dressing style and buy the same products as she does. Therefore, they create their own make-up brands and clothing brands to satisfy their fans.

Textual productivity refers to fans producing texts that circulate in groups, whose texts are not only the production of new texts, but also the construction of original texts (Fiske, 1992). For example, fans will imitate the characters in their favorite dramas and upload the imitated clips to social media, which will attract a large number of fans or make the recreated new texts popular. They even edit videos of star works or make their own star videos according to music.

Besides, fan is the main consumer group of celebrities (Chen, 2016), and therefore their purchase behavior is one of the components of fan behavior. Fans consume the ideology represented by stars to meet their needs and desires (Liu, 2016). From another perspective, stars are constructed for fans to consume. Thus, fan magazines often play up to and encourage this sense of possession. The idea that stars are constructed by their fans owes their stardom entirely to them (Fiske, 1992). Stars are targets on which fans project their egocentric needs (Liu & Zang, 2021), and therefore, when the image of a star is changed, the fan group is more likely to defend the star. Fans' positive attitude towards stars can be expressed in the forms of love, fanaticism, and trust. They express their expectation attitude when stars are under performing, and even feel distressed for stars when stars encounter negative comments (Liu, 2016).

According to Xiao (2020), fan behavior in the digital media age can be divided into three categories: all-day companionship, free digital labor and economic consumption. All-day companionship means that fans use the initiative brought by mobile internet technology to find all the information related to idols. Fans not only get to know stars through regular programs, but also get fragmented information about stars through digital media platforms such as Weibo and Douban, and even upload self-edited imaginary videos on video sites such as Bilibili. Free digital labor



refers to the work fans do on the Internet to keep stars of high commercial value, such as refuting negative information about stars, focusing on positive information about stars in a certain period of time, calling on fans to focus on forwarding blog posts about stars of a brand, etc., which fans voluntarily spend time, energy and money to achieve. Hence, this series of behaviors become free digital labor. Economic consumption refers to the consumption of media products produced by fans for stars with real money and silver. Fans can support stars by buying albums, buying tickets for movies starred by stars, and supporting public welfare related to stars, etc. The consumption behavior of fans can be regarded as the consumption of stars' symbols by fans (Cao, 2020). Because fans don't necessarily buy products they need, they usually buy star-related products to show their support for their favorite stars.

Fans are an important foundation of star career, and they put a lot of enthusiasm and painstaking efforts into supporting stars. However, when the star's disqualification behavior leads to the change of his original image, the attitude and behavior of some fans probably change. From the perspective of fan behavior, they will not carry out the above three kinds of behaviors to support stars, and even discard the products related to stars purchased before. They even take the initiative to attack stars, that is, fans take the initiative to post negative information on social media to attack stars for lack of professional skills, bad character and personality, poor appearance, etc. (Jia, 2019).

## **2.2 Review of Related Theories about Online Interaction (with Fan)**

In the era of digital media, fans can learn about celebrities' information timely and quickly through the Internet. For example, one of the social media platforms-Weibo-has the characteristics of information fragmentation and immediacy. So, fan groups can obtain star's information quickly by using this platform. Besides, celebrities can also use these characteristics to meet their psychological needs for

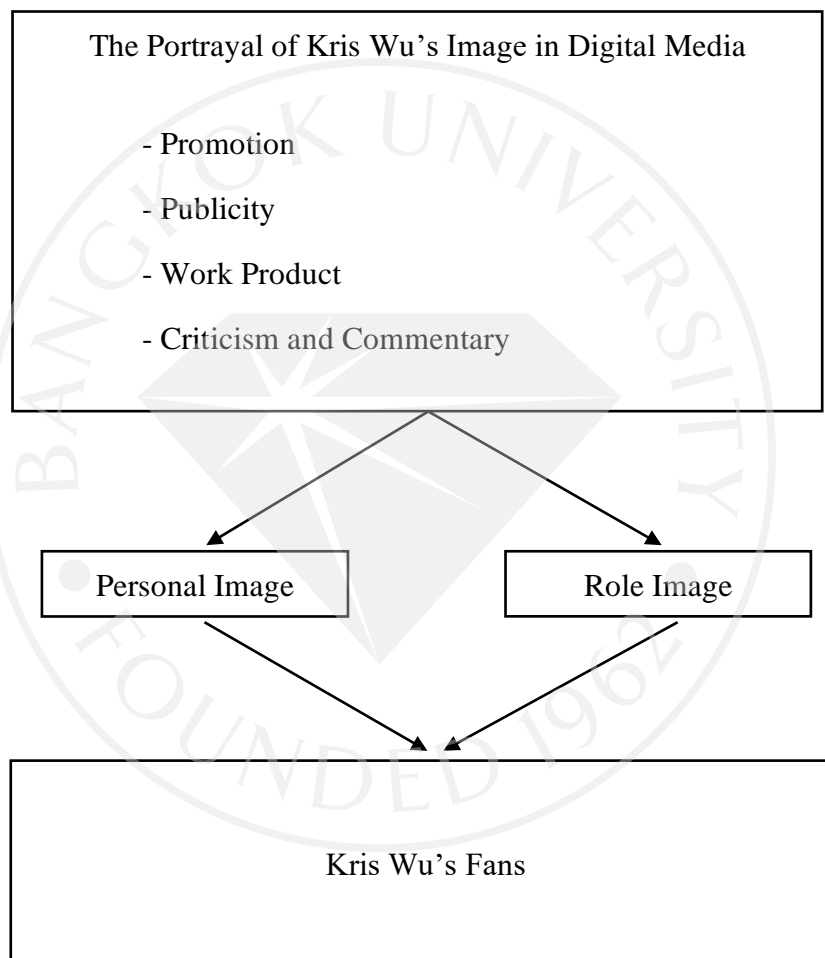
high-frequency exposure and publicity. The premise of interaction is that both parties have the psychological need to communicate, and the specific communication effect depends on the behavior and attitude of both parties (Jin, 2014). The interaction between celebrities and their fans through social media platforms is an inevitable trend to increase the exposure of celebrities, expand marketing communication channels and increase the closer relationships among fans. Fiske (1992) defines fans as crazy readers with strong emotions. Emotional energy is an important driving force in Collins's chain of interactive rituals (Fine, 2005), and social media can easily form fan groups or pay attention to each other and share emotions (Xue, 2021). In the online era of digital media, the interactive ritual chain begins with the flow of information across multiple platform communities. Any individual can get the desired ritual effect through the interactive ritual of the social platform community (Gu, 2022). With a range of tactics for ceremonial effect platforms, such as digitization or commoditization (Gu, 2022), so star data is becoming increasingly important in the fan economy. Fiske (1992) believes that fan culture is closely related to social and commercial interests. Fan groups want to expand their voice on the Internet to increase the value of stars, so it is very difficult to isolate from other groups, so collisions between different groups often occur (Hu, 2021). In recent years, there have been many fan wars on Chinese social media and video platforms, involving fan and non-fan groups of stars or different fan groups of stars.

### **2.3 Conceptual Framework**

Based on the review of related literature and previous study, together with the discussed theory, conceptual framework of this study can be summarized. This study analyzes Kris Wu's image in digital media by obtaining fans' views on the promotion, publicity, work products, criticism and comments of stars. The image of the star will be analyzed from the personal image and the role image. Finally, the study examines

the change of fans' attitude and behavior by analyzing the fans' views before and after the change of star image, Kris Wu. In summary, conceptual framework is illustrated below (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter will explain the design of the whole study and the specific methods of implementation. This chapter is divided into the following topics:

- 3.1 Research Design
- 3.2 Population and Sample Selection
- 3.3 Research Instrument
- 3.4 Data Collection Procedure
- 3.5 Data Analysis
- 3.6 Reliability and Validity of the Research

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The purpose of this study is to explore the star image among fans in digital media and its influence on fans' behavior and attitude. Through qualitative research, researchers can understand the language and behavior range of specific groups, and further explore the changes in people's behavior, emotion, thought and other fields (Zhou, Sun & Hao, 2007). Qualitative research can enable researchers to have deeper information on group thoughts and feelings, and the collected information is more comprehensive (Zhou et al., 2007). The purpose of this study is to examine the image of Kris Wu in digital media in the eyes of Kris Wu fans and the influence of this image on fans' attitude and behavior. Therefore, this study has adopted qualitative methods.

Interviews were used to gain insight into a person's subjective experiences, opinions, motives (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020). As this study focuses on fans' emotions, opinions and behaviors, in-depth interviews were conducted for collecting the data.

### **3.2 Population and Sample Selection**

The population of this study is young Chinese fans of Kris Wu. According to the “Arithmetic·Kris Wu” series of reports released by Toutiao in 2015, young people aged 18-30 are the main group, so the main age composition of the sample is fans aged 18-30. In addition, according to the report, this group of people have high spending power and willingness. Young viewers are the most active people in society. They have a strong ability to accept new things. They are used to obtaining information through digital media channels such as social media and video platforms. The interviewees chosen by researchers must be or have been fans of Kris Wu.

Since there are no fans of Kris Wu around the researcher, the researcher published a post, which informed the age requirements of the participants on Weibo and WeChat. If this approach is ineffective, the researcher took the initiative to contact fans in Kris Wu on the social media platforms and adopted a snowball sampling, which is the method that the previous interviewee will recommend the next qualified interviewee.

### **3.3 Research Instrument**

The researcher compiled a semi-structured interview list, which mainly includes the following three parts: personal information, star image, fan attitude and behavior. The first part mainly collected the personal information of informants, including specific age, gender, educational background, the most used digital media platform.

The second part was to collect data related to Kris Wu’s image. This part mainly asked the interviewees’ opinions through the Dyer Star model modified by Margiotta (2017), including publicity, promotion, work products, criticism and comments, and summarizes the image of Kris Wu in digital media.

The third part was to collect data on fans' attitudes and behaviors. This part asked the interviewees why they like Kris Wu now or once and what behaviors they have done for him and summarized the deep reasons behind fans' attitudes and behaviors. This interview list was divided into two parts, because the fan groups of this interview were divided into fans who continue to like Kris Wu after he is suspected of breaking the law and fans who no longer like him. The full list of interview questions can be found in the Appendix.

In this study, face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted. Participants were unwilling to disclose detailed private information about themselves when interviewing via telephone.

### **3.4 Data Collection Procedure**

The list of questions and the guide for semi-structured interviews were prepared in English. As the interviewees were all Chinese fans of Kris Wu, the guide was translated into Chinese and English. The researcher made an appointment with the interviewee before the interview to ensure the smooth progress of the interview. Each interview was limited to 20-30 minutes. In addition, the researcher explained all the guidelines to the interviewees in detail before conducting the interview. All the interviews were conducted in Chinese during the whole interview process. The whole interviews were audio recorded. After the interview, the researcher transcribed the interview recordings into a text in Chinese, and translated them into English to complete the data collection procedure.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

According to the above research design and data collection, this study analyzed the interview data, trying to explore the influence of Kris Wu's image in digital media and fans' attitude and behavior. The collected data were classified and

coded, which has been carried out from three aspects: star image, attitude and behavior. On this basis, the indirect and potential motives and effects of the text are mined, and the factual data are commented (Xu, 2011). The specific text analysis was as follows:

First, the researcher read the transcribed texts of all the interviewees, and marked the labels of the interviewees' mentioned images, attitudes and behaviors. For example, when informants described a star as "handsome" on a show in publicity part, the researcher coded it as appearance, which was belonging to personal image; and when the informants described a star as "charming" in a movie, the researcher coded it as personality, which was belonging to role image. But both above codes belonged to image. After the first encoding cycle was completed, the researcher carried out the second and third cycles of the encoding of the previous cycle until the first encoded code has been included, re-marked by other codes or deleted.

### **3.6 Reliability and Validity of the Research**

Reliability means that different researchers have the same observation on a given phenomenon. The researcher returns the interpretation of the interviews to the two informants (one from each of the two categories) and reaches a consensus through several iterations of the exchange. The interpretation refers to the analysis content obtained by the researcher through sorting out and classifying the interview contents of the interviewees. In addition, the researcher herself must always remind herself to abandon her previous perceptions of the research subject and her fan base.

Validity is concerned with whether the research results can be obtained in the right way. Researchers ensure the validity of the research content by the following methods. After creating an outline of the interview questions based on the research questions and the theoretical conceptual framework, the researcher gave the outline of the interview questions to the peer researchers for review and comments, and then the

researcher revised the outline of the interview questions based on the comments of the peer researchers.





## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

This chapter summarizes the results of interviews with 10 Kris Wu's fans. Based on the theoretical framework, this study summarizes and displays the interview content. In this chapter, the discovery is mainly divided into three parts to show, the first part is the characteristic information of the interviewees, the second part analyzes Kris Wu's portrayal by digital media from the perspective of fans, Kris Wu's image, specific fan attitude and behavior, and the third part summarizes the content of the second part.

#### 4.1 Descriptions of Informants' Characteristics

#### 4.2 Findings

#### 4.3 Conclusion

### **4.1 Descriptions of Informants' Characteristics**

Ten informants were invited to the study, five of whom are still Kris fans, while the other five were former Kris fans. Informants were between the ages of 18 and 30, which met the age requirements for fans selected in the analysis of population and sample selection. An analysis of the educational background of the interviewees found that eight were undergraduate, one was a graduate student, and one was a high school student. Each interviewee said that Weibo, Douban and Bilibili were the most popular digital platforms used or used as star-chasing fans. The common point of these three platforms is that they can freely express opinions or original and creative graphics, videos and specific labels can be marked, especially Weibo and Douban can also establish corresponding groups.

Table 4.1: Informants' Characteristics

Informant	Age	Gender	Education	Platform	Location	Current attitude
1	30	Female	Bachelor	Weibo	Online	NO
2	23	Female	Bachelor	Tieba Weibo	Online	NO
3	24	Female	Master	Weibo Douyin Douban Bilibili	Online	NO
4	24	Female	Bachelor	Weibo Douyin Redbook Douban Bilibili	Online	NO
5	25	Female	Bachelor	Weibo Bilibili	Online	NO
6	22	Female	Bachelor	Baidu Weibo	Online	Still like
7	21	Female	Bachelor	Weibo	Online	Still like
8	20	Female	Bachelor	Weibo Instagram	Online	Still like
9	18	Female	High school	Weibo Douban	Online	Still like
10	20	Female	Bachelor	Weibo	Online	Still like

## 4.2 Findings

### 4.2.1 The Portrayal of Kris Wu on Digital Media among Fans

The researcher uses four aspects: promotion, publicity, work product, criticism and commentary to understand the image of star Kris Wu in the eyes of his fans on digital media. The following are definitions and specific examples of these four areas in this study.

Table 4.2: The Portrayal of Kris Wu on Digital Media among Fans

The portrayal of Kris Wu on digital media	Definition	Example of quote from fans who still support Kris Wu	Example of quote from fans who no longer support Kris Wu
Promotion	Fans learn about the image of the star positioned by the company promoting the star	<p>I remember that he is the facade and the captain of the Chinese team. Indeed, I think his appearance is very good and he deserves to be the facade.</p> <p>Moreover, he can speak English, Mandarin and Korean. As a captain, he can really take care of other players. I think he really takes care of others.</p> <p>(Female, 20 years old)</p>	<p>I don't know when he was in the team, but I remember that he was the captain. I think the captain must be a responsible person in general.</p> <p>(Female, 24 years old)</p>

(Continued)

Table 4.2 (Continued): The portrayal of Kris Wu on digital media among fans

The portrayal of Kris Wu on digital media	Definition	Example of quote from fans who still support Kris Wu	Example of quote from fans who no longer support Kris Wu
Publicity	The image of a star formed by fans through the publicity and exposure of the star on digital media platforms	I think he shows a very handsome image on both platforms, and sometimes there are pictures of working. I think he works very hard. (Female, 21 years old)	The first time I was attracted by his music works was when he was in Korea. A small clip streamed out of social media should be Lullaby that he cooperated with his good friend Kevin. Although it is a small segment he sang a long time ago, I can feel that this person is quite gentle from that segment. (Female, 23 years old)

(Continued)

Table 4.2 (Continued): The portrayal of Kris Wu on digital media among fans

The portrayal of Kris Wu on digital media	Definition	Example of quote from fans who still support Kris Wu	Example of quote from fans who no longer support Kris Wu
Work product	The image of a star formed by fans through the star's music and film work	I think his music is very inspiring and shows his own personality. For example, "Happiness" is the spirit conveyed by "Big Bowl Thick Noodles" and the musical spirit of Kris Wu, which was called "Big Bowl Thick Noodles" spirit which means a more inclusive, open-minded and tolerant attitude, and happily conveys happiness. (Female, 21 years old)	It's very European and American, cool and attitude, which is different from the traditional entertainment industry in mainland China. Very self-different, very personal or very attitude. (Female, 30 years old)

(Continued)

Table 4.2 (Continued): The portrayal of Kris Wu on digital media among fans

The portrayal of Kris Wu on digital media	Definition	Example of quote from fans who still support Kris Wu	Example of quote from fans who no longer support Kris Wu
Criticism and commentary	The image of a star formed by fans through the criticism and comments of others on the star's work	N/A	N/A

#### 4.2.1.1 Image in Promotion

In this study, the image obtained by fans through promotion mainly refers to the image positioning of stars by companies in order to promote stars. Most informants said they understood the company's image of Wu and his role in the team in his early days, and they also said the company's positioning of him was accurate. Asked about the first impression of Kris Wu, Informant 8 said she first noticed Wu's face and marveled at how handsome he was. When talking about the company's positioning of his personal image in the interview, the informants who knew about his early debut information all said that it was the image positioning of Lengdunan (冷都男), that is, the image of a handsome man with cold, handsome and few words. At the same time, the informants also said that this positioning was consistent with Kris Wu's superior appearance.

“I remember that he seemed to be a Lengdunan. I think it is quite consistent with his face.” (Informant 3, personal communication, May 18, 2022)

“I think his position is as a facade in his team, because he is very handsome.” (Informant 5, personal communication, May 20, 2022)

When asked about Kris Wu’s role in the team, most informants said he was the facade and captain. Facade responsibility refers to the role of representing the appearance of the team due to his superior appearance in the team. Kris Wu’s role in the team is consistent with his company’s personal image positioning, so we can know that Kris Wu’s own appearance is very superior.

“I remember that he is the facade. Indeed, I think his appearance is very good and he deserves to be the façade.” (Informant 10, personal communication, May 22, 2022)

When asked about Kris Wu’s image positioning in the team, in addition to the role of facade, informants also mentioned his role as captain in the team. Informants said the role of captain reflected good personal qualities, such as responsibility. Because

“I think the captain must be a responsible person in general” (Informant 3, personal communication, May 18, 2022)

In addition, Wu’s ability to speak four languages also makes his role as captain a matter of course.

“He plays the role of captain in the Chinese team. He is very caring and responsible. Besides, he can also speak Korean, English, Mandarin and Cantonese, so his language ability is also good.” (Informant 1, personal communication, May 15, 2022)

The informant further increased their love for Wu in terms of his language ability. The informants affirmed Wu's captain role and language ability, which can tell that fan’s love from appearance has turned to his inner personal qualities. In the hearts of fans, Wu’s image began to gradually be enriched.

Some informants said it was important for companies to position the image of stars in advance, because it would help companies promote newcomers to the entertainment industry and attract fans with their distinctive personal characteristics. In particular, Informant 2 said that the company created the mystery and distance of the star image by packaging the image of the star and restricting the opening of personal accounts by the star. She thought that's why Wu had a lot of fans in China when he worked in South Korea in his early days.

#### 4.2.1.2 Image in Publicity

##### 1) Images in Variety Shows

In the interview, a number of informants mentioned that there was a difference between Kris Wu's actual personal image they learned from variety shows and the company's personal image of Lengdunan. They thought Wu's actual personal image should be cute with a bit of stupidity, not the cold of the company's positioning. This image was in stark contrast to the company's image of him. Informant 2 said that after watching the variety show "Show Time", she felt that Wu's actual personality was cute and humorous. She mentioned a scene in the variety show in which the team members asked Kris Wu to eat fried chicken together. He said that fried chicken was not his style and did not eat it, but in the end, he ate it happily and sighed that the fried chicken was really fragrant. This scene made her feel that there was a huge contrast between Wu's image, but this contrast would attract her to understand Wu more. In addition, many informants also mentioned that because the reaction time of stars in variety shows is very short, and stars can't disguise themselves well, so they feel that the personal image of the star in the variety show is more real than the image of the star that they know through other means.

When asked how they first learned about Kris Wu, six informants said they learned about him through variety shows, and five of them mentioned the popular variety show "Happy Camp". From the above informants' answers, it can be



seen that participating in variety shows is a good way to expand popularity and increase exposure, especially participating in popular variety shows.

## 2) Images on Social Media Platforms

In interviews, all informants mentioned that they had accounts on social media platforms and said that the advent of social media made their star-chasing journey easier, because they could keep up with the latest information about stars and communicate with other fans anytime, anywhere. When asked if they followed Wu's Weibo and Instagram accounts, all informants said they followed Wu's Weibo account. Two informants said Instagram wasn't followed due to regional difficulties, but because other fans would repost Wu's Instagram posts to Weibo, they followed Wu's Instagram account in another way.

Informants said there were differences in Wu's image on the two social media platforms. They argued that Wu's overall image on both platforms is fashionable and handsome. While it presents a more international, life-close and fashionable image on Instagram, it is more commercial and official on Weibo. Because according to the answer of Informant 8, she said Wu showed pictures on Instagram wearing brand clothes, shoes, watches and photos with famous cars or European and American celebrities, as well as a few photos of his own travel. Weibo, on the other hand, typically features photos of brands he has endorsed or collaborated with, posters of movies or variety shows he has participated in, and official greetings he has posted during holidays. Although the image of a star on different social media platforms varies, fans can access and understand it.

## 3) The Influence of Compliment Media Coverage

When asked how to view the media coverage of Kris Wu, informants were rational. Because they understood that the media reported Wu because of his honor, high status and huge fan base at that time. Informant 10 said that she felt it was normal for the media to report on Wu, because his public image was positive, he

encouraged fans to pursue their dreams bravely, and he also participated in public welfare activities, so Informant 10 felt that Wu was a good and responsible public figure. Informant 2 even said that the influence of media reports on her is not as deep as that of fans, because she thought that fans share information as individuals, which will make readers read information without precaution. Interestingly, Informant 1 said that although she knew Wu through variety shows, it was because Wu's fans took photos of him holding cabbage at the airport and posted them on Weibo. After she saw this interesting photo, she wanted to know Wu more deeply.

A few informants said that the media coverage would increase their love for Kris Wu, because they felt that the media coverage expressed the affirmation of their selection vision and increased their sense of self-achievement and recognition.

“Maybe add some love more or less, and there will be a sense of accomplishment by the media coverage.” (Informant 3)

These informants are self-contradictory, and while they understand the reasons behind media coverage, they still need external recognition to enhance their sense of fan identity.

Although the informants were rational about the media coverage of Kris Wu, most of them had a neutral or even negative attitude towards the media. Informant 2 said there were only two reasons for media coverage, money, and attraction. She felt that Wu was a star with a lot of fans and a good image at that time, so the media would naturally choose him to report to attract more readers. In addition, Informant 8 directly said that the media is snobbish, because their purpose is too clear and explicit. She thought that the media chooses high-ranking stars to report his good, in order to attract fans and exposure. But when a star was in deep trouble, the media would hide the previous reports about this star praise and release his bad behavior in order to attract the attention of non-fans.

Generally speaking, when the informants read the media reports, their inner image of Kris Wu has been constructed and the image is positive and good. The media coverage of praise has no influence on the cognition of fan groups who have already constructed the image of stars.

#### 4.2.1.3 Images in Work Products

##### 1) Images in Film

When asked about Kris Wu's role in the film, a few informants mentioned that his character was handsome and charming as a whole, but also showed an image of longing for love in the film "Never Gone". Informant 2 said that in the movie "Sweet Sixteen", Wu's character shot a man who hurt the heroine, which was considered charming and handsome by fans. Most informants said they didn't analyze Wu's role in detail, but they agreed that Wu has shown a good personal image of hard work and continuous improvement in acting skills through multiple films. Informant 9 said although Wu's acting skills could not be compared with professional actors, he was constantly learning, and his acting skills were gradually improving. Interestingly, most of the informants were aware that Wu's acting skills were average, while only a few thought his acting skills were good. However, no matter whether Wu's acting skills were good or average, they would watch Wu's movies. Informant 2 said that they were happy to have a place to see Wu and were not so concerned about the production and quality of the movies.

When asked if Kris Wu's character is like what they think Wu's personal image is, most informants said Wu's handsome image in movies is consistent with his physical superiority in real life.

"I think the similarity between him, and movie characters are limited to the appearance requirement." (Informant 5)

Two other informants thought Wu's image of longing for love in "Never Gone" was similar to his own. Interestingly, Informant 3, personal

communication, May 18, 2022 said that Wu's acting in movies would make her feel Wu's personal image more three-dimensional because of the overall story background. Informant 2 directly said that acting in movies would add to the image of the actor himself, which is why Kris Wu acted as a singer. Generally speaking, informants did not analyze Wu's role in movies in depth and paid general attention to these movies. They are more focused on Kris Wu himself.

## 2) Images in Music

When informants were asked what image Kris Wu presented in his music works, most informants said he had attitude, personality, courage to express himself and self-confidence. For example,

“I think it is self, personality-sufficient, and able to express himself bravely.” (Informant 9, personal communication, May 22, 2022)

The few remaining informants said they had not thought about it or thought Wu's overall image in music was vague.

Interestingly, when asked to give specific examples of Kris Wu's songs and their own analysis of song ideas, only two informants gave specific examples of songs, all of which were “Big Bowl Thick Noodles”. They felt that Wu had directly faced the ridicule of others through this song, which showed that Wu was a very courageous and tolerant person. At the same time, the song also conveyed the spirit of happiness and optimism, which showed that Wu was a sunny and positive person. In general, the informants have no deep understanding of Kris Wu's music works, but they think that his image in his music works is good.

### 4.2.1.4 Image in Criticism and Commentary

When asked if they had read online criticism and comments related to Kris Wu's films, half of the informants said they would check the comments, but they felt they were not objective enough or even biased.

“I think those comments are false, because they are all praising his acting skills, but I know his acting skills are not very good.” (Informant 1, personal communication, May 15, 2022)

Informant 10 said that most of the comments were not objective enough, because they were critical of him. She felt that most people criticize Wu just to hate him, and she thought that the public shouldn't be too harsh on non-professional actors. These informants felt that the comments, whether positive or negative, were not objective, so they said the comments didn't affect their opinion of Wu. Interestingly, the other half of the interviewees directly said that criticism and comments were subjective, so they didn't read others' comments.

When asked if they read online criticism and comments about Wu's music, most informants said they would check the comments, but they felt these words were not objective because they were mainly flattering or mocking Wu. The remaining minority of informants expressed the same views as criticism and commentary of the film, believing that these comments were too personal and subjective, so they did not check them.

In general, informants have a negative view of criticism and comments, and don't even read them. Those who read other people's criticism and comments felt that other people's views of Wu were false, and Wu was a passive and aggrieved image.

#### 4.2.2 Personal Image and Role Image of Kris Wu on Digital Media among Fans

In this study, Kris Wu's image was analyzed by asking informants about their views on four aspects of Kris Wu: promotion, publicity, work product, criticism and commentary. Kris Wu's image was analyzed in two ways, namely his personal image and his role image. The specific definitions of personal image and role images are given as follows.

Table 4.3: Personal image and Role image of Kris Wu on digital media among fans

Image of Kris Wu	Definition	Example of quote from fans who still support Kris Wu	Example of quote from fans who no longer support Kris Wu
Personal image	The personal image of a star formed by fans through four aspects: promotion, publicity, work product, criticism and commentary	As a fan, I admit that his acting skills are not very good, but I think every movie he made is improving. I think it is normal to be reported by the media, and what he does is very positive, such as playing basketball and driving racing cars to take risks. (Female, 22 years old)	I think he should be reported and praised at that time, because for example, if he likes basketball, he will enter the NBA (as a Chinese), he like to play rap, which really expands the influence of Chinese rap. Because his image and what he did at that time were quite positive. (Female, 24 years old)

(Continued)

Table 4.3 (Continued): Personal image and Role image of Kris Wu on digital media among fans

Image of Kris Wu	Definition	Example of quote from fans who still support Kris Wu	Example of quote from fans who no longer support Kris Wu
Role image	Fans form role images through the star's filmography	N/A	Then, with deep affection for the role, for example, he killed people for the hostess in "Sweet Sixteen". If this kind of person can stand it, the little girl will feel "Wow, so charming and handsome", and the added achievements of this role will be added to him. (Female, 23 years old)

#### 1) Personal Image

From the promotion, the researcher can know Kris Wu's personal image is superior appearance condition namely handsome, but also cold and sense of responsibility.

Kris Wu's personal image is lovely and contrast, which can be found from the variety shows in publicity. Informant 1 said that she felt that Wu contrasted with the image set by the company, and Wu was actually a bit cute. She cited Kris Wu's other name, Van Gogh Wu, but his painting skills were childish. Kris Wu's personal image is handsome, fashionable, and international, which can be found from his social

media accounts in publicity. However, informant's views on media reports in publicity are more based on the constructed star image, such as positive imagination and huge number of fans, so media reports are meaningless for the construction of Kris Wu's personal image. For example, Informant 6 said that it is very common for Wu to be reported by the media, because he has a huge number of fans, and he is a top star. Moreover, Wu loved basketball and car racing. Generally speaking, she thought Kris Wu's image was positive.

From the film works in work product, the researcher can know that Kris Wu's personal image is an image of ordinary acting skills, but hard work, study and continuous progress. From the music works in work product, the researcher can know that Kris Wu's personal image is full of personality, attitude and self-confidence.

In the part of criticism and commentary, the informants said that criticism and comment would not affect their cognition of Kris Wu's existing image, and even a few informants said they did not look at other people's criticism and comment on Kris Wu, so it can be seen that criticism and comment are meaningless in shaping Kris Wu's image in the eyes of fans.

To sum up the above, Kris Wu's personal image is handsome, cold, responsible, lovely, with contrast cute, fashionable, international, hard-working, positive, love sports, brave to take risks and constantly improving ability. The above descriptions of Kris Wu's personal image are good, even Kris Wu is a perfect person.

## 2) Role image

According to the answers of informants, the role image of Kris Wu's in his film works is analyzed as follows: handsome, charming and eager for love. "He is a handsome image in most of his works." (Informant 7, personal communication, May 21, 2022)



Most informants also said that the character image is very similar to Kris Wu's personal image.

“There are similarities, such as Cheng Zheng's desire for love in *Never Gone*.” (Informant 3, personal communication, May 18, 2022)

“I think there are some similarities. The characters in most of his works are still handsome. There is a role story bonus in movies, which will make me feel that he is more three-dimensional.” (Informant 9, personal communication, May 22, 2022)

Therefore, some informants said that the role image makes Kris Wu's personal image more three-dimensional, so they have a better impression on Kris Wu.

#### 4.2.3 Attitude and Behavior of Kris Wu's Fans

The specific definitions of fan attitudes and behaviors towards Wu in this study are given as follows.

Table 4.4: Attitude and behavior of Kris Wu's fans

Attitude and behavior of Kris Wu's fan	Definition	Example of quote from fans who still support Kris Wu	Example of quote from fans who no longer support Kris Wu
Attitude	Fans' emotions and feelings towards star	I am very sad and regret for him. I think it is not easy for him to become a top star. (Female, 21 years old)	At the beginning, it was shock. After shock, it was regret. Such a good person is to make himself like this, and there are so many people who like him. (Female, 30 years old)

(Continued)

Table 4.4 (Continued): Attitude and behavior of Kris Wu's fans

Attitude and behavior of Kris Wu's fan	Definition	Example of quote from fans who still support Kris Wu	Example of quote from fans who no longer support Kris Wu
Behavior	Star-related actions done by fans	I would collect things about him bit by bit, listen to his songs, buy his endorsements and surroundings, watch his movies, and capture every detail of him in some programs. I also specially prepared a small notebook to record his diary. (Female, 18 years old)	Movie booking, album buying, endorsement buying, birthday party concert and other scenes should be basically done by all idolize girls. There is no reason why I don't support his work products and go to the scene to see him. (Female, 24 years old)

#### 4.2.3.1 Fan's Attitude

When informants were asked about their first feelings about Kris Wu's alleged illegal activities, they said their attitude was disbelief and shock. Informant 9 said she didn't believe and was shocked because she thought Kris Wu was a very good person and could not do such a bad thing. Interestingly, Informant 2 said she didn't believe it because she thought the news was just gossip like Wu's previous news. According to the informants' answers, they never thought their favorite stars would break the law.

When informants were asked about their feelings or emotions after learning about Kris Wu's specific violations, those who were still fans of Wu expressed sadness and disappointment. Informant 6 said Wu had encouraged his fans to study and work hard and had been influencing them with his positive energy, so she was so disappointed with Wu. Informant 8 said that Kris Wu was a person who paid attention to public welfare activities, but his information was deleted by China Internet platforms because of this thing, which made her feel very sad. Interestingly, two of the informants who still liked Wu said they didn't believe that the female victims of the crime were innocent. Because they felt that Kris Wu was one of China's top stars at the time and had a lot of resources in entertainment industry, they felt that the female victims approached Wu for a purpose.

Responding to the above question, informants who are no longer Kris Wu's fans said their emotions were regret and shock. Informant 2 said that Kris Wu had become a top star in China at that time and had won a lot of honors and high status, but everything he had gained disappeared because of private life problems. She felt sorry for Kris Wu. Interestingly, Informant 4 said that she knew that Wu's private life was chaotic after Wu's first affair with a woman was revealed, but she was still shocked by Wu's illegal behavior due to his private life. When it comes to gossip, which affects the image of stars, the researchers found that many informants who are no longer Kris Wu's fans mentioned that they had known negative information about Wu's image. But none of them affected their continued liking for Kris Wu or their good image of Kris Wu.

Asked about their current feelings and emotions about Kris Wu, five informants who are still fans of Kris Wu said they liked and were hard to give up. Informant 7 said she would not support Wu on the surface, but she still liked Wu in her heart, because it was hard to give up her feelings at once. In addition, Informant 10 made it clear that she would not question the official announcement, but she had

liked Wu for many years and could not give up quickly. But she also said she did not know if she would change her current views and thoughts as time passed and she grown up. The five informants who are no longer fans of Kris Wu said that they had no emotional fluctuation to Wu's news, that is, they had no feelings for him, and they no longer liked him.

“I am indifferent to his news no matter it is good or bad now.”

(Informant 1, personal communication, May 15, 2022)

“I don't support him anyway, so it doesn't affect me anymore.”

(Informant 4, personal communication, May 19, 2022)

From the answers of the informants, it can be seen that because they no longer like Kris Wu, their emotions when they see his news are indifferent and will not be affected.

#### 4.2.3.2 Fan's Behavior

##### 1) Fan Behavior before Star Crime

When informants were asked what they had done about Kris Wu, they said they would inquire and read information about Kris Wu to get the latest news about him. Informant 2 said she used to open her Weibo on her computer every Friday when she came home from school and read all the posts about Wu in a week. She felt that nothing in the world could disturb her at this time. In addition, a small number of informants said they would send messages to Kris Wu's Weibo account through Weibo's private message function.

“I would send my happy and unhappy things to Kris Wu's Weibo account through private letters. At the beginning, I wanted him to see it. Later, I knew that celebrities don't usually manage their own Weibo accounts, but I still sent him private messages. In fact, at this time, I already regarded this channel as a tree hole to complain. Of course, I would also send some messages of encouragement and praise to him.” (Informant 9, personal communication, May 22, 2022)

Informants not only hope to be accompanied 24/7 by knowing Kris Wu's information all the time, but also hope to establish intimate relations through this way.

Most informants said they would support Kris Wu through consumption behavior, and the products they consume must be related to Kris Wu, such as Wu's music albums, Wu's endorsement products, buying tickets to watch Wu's movies, or even buying the same clothes or accessories as Wu wearing. When asked about the reasons for this consumption behavior, most informants said it was normal for fans to support their favorite stars through consumption behavior.

"I think it is very common for a star-chasing girl to support stars through consumption behavior, because fans of other stars will also support their favorite stars through consumption." (Informant 4, personal communication, May 19, 2022)

In fact, Informants hoped to make Wu's business data valuable through consumption behavior, thus taking Wu's career to a higher level.

"I definitely want to support Kris Wu, because I want him to become better, whether it is to buy products or movies, or to make his business data look better." (Informant 1, personal communication, May 15, 2022)

Informants want to express their love by supporting their favorite stars through consumption behavior. They hope that their favorite stars' careers will become better because of their support.

During the interview, some informants mentioned that they would forward the posts related to Kris Wu on Weibo, especially the posts sent by Kris Wu's own account would be forwarded, and then the star account data would be good. Informant 8 and 10, in addition to the above behaviors, would refute or even follow the goals of their fan group to control negative information on various digital media platforms, hoping to maintain Kris Wu's image through this behavior.

## 2) Fan Behavior after Star Crime

When informants who are still fans of Kris Wu were asked if they had done anything to continue supporting Kris Wu, three informants said they would post content related to Kris Wu on Weibo or Instagram, one said she would not post content on Weibo or Instagram but would comment on content posted by others, and one said she would not post or comment on digital platforms.

“I want to support him now, but I don't know how to do to support him. I still remember him in my heart. Sometimes I still post articles on Weibo to miss him, but because I am afraid of being ridiculed by others, my content is generally obscure. In fact, I feel that I am also missing my former self.” (Informant 6, personal communication, May 20, 2022)

“I will post posts about Kris Wu on Weibo and Instagram, and now the Chinese Internet has deleted everything about him. I think it is unfair to deny him and what he has done to spread Chinese culture because of one thing. And I don't think anyone can do it without making mistakes. It's really hard to stick to the original heart in the high-end entertainment industry.” (Informant 10, personal communication, May 22, 2022)

According to the informants who are still fans, they miss Kris Wu very much and find it difficult to accept that everything about him has been deleted from various digital platforms. Their hearts are full of contradictions. They are afraid of ridicule from other people, but they are also quietly sticking to their love.

When informants who are no longer fans of Kris Wu were asked if they had done anything to vent their dislike of him, four informants said they had not done anything and had accepted his violation of the law, while one said she had thrown away posters related to Kris Wu and changed the password.

“I didn't do anything. Because I don't pay much attention to him anymore, I'm old now, and I have a lot of other things to do myself.” (Informant 1, personal communication, May 15, 2022)

“Small details in my life, such as notebook records, will remind me that I once liked such a person, but I think my own values are very positive, so I don't like it now, but I still wish him well.” (Informant 3, personal communication, May 18, 2022)

Overall, the informants who are no longer fans did not make any back-stepping behavior, and even left good wishes for Kris Wu in their hearts.

#### 1) Gains from Star-chasing Behavior

When asked what they gained in the process of chasing stars, the informants answered in two aspects: personal psychology and friendship.

Most informants said that stars are a kind of spiritual sustenance and spiritual comfort. They would be happy to see Kris Wu's news or listen to his songs. They gained strength from his experiences and dreams to encourage themselves and admitted that the process of chasing stars was chasing their ideal self.

“I think chasing stars is psychological comfort. Because in the process of chasing him, I will understand some truth, I will put down a lot of troubles.” (Informant 3, personal communication, May 18, 2022)

Informant 3 even thought that the process of chasing stars was actually more a process of self-moving. That outstanding person would always live in her own spiritual world, and the longer Kris Wu stayed, the more she would rely on him.

“I had similar life experiences with Kris Wu. My parents divorced and were raised by the older generation. But Kris Wu later went to live abroad and became a trainee in Korea. I think Kris Wu is very strong, and he has also become a beam of light for me. He inspires me to be strong and move forward.” (Informant 9, personal communication, May 22, 2022)

According to the informants' answers, fans regard the star as their ideal self and find his advantages to motivate themselves.

In addition, most informants also said they met many other fans and became real life friends because of Kris Wu. They said they were very happy that they could talk any topic about Kris Wu at will in their fan base. Informant 1 said that after she joined the fan group, she could exchange the latest information about Wu with others or share her own praise for Wu. She was happy to talk about it. Another Informant 10 said that in addition to meeting a lot of friends, she also felt that her fan base was like a class, rushing forward together under the call of a goal. When Kris Wu's negative news appeared on the Internet, some people in her fan base would call for "washing the ground (it refers to getting fans to send and like positive comments)", so as to reduce the impact of negative events. For this behavior, she would feel a great sense of achievement and happiness. According to the answers of Informant 10, fans can not only feel happy because of communication in the fan group, but also feel successful and happy because of achieving the group goals or what they have done for the star.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, interviews were conducted with ten fans aged between 18 and 30, and then the interview data were collated and analyzed in terms of four aspects: promotion, publicity, work products, criticism and commentary, to analyze how the personal and role images of the celebrities were shaped by social media. In the analysis, it was found that Kris Wu's previous economic company promoted his personal image by positioning his personal image in advance.

Publicity was very important in shaping a star's image and expanding his popularity, mainly through variety shows, personal social media platforms and media coverage. Variety shows made fans feel that they have discovered the real persona of



a celebrity, making it easier to form a positive opinion of them. Personal social platforms showcased personal images and deepened the positioning of personal images. Media coverage was of little practical significance to fans. For Kris Wu's works, it was clear from the interviews that his fans had no in-depth knowledge of his works and were relatively more focused on entertainment. Through the analysis of the four aspects of the information it came out that fans had a good first impression to the later more likely to form a perfect personal image of the star. At the same time, although fans did not have a deep knowledge of his work, they were happy to look for improvements in different works and in the performance of the character, which added to the personal image of the star. In addition, fans did not pay attention to the criticism and comments of others. Therefore, so criticism and comments played a limited role in shaping the image of stars.

In response to Kris Wu's offense, fans had expressed disbelief and shock when they first saw it on digital media, followed by sadness and now unforgettable and unbelievable attitudes from fans who still like him, as they could not accept that someone who was once so perfect had committed an offense. The fans who no longer liked him had an attitude that ranged from disappointment to indifference, they were disappointed that he did not value his hard work and achievements, and secondly, they had a life full of other things in their lives, so they no longer felt anything for Kris Wu.

Fan behavior consisted of searching and reading to learn about celebrities, consumption behavior, maintenance behavior and retention behavior. Fans had a psychological need to know the latest news about celebrities, so they searched digital media, such as Weibo and Douban, to find out the latest news about celebrities. Fans felt that by supporting a star they should spend money for him, leading to their engagement in consumption behavior. Maintenance behavior was mainly when fans could not accept negative information about a celebrity, so they would counter the

negative information or leave positive messages under the appropriate words depending on the fan base target. The retention behavior was mainly for fans who still liked Kris Wu, they could not accept that the image they once had liked no longer existed at all on digital media, so they would insist on posting on digital media to prove that the love they once had still existed. As for the fans who no longer liked him, they also said that they would not act out because of their lack of loves. As for fans who no longer like Kris Wu, most also said that they would not act because they had no feelings. However, a few may be disappointed and chosen to throw away their own bought star-related products to vent their emotions.

Fans said that the process of following Kris Wu was mainly rewarded with personal psychological satisfaction and friendship. The researcher believed that there were two main motivations behind this: the self-identity and group identity that fans sought in the interactive rituals to achieve a sense of participation to gain pleasure.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

This chapter summarizes the descriptive findings and discussions, limitations of this study, and provides recommendations for future applications and research.

This chapter contains the following topics.

5.1 Summary of Findings

5.2 Discussion

5.3 Limitations

5.4 Recommendation for Further Application

5.5 Recommendation for Further Research

#### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

RQ#1: What is the image of Kris Wu among fans in digital media?

Margiotta (2012) modified Dyer's star model into four aspects: promotion, publicity, work product, and criticism and commentaries, but the researcher found that for the research object of this study, the importance of the four aspects in shaping the image showed obvious differences, and even criticism and commentaries had not been mentioned at all by their fans. For fans, Kris Wu's image on digital media was positive and perfect. The details are as follows:

In promotion, Korean agencies positioned individuals in advance in order to facilitate the promotion of idol groups, in order to promote the team and highlight individual characteristics. The company positioned the individual in advance through his appearance and ability, positioning Kris Wu as a facade because of his outstanding face and height and as Lengdunan because of his low speech and cool expression. In addition, the company also had advertised him as the captain of the Chinese team as a

way to reinforce his personal image, such as: responsibility and superb language skills.

In the star model, publicity was the most important for the image building of the star. Fans found a different image of a celebrity from the one they promoted through the real reactions of the celebrity on the variety show. As this image was observed and analyzed by the fans themselves, it was more real to them, which allowed them to identify with the image of the celebrity, and they were willing to invest more emotionally. Besides, by uploading content on Instagram and Weibo, Kris Wu had portrayed himself as stylish, international and handsome, further cementing the personal image his fans had previously formed. The image of a celebrity in media coverage could directly influence the audience's image identification and image judgement of the celebrity (Yan & Zhang, 2020). However, the informants in this study indicated that media coverage was existential in purpose and did not affect their identification and judgement of Kris Wu's image. In addition, informants also indicated that they were happy to see their favorite star covered by the media but did not increase their liking because of the media coverage. They appeared to perceive that the media covered their favorite celebrity because of the reputation he had achieved and his positive image. But at the same time, fans also said that media coverage would increase their internal affirmation of the positive image of their favorite celebrity.

With respect to work product, the images of Kris Wu were more based on the appearance of the film characters, and there was no in-depth analysis of the characters considering Kris Wu's works. When analyzing the image of the music product, the interviewees did not specifically analyze the idea of the music product, and the image they proposed for the music product was similar to the image presented by Kris Wu in terms of appearance. In addition, the image they proposed was not different from the image of most rappers (i.e., cool, with attitude and personality).

In criticism and commentary part, fans had a negative attitude towards the criticism and comments given by other professionals on Kris Wu's works and did not analyze and accept them. Therefore, for fans, criticism and commentaries had no significant role in shaping Kris Wu's image.

The analysis of Kris Wu's profile showed that fans formed a good first impression through his appearance, and then complemented his already good profile with other information to form a nearly perfect profile, even if there was some negative information or gossip news, but for fans, they could ignore these shortcomings and still retained the perfect image of the star. Once the first impression had been formed, subsequent information often played a complementary and explanatory role.

In analyzing Wu's role image, it was found that fans did not care much about how Kris Wu was portrayed in his roles, as they knew that Wu was not a professional actor. However, they were happy to look for proof that Wu's ability had improved because of his hardworking and progressive personal image. In addition, most of the roles he portrayed had a connection to his persona, and in the eyes of his fans, the characters in the film gave him a more three-dimensional image. Therefore, it could be summarized that Kris Wu had added to his image through his filmography and the characters he portrayed in his films.

RQ#2: What is the attitude of his fans towards him before and after his illegal behavior?

In this study, the attitude of the fans varied between disbelief, shock, disappointment, sadness, regret, unfeeling and unforgettable emotions. Disbelief and shock were mainly because fans never expected their favorite celebrities to behave in ways they never imagined. Regret was mainly for fans that used to be Kris Wu's fan. They felt that Kris Wu had let down so many of their fans who used to support him, and he had also let down his own efforts. Disappointment and sadness were found

mainly among fans, who still like Kris Wu. These fans felt that he was once positive and did a lot of good things, but now he was no longer available on digital media in mainland China. This was how informants' attitudes changed: the first thing fans usually feel was shocking, and then started to show attitudes in terms of regret, disappointment and sadness.

Nevertheless, in this study fans also showed attitudes in terms of indifference and unforgettability, which was an attitude not mentioned in other previous studies. The indifference was due to the fact that fans said that they were growing sensible and that their lives were full of other things, so when there was a sudden change in the image of the star, they were able to quickly regulate their emotions from eventual shock and regret to finally indifference, because at this point the star for them was just a means to spend their leisure time, and the change in the image of the star was just a small thing. For fans who found it hard to give up, celebrities occupied a large part of their lives and were their trust or ideal. Accordingly, when the image of a celebrity changed, they found it hard to give up and accept it overnight. This was not a simple choice for them. Besides, in this study, no informants expressed any anger or disgust, nor did they think back on Kris Wu, as they were open to the fact that they had liked or still liked a certain star, which was different from previous studies.

RQ#3: What is the behavior of his fans towards him before and after his illegal behavior?

Fans said that when they followed a star, they must have an all-day companionship no matter online or offline platform. As they had a need to know the latest information about their favorite star, each of them had a Weibo account. This was because in the era of fan economy, the first need of fans was to get information (Yan & Zhang, 2020). Fans supported their favorite stars through the act of consumption in order to pursue celebrity identities or in order to make stars better and better. Fans spent not necessarily because they needed the product, but because of the

star symbol that the product represented. Fan economy was based on emotion (Yang, 2011), which realized commercial behavior through fans' emotional investment in stars. As the functional attributes of the goods had been deflated at this point, and the symbolic meaning they were carried or pasted with becomes the motivation for fans to consume (Liu & Wan, 2018). Wang (2014) indicated that the deep indulgence inspired by fans' intrinsic interest in celebrity idols was the essence of the consumption behavior; consumption was an end in itself, and one more consumption was one more enjoyment. Fans will invest time and money in order to satisfy their intrinsic needs. Comparing the two types of fans interviewed those who still like Wu was more likely to exhibit maintenance behavior, they could not accept negative information about their favorite stars, and they would defend their favorite stars by refuting and controlling comments.

Li and Bu (2022) indicated that fans gave meaning to their actions and believed that because of their contribution they could have a good impact on the star's career. In addition, they were more prone to nostalgia. They could not accept that their favorite stars did not have any information on digital media, so they would insist on posting Kris Wu's related information on social media platforms. Fans can be classified as free digital labor for doing these voluntary acts, hoping to keep stars exposed. This was because the process of following a star could be seen not only as a collective act, but also understood as a series of behaviors that fans perform in order to maintain and develop their fan identity (Jacobson, 1979).

The motivation behind the analysis of fan behavior was two-fold: self-identification and group identification in interactive rituals. Freud (1992) introduced the term "projection" to refer to the psychological mechanism of finding one's own emotions, thoughts or expectations in others. And fans projected their own emotions, beliefs and values onto stars and gave meaning to the time, money and emotions they gave to stars, and finally regarded stars' success as their own. As some

informants said that Kris Wu was their spiritual support, they felt happy when they saw his handsome photos and listened to his music. It was a way for fans to fill and vent their inner emptiness and anxiety by chasing the star, which served as the equivalent of social entertainment, and in the process identify themselves as fans.

Fans focused on their idols in interactive rituals to gain emotional energy, to relieve the misery in their lives or to use it as a way to gain strength to move forward. From another perspective, fans projected their selves onto stars, looking for security or their own strengths to identify with them, gaining spiritual support, motivation and role models from stars (Zeng, 2020). All above could be described as pursuing their ideal celebrities to gain self-identity. Many of the informants in this study reported joining fan groups. By joining a fan group, fans could share their feelings about the stars to achieve emotional resonance and happiness. Joining a fan group was also a way for them to find their own community and gain a sense of belonging to it. At the same time, the responses and comments of others in the group also had an impact on their self-identity, i.e., they enhanced their identity through interaction. Fan culture as a subculture had a bias in the mainstream culture.

## **5.2 Discussion**

This study explored Kris Wu's personal and character image in terms of four textual aspects of Margiotta (2012) modified model of celebrity image: promotion, publicity, work product, and criticism and commentaries. Analyzing the informants' responses, for fans of stars like Kris Wu, the most important aspects are promotion and publicity, while work product is just a new way for them to see their favorite stars and to reinforce their inner personal image of the stars through their work product. Especially variety shows are very important in publicity. States that celebrities can show their personal qualities through their participation in the variety show. The public will get to know the celebrity better and will like the celebrity from the bottom



of their hearts. In addition, criticism and commentaries are meaningless to fans in terms of shaping the image of the celebrity, and they have negative attitudes towards others, especially criticism, and in response to criticism, fans appear to defend the celebrity. As the emotional energy of the fans tends to become deformed, they want the general public to evaluate their idols positively. To achieve this effect, fans will collectively use the idol's beautiful pictures, complimentary words and actual performance to control the criticism in order to create a good public opinion for their idols (Zhang, 2021).

Interactive ritual chain theory is a sociological theory of emotions that studies human behavior and the motivations behind it. Emotional energy is the core of the interactive ritual chain theory. Fans complete their ideal selves by projecting their ideals, emotions and qualities onto the star, seeing the star's success as their own, and completing their own self-identity in the interactive rituals, and if the star has not achieved a certain level of success in their career, fans will do their best to support the star's career. Fans will also complete their group identity by sharing emotions and information and expressing their ideas in the fan group, to gain a sense of belonging to the group identity.

Fans gain emotional energy through behaviors such as reading the latest information about the celebrity, consuming products related to the celebrity and defending him online as a free digital labor. However, when the image of the celebrity changed, informants in this study do not appear to back pedal, especially as there are some fans that still retain their love for him and appear to linger. For example, they will post some posts about Kris Wu on Weibo or Instagram to prove that the love they once had still exists, but they also confess that they do not know if they will still like him in the future as they grow up. In a word, they cannot stop liking him all of a sudden now and confess that there is ambivalence within them as well. On the contrary, fans who no longer like Kris Wu say that they are no longer focused on

liking a specific star, nor will they invest so much emotion and money as before.

Jenkins (1992) believes that fans are nomads who like to roam freely. Guo and Wei (2021) said that idolatry is dynamic and changeable in the current Internet era.

When the star's own behavior is different from the image, fans will feel that the star's behavior disappoints them, resulting in unfollowing the star no longer (Lin, 2019), or even a few fans turning into anti-fans. They vent their dissatisfaction with stars by attacking stars' professional ability, quality, or dedication (Feng, 2020). In this study, although some fans showed unfollowing behavior, none of them became anti-fans. Although they no longer like a specific star, the process of their frank star-chasing has brought positive effects on their own psychology and growth. This result is different from what was expected. The behavior of the star studied in this paper was very bad, so the author expected that most people in the unfollowing crowd would hate the star or even become his anti-fans. But this didn't happen, and they even thanked the star for bringing them joy. Although the study was designed to include current fans, it wasn't expected that their support after the star broke the law would be based on contempt for law and morality, or victim-blamed. Their view and analysis of the problem is slightly one-sided and extreme. Although more fans said that they were unable to accept their favorite star's illegal events for the time being and chose to continue to support the star, it also shows that the fan group needs to strengthen the awareness of morality and law. In addition, individuals should put morality and law in an important position.

To some extent, fan culture is a kind of interest culture. They gather because of their common interests to analyze, study, and share the textual content (songs, movies, etc.) of stars (Lin, 2019). But today, fan productivity is what makes them with attention. As the interviewees in this study mentioned, what fans share affected them more than the media. Fans' sharing and comments on the Internet are the productivity generated by fans participating in the process of chasing stars. All of

these increase the fans' sense of participation in the star's personal or career growth, which may attract more emotional or financial investment from fans. In fact, the sharing and communication between fans can be regarded as a kind of productivity, because it will have an impact on fans' emotions and thoughts, and then affect fans' feelings towards stars. In addition, the perception of a star by non-fan groups will also be affected by fan groups to a certain extent. Therefore, the star has the responsibility and must do a good job in the management and guidance of the fan group.

### **5.3 Limitations**

There are limitations to this study. At present, the interviewees who have been found and are willing to accept the interview are all women, and there are no male fans of Kris Wu. Therefore, lack of male informants is considered the first limitation. The second limitation lies in a possible confounding effect of informants' different life stage such that older fans no longer like Kris Wu as they focus more on their job whereas younger fans still like Kris Wu as they have more free time for themselves. Fans' different attitude and behavior can also be influenced by their different life stage, rather than by portrayal of star image via digital media alone. This study collects data through interviews, but there may be situations in which the interviewees may not necessarily express the truest thoughts and attitudes during the interviews, so the accuracy of the data may be a little insufficient.

### **5.4 Recommendation for Further Application**

This study found that fans of the star were easy to form a perfect personal image. In the age of digital media, fans see fragmented star information, so the perfect image is more based on their own imagination or projection of their ideal self. Stars are easy to become a role model to someone and further influence the values of a group. Therefore, the entertainment industry should pay attention to improving the

moral quality of its employees and even formulate corresponding laws and regulations to standardize the industry.

Secondly, the whole industry should pay attention to the quality of works, not to the number of fans of a certain star and should use the quality of works and professional ability to determine its position and status in the industry. Besides, the stars of showbiz should be treated as mere participants working in the industry. As a worker, the assessment of work results must be based on the quality of performance, not on the practitioner's appearance or number of fans.

According to the interview, social media and video software are the most used digital platforms for fans, but some social media, such as Weibo, carry more public affairs functions (Cui, 2021). Social media should reasonably plan platforms and change the principle of giving priority to interests.

The media should bear the responsibility of communication and emphasize the one-sidedness of the star image, especially when a certain star appears in negative news, media should not hide the previous positive report on him. Instead, media should admit the negative and positive image of his former image, and at the same time form a contrast with his current mistakes, so that fans and other non-fan groups understand the one-sidedness of the star image on the screen. Encouraging individuals to maintain critical thinking to look at things is also suggested.

### **5.5 Recommendation for Further Research**

Based on limitations of the study discussed above, it is suggested that future researchers can study the attitude and behavior of fan groups according to age or gender and explore whether there are differences in the emphasis of star image building and the attitude and behavior of fans among different age groups or different gender groups. In addition, this study adopts qualitative research methods, and it is suggested that future research can use quantitative research methods to study the

shaping of star image and the attitude and behavior of fans. Besides, this study just focuses on one star-Kris Wu in China, which is difficult to be the standard to prove other stars' image. Thus, future research can extend the findings to other stars or the stars in other countries.



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**APPENDIX**

## Interview Guide

Portrayal of Star Image via Digital Media and Its Impact on Fans' Attitude and Behavior : A Case of Chinese Star - Kris Wu

Interview and transcribing period: 15 May - 15 June 2022

Interview duration: Approximately half an hour

### Research Objectives:

To understand the image of Kris Wu in digital media among his fans and how it affects fans' attitude and behavior, as well as to explore the reasons why his fans support for him.

### Informants' Characteristics

- 1) 10 interviewees who must be or have been fans of Kris Wu. They were born and lived in China.
- 2) The interviewees are used to obtaining information through digital media channels such as social media and video platforms.

\*Note: Among 10 informants, aged 18-30.

### Recruitment Process

- 1) The researcher will publish an article which clearly states the age requirements of the informants on social media platforms, which sincerely invites fans of Kris Wu to participate in the interview. Then the researchers invited qualified informants for interviews. If this approach is ineffective, the researcher will take the initiative to contact fans in Kris Wu on the social media platforms and adopt snowballing method which is that the previous interviewee will recommend the next

qualified interviewee. The process will follow this technique until reaching 10 informants.

2) Informants must be fans who liked Kris Wu before he broke the law and continue to like or no longer like him after he broke the law. If a potential informant does not meet these criteria, please thank him or her before proceeding to the next interview. Informants who do not meet the conditions will not receive any compensation.

Interviewers' Note:

1) The main questions (always preceded by a number) will discover the informants' opinions, which are a guide to you and sometimes come with indications of further questions.

2) Sub-questions (in dashes) are sometimes listed below a main question. The sub-questions help an interviewer learn more about informants' opinions and thoughts towards the main questions. It is not mandatory to discuss all the sub-questions, but please try to ask the informants as many as possible.

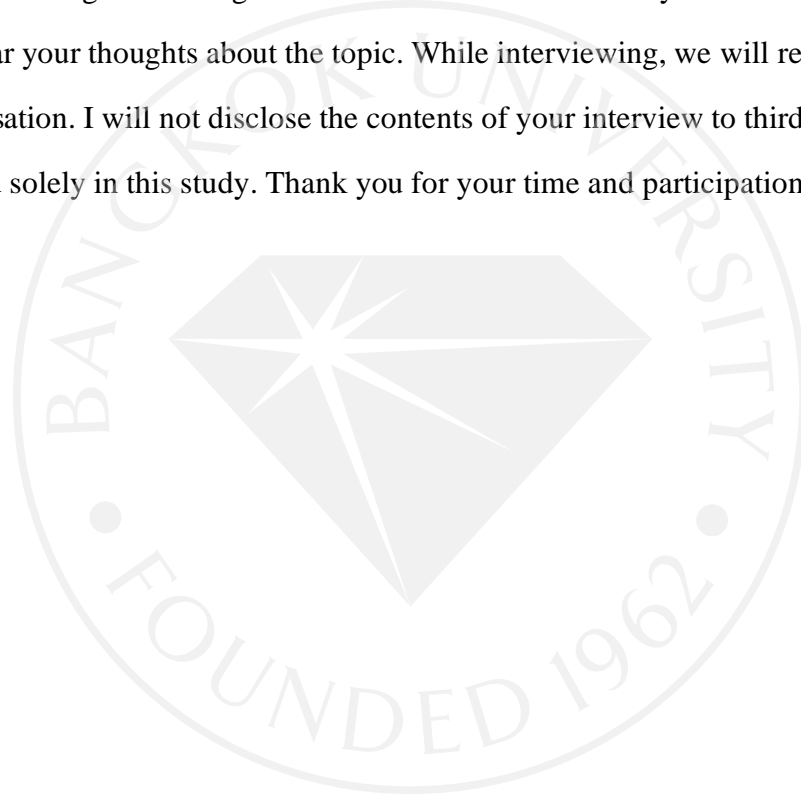
3) Ideally, the questions should be asked in the order they are presented here, but if it does not happen (e.g., another issue is raised before), it is still imperative that all the main questions and topics that appear here are covered in the interview.

4) Please review this set of interview questions in advance and see if you can get used to the questions in order to make sure that you will not miss any questions during the interviews.

Before Starting the Interview

Please tell the informants the followings: 'In this interview, I will discuss Kris Wu and summarize his image from four aspects: publicity, promotion, work products, criticality and comments. At the same time, I would also like to ask you

about your past or present attitude towards him and some behaviors you have done for him. I would like you to share with me your opinions, attitudes and behaviors with me when you got the information about Kris Wu on digital media in the past. Please openly share your thoughts and feelings. All the information that you provide will not be showed to other participants, and it will be kept absolutely anonymous. Please be as open and honest as you can when answering the questions, and keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. We would like to really understand your opinion and hear your thoughts about the topic. While interviewing, we will record our conversation. I will not disclose the contents of your interview to third parties. It will be used solely in this study. Thank you for your time and participation’.



### **Checklist of Depth-Interview**

Date of interview:

Name of informant:

Age:

Gender:

Education:

The favorite digital media platform (one or above):

Interview location:

#### **A. Focusing on the Image**

This section aims to ask Kris Wu's fans about their thoughts and opinions on his publicity, promotion, work products, criticism and comments on digital media.

It also aims to summarize Kris Wu's personal image and role image among fans through the thoughts and opinions of fans.

1) How did you know Kris Wu for the first time? What was your first impression of him?

2) What do you think of SM Entertainment's position on him when he made his debut in the early days?

- How did you get this information?

- What do you think of his role in the team?

3) How do you think he was reported by Chinese official media? In addition, he is often reported and praised by other media in the past, what do you think about that?

- Do you think the media coverage will increase your love for him?

4) What do you think of his film (Somewhere Only We Know, Never Gone, Sweet Sixteen, Journey to the West: The Demons Strike Back, Mr. Six) roles? What do you think of him?

- Do you think the role image is related to his own personal image? If so, can you give an example?

- Have you seen professional comments on his acting skills?

- What do you think of the professional comments on him?

- Do you think his role in the film will increase your love for him?

5. He has his own social media such as Weibo and Instagram. What do you think of his image on these own accounts?

6. What do you think of his music?

- Do you think his music works express his own thoughts?

- What image do you think he is in his music?

- Have you seen the comments of professional musicians on his music and what do you think of the contents of the comments?

7. What kind of person do you think he is after the official announcement that he is suspected of breaking the law?

- What do you think of his current image? Is it consistent with or far from what you once thought of him?

- What do you think is the most important component of star image?

8. What do you think of the relationship between stars and law and morality?

## **B. Focusing on Fans' Attitudes and Behaviors**

1) This section aims to understand the informants' attitudes and behaviors towards Kris Wu before and after breaking the law.



2) If you are interviewing an informant who has always liked him, please ask him / her questions in section B.1 and B.2. If you are interviewing an informant who no longer likes him, please ask him / her questions in section B.1 and B.3.

3) It also aims to explore the deep-seated motivation of fans through the reasons behind their attitudes and behaviors.

#### B.1 General Questions

9. When did you start to like him?

10. What do you think you have gained in the process of liking and supporting him (psychology, friendship, etc.)? Please give me some examples.

11. What have you done to support him (buy products endorsed by him; buy music album, etc.)?

Can you give me some examples and the specific reasons for each example?

12. What was your first reaction when you knew he was suspected of breaking the law?

- What is your attitude at this time?

- What is your attitude currently?

#### B.2 Focusing on the group who is still Kris WU fan

13. What is your attitude after making it clear that he is suspected of breaking the law?

- Based on your attitude, what did you do to protect him at that time?

14. What actions have you done to continue to support him? Please give me some examples.

- Have you encountered any difficulties in this process? And how to overcome it?

- In the process, what do you think you have gained (psychology, friendship, etc.)?

### B.3 Focusing on the group who is no longer Kris Wu fan

15. What is your attitude after making it clear that he is suspected of breaking the law?

- Based on your attitude, what did you do to abandon him?

16. Have you done anything to vent your dissatisfaction with him? Please give me some examples.

- What do you think you have gained?

17. Will Kris Wu's illegal incident affect you to like other stars in the future?

- If so, can you tell me why?

#### **After the Interview**

1. Asking whether the participant wants to add something. If not, thank the informant for his/her cooperation.

2. Please make sure that all participants complete a personal values questionnaire.

3. The interviewees must sign the participation form.

4. Please make a short summary of each interview. It could be a one-page note in English about what main insights we get from an interview (see an example in Appendix A). In addition, please also summary the duration of the interview, the collaboration of the participant, and whether he/she understands the meaning of interview questions.

5. You are also responsible for transcribing the interviews from audio files to text files. For the interviews that are conducted in Chinese, the transcripts of the interviews have to be in English.

6. Please try to finish transcribing (and translating) by June 15, 2022.

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