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The Realization Path of Sustained Value Conversion for County-level Sports Events amid Viral Mass Sports Trends

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of Chinese modernization and the national fitness strategy, county-level mass sports events have gone viral via new media, acting as critical vehicles for urban-rural integration, rural industrial growth and residents' cultural enrichment. However, most such events only attract temporary online attention and suffer from short-sighted value conversion and fragile operational frameworks. This paper employs literature review and multi-case comparative analysis, selecting three representative events: Rongjiang Village Football League, Lanling Village Basketball League and Pidu Rural Sports Tournament. Three distinct development models are summarized, alongside three core bottlenecks: misalignment between viral influence and local developmental needs, fragmented empowerment frameworks, and inadequate multi-stakeholder collaboration. This study innovatively establishes a three-tier operational framework covering graded viral influence assessment, targeted value matching and dynamically adaptive long-term governance. Corresponding strategies regarding differentiated promotion, collaborative management and integrated industrial-livelihood empowerment are put forward. The findings offer theoretical support and practical guidelines to help county sports events escape fleeting traffic traps and realize balanced, sustainable progress in social, industrial and people's welfare value.

1. Introduction

Guided by the theory of Chinese modernization, high-quality sports development constitutes an indispensable component of the construction of Chinese modernization. As pointed out in existing academic research, mass sports events serve the core carrier of public sports services, acting as a crucial starting point for building a strong sports nation, optimizing social governance and revitalizing regional culture [10,12]. As the critical link connecting cities and villages, county-level mass sports events feature down-to-earth operation and low participation thresholds, which have broken

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geographical and demographic boundaries in recent years and become an important driving force for activating county vitality and enriching residents' daily lives.

Existing studies mostly focus on the governance of regional and large-scale mass sports events. Previous scholars have discussed collaborative governance and general development predicaments of mass sports [7,2]. However, few researches systematically explore the long-term mechanism of value transformation after county sports events go viral, lacking empirical analysis centering on the complete chain of "viral popularity – value transformation – long-term empowerment" with concrete local cases. Based on county-level practical realities, this paper draws on typical event cases to address the challenge of sustaining value after online fame, and puts forward operable mechanism construction routes to support the high-quality and sustainable development of county mass sports events.

The innovation of this research lies in breaking the traditional research framework of "governance dilemma – path optimization". It proposes the core logic of "grading county event viral momentum – targeted matching of value transformation – dynamically adaptive long-term mechanism", which integrates the traffic advantages of viral events with local county development demands and avoids empty theoretical discussions detached from grassroots realities, realizing dual breakthroughs in research perspective and practical approaches.

2. Case Analysis of Viral Popularity and Value Transformation of County Mass Sports Events

This paper selects three county mass sports events located in eastern, central and western China with distinct development models as research cases, namely Rongjiang Village Football League in Rongjiang County, Guizhou Province, Lanling Village Basketball League in Lanling County, Shandong Province and Pidu Rural Sports Tournament in Pidu District, Chengdu City. The three cases cover different regional economic levels and development logics, possessing strong representativeness and comparability [9]. Detailed analysis is presented as follows:

2.1 Case 1: Rongjiang Village Football League (Viral Popularity Type)

Rongjiang County is an underdeveloped western county in southeastern Guizhou with profound grassroots football culture. The village football league has risen to national fame since 2023, realizing a qualitative leap from local grassroots activity to a nationwide trending sports event. Its core development model is "spontaneous mass participation + new media communication", differing from government-dominated traditional tournaments. Driven by authentic rural sports atmosphere, the event accumulates massive online traffic, consistent with the research conclusion that outdoor sports in Guizhou rely on local culture and internet dissemination to gain exposure [13,17].

In terms of practical operation, participants of the league mainly consist of local villagers and returning young people, with low participation barriers, conforming to the definition of mass sports events that voluntary public participation and fitness entertainment are core attributes. After gaining nationwide popularity, the event rapidly boosted the local cultural tourism industry and pushed authorities to construct multiple standard football pitches, popularizing fitness awareness among residents and realizing preliminary value output.

Nevertheless, the event suffers from disconnection between online traffic and long-term industrial value. First, it lacks a sustainable long-term operation system, relying temporarily on government subsidies and social donations without mature market-oriented operation models, which aligns with the common operational dilemma of mass sports events summarized in prior research [7]. Second, industrial integration remains superficial. The event only drives short-term

tourism consumption without in-depth linkage with local agriculture and ethnic folk culture, failing to form a circular industrial system. Third, systematic brand cultivation is absent. Authorities only pursue short-term online exposure without long-term IP planning, creating risks of fading public attention and declining industrial benefits.

2.2 Case 2: Lanling Village Basketball League

Lanling County is an inland agricultural county in southern Shandong with solid agricultural foundations and a strong grassroots sports atmosphere. Distinct from the overnight popularity of Rongjiang Village Football League, Lanling Village Basketball League adopts a steady, long-term development model. Rooted in local agricultural industries, it integrates tournament development with industrial and public wellbeing demands and rejects utilitarian pursuit of online heat, matching the social governance orientation of mass sports under the national fitness strategy [15,16].

The league demonstrates obvious long-term development characteristics. Since its launch in 2022, regular regular-season and post-season matches have been scheduled annually, covering villagers, enterprise employees and returning youth to achieve full-scale public participation. It innovates the "sports event + agricultural product" linkage mode. During matches, local garlic and organic vegetables are displayed and promoted through live streaming, realizing deep integration between tournament value and county industries and fulfilling the logic of sports empowering rural industries [12]. In addition, the county government builds numerous standard basketball courts and village sports teams, organizing regular fitness training to enrich residents' spiritual life and link sports events with grassroots livelihood demands.

The primary limitation of this event lies in insufficient national exposure. Its influence is mostly confined within Shandong Province without nationwide traffic momentum. The tournament still relies on government guidance and corporate sponsorship, lacking effective channels to mobilize residents to participate in operational planning, failing to establish the multi-stakeholder collaborative governance framework proposed by relevant studies [14]. Furthermore, match formats are relatively conventional, unable to adapt to the diversified sports consumption demands of contemporary residents and restricting the expansion of its influence.

2.3 Case 3: Pidū Rural Sports Tournament (Progressive Cultivation Type)

Located in the western developed suburban area of Chengdu, Pidū District boasts superior geographical and economic conditions. Its rural sports tournament adopts a gradual cultivation strategy without blind pursuit of online explosion. Combined with rural revitalization and local folk customs including Shu embroidery and Pixian bean paste culture, the event prioritizes standardized operation and long-term value cultivation to avoid short-term traffic utilitarianism.

The tournament features clear positioning and progressive development. It establishes a preliminary collaborative framework led by the government, operated by market entities and participated by residents, echoing the multi-stakeholder governance ideology [2,14]. While integrating local folk customs into event arrangements, it gradually drives rural tourism growth, incubates local sports operation enterprises and improves grassroots sports infrastructure, realizing preliminary transformation from online exposure to comprehensive regional value, and fulfills the mission of sports revitalizing local culture [12].

However, the tournament still faces prominent restrictions. Its innovation in communication and event design is inadequate, failing to build unique event IPs to accumulate sustained traffic. The integration of sports with agriculture, tourism and people's livelihood is shallow, without forming a

self-reinforcing industrial cycle. Besides, ambiguous government roles lead to excessive administrative intervention in market operation and inadequate supervision in volunteer management, consistent with previous research on government positioning in mass sports events [1], dampening the enthusiasm of market entities and residents.

3. Core Dilemmas of Value Transformation After Viral Popularity of County Mass Sports Events

Based on comparative analysis of the three cases and existing research findings [2,7], the value transformation of county mass sports events is restricted by three interrelated systematic dilemmas that hinder sustainable high-quality development.

First, viral momentum is mismatched with county development demands. Most county sports events gain popularity passively without pre-planning aligned with local industries and people's livelihoods. Rongjiang Village Football League achieves sudden fame without supporting industrial layout, resulting in transient tourism consumption. Lanling Village Basketball League fits local agricultural demands yet lacks national communication strategies, limiting its radiation range. Existing literature mostly discusses event communication rather than matching traffic with regional practical needs, leaving this contradiction underexplored [6].

Second, fragmented long-term empowerment systems lack dynamic adaptability. Current county events only realize single-dimensional value output: Rongjiang focuses on tourism, Lanling emphasizes agriculture, Pidu prioritizes cultural tourism. No integrated "operation – industry – livelihood" system has been constructed. Mechanisms are seldom adjusted alongside industrial changes or shifts in residents' demands, and many counties copy governance models from other regions without localization, creating disconnection between institutional design and grassroots reality [5].

Third, insufficient coordination among multiple stakeholders restricts endogenous driving forces. Most events are dominated by governments with limited market participation, and residents are merely spectators excluded from operational planning. Meanwhile, systematic training for event operators and volunteers is missing, inconsistent with the standards of volunteer long-term management systems [5], leading to non-standard tournament operation and weak sustainable development capacity.

4. Construction of Long-term Mechanism for Value Transformation of Viral County Mass Sports Events

Targeting the above dilemmas and drawing on collaborative governance theories [2,14], this research constructs a three-in-one long-term system featuring "viral momentum grading – targeted value matching – dynamically adaptive long-term mechanism", centering on targeted publicity, multi-stakeholder coordination and dynamic empowerment.

4.1 Construct Targeted Viral Guidance Mechanism to Match Traffic and Local Demands

Avoid blind pursuit of online heat and formulate differentiated publicity strategies based on county resource endowments. Underdeveloped counties such as Rongjiang prioritize cultural tourism development driven by online traffic; agricultural counties like Lanling focus on building event IPs to boost local agricultural sales; developed suburban districts such as Pidu integrate sports with cultural tourism and wellness industries. Diverse communication content highlighting local ethnic customs, farming characteristics and folk culture shall be created to realize dual brand promotion of events

and counties [8]. A regular momentum evaluation system shall be set up to adjust communication strategies timely according to industrial and livelihood changes.

4.2 Establish Multi-stakeholder Collaborative Operation Mechanism to Foster Endogenous Impetus

Adhere to the multi-stakeholder collaborative governance framework [3,14] and clarify the division of responsibilities among different participants. The government acts as guide and supervisor to release supportive policies, improve sports infrastructure and standardize tournament management without over-intervening market operation [1]. Market entities undertake event branding and industrial linkage through commercial cooperation and IP development to secure stable operational funds. Residents are encouraged to join tournament organization, judging and publicity to strengthen subject awareness. Complete training and incentive systems for local operators and volunteers shall be established [4,6], while diversified funding channels including government subsidies, corporate sponsorship and public donations are integrated to eliminate single financial reliance [18].

4.3 Improve Dynamically Adaptive Empowerment Mechanism for Sustained Value Output

Adopt the integrated logic of "operation – industry – livelihood". In industrial empowerment, deepen event-industry integration models tailored to local resources: Lanling strengthens sports-agricultural linkage, Rongjiang develops football-culture-tourism routes, and Pidun integrates tournaments with wellness tourism to form mutually reinforcing industrial cycles and resolve insufficient value conversion [7,11]. In terms of people's livelihood, governments shall complete full coverage of village sports venues, organize regular fitness training and prioritize local residents and returning youth for event-related jobs to boost household income. A dynamic revision mechanism shall be implemented to optimize institutional arrangements in response to different development stages of events and evolving public demands, ensuring long-term value release.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Through literature review and comparative case study, this research concludes that viral county mass sports events represent a grassroots practice of Chinese modernization, capable of boosting industrial upgrading, cultural inheritance and residents' wellbeing. Nevertheless, three core bottlenecks exist: disconnection between viral momentum and local demands, fragmented empowerment systems and inadequate multi-stakeholder coordination, among which demand-mismatch is the primary restrictive factor. The three-in-one long-term mechanism proposed in this study can effectively convert transient online traffic into sustained regional value, conforming to the people-centered philosophy and national fitness strategy [15], and providing feasible practical approaches for the sustainable development of county mass sports events.

5.2 Recommendations

First, carry out targeted viral publicity based on local realities. Counties shall formulate event development routes matching agricultural, cultural and tourism resources to avoid blind imitation of internet-famous tournaments and realize mutual promotion between event exposure and county

development. Innovative communication carriers shall be adopted to explore local cultural characteristics and expand event influence.

Second, strengthen multi-stakeholder coordination to cultivate endogenous development momentum. Establish integrated governance systems involving government, market, residents and social organizations with clear power boundaries. Train professional operators and volunteer teams, and diversify funding sources to transform event operation from government monopoly to multi-party co-governance.

Third, build dynamically adjusted empowerment systems. Deepen the integrated "sports +" industrial model, promote the fusion of tournaments with agriculture, culture and people's livelihood, and revise institutional arrangements regularly to maintain sustained value output and advance the high-quality development of county mass sports events.

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