

# From "Traffic" to "Retention": The Cultural Logic and Practical Reflection on the Sustainable Development of Rural Sports Event IP Driven by Digital Technology

-- A Case Study of Zhaoqing City

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## ABSTRACT

Driven by the dual forces of digital technology and the Rural Revitalization strategy, rural sports event IPs (Intellectual Property), represented by the "Village Super League" ("Cun Chao") and "Village BA" ("Cun BA"), have risen meteorically, creating a phenomenon-level "traffic" miracle. However, a profound inherent contradiction exists between the transience and perishability of "traffic" and the "retention" (user retention, cultural retention, value retention) required for the sustainable development of IP. Based on a "traffic-retention" analytical framework, this paper adopts a qualitative research method, taking Zhaoqing City, Guangdong Province (which possesses deep-rooted local sports traditions such as dragon boat racing and martial arts) as a practical observation field, to conduct an in-depth exploration of the sustainable development logic for rural sports event IP driven by digital technology. The study argues that the currently prevalent "traffic logic"—a path that is technology-oriented, spectacle-driven, and focused on short-term monetization—can easily lead to the IP's cultural "performancization," community "marginalization," and value "alienation." This paper proposes that the fundamental shift from "traffic" to "retention" hinges on reshaping the "cultural logic." The core of this "retention logic" is: shifting from technology worship to cultural self-awareness, from spectacle construction to community embeddedness, and from unilateral output to value co-creation. Digital technology should not be viewed merely as a "traffic-driving" tool but must be strategically employed as a "retention" tool for "cultural empowerment," "community connection," and "value precipitation." Based on reflections from the practice in Zhaoqing, this study proposes sustainable development paths, such as transcending "festival-style" thinking, reshaping the "community-led operation" model, and constructing a "value symbiosis" ecosystem. This research aims to provide theoretical guidance and practical reflection for rural sports IP to avoid the "internet fame trap" and achieve long-term development.

## KEYWORDS

Rural Sports; Sports IP; Digital Technology; Traffic; Retention; Sustainable Development; Cultural Logic; Zhaoqing

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## (I) Research Background: The "Traffic" Miracle and "Retention" Anxiety

Since 2023, the development of rural sports in China has shown unprecedented explosive power. Local sports events, represented by Guizhou Rongjiang's "Village Super League" and Taijiang's "Village BA," have rapidly broken through social circles and become nationwide "phenomenon-level" cultural events, aided by the instantaneous, visual, and highly interactive communication of digital media such as short videos and live streaming. These events have not only activated dormant local resources but also demonstrated immense potential as a new type of sports IP, providing a "sports solution" and "cultural model" for rural revitalization [1].

Digital technology has played a crucial "amplifier" and "accelerator" role in this process. It has enabled grassroots events "hidden in the deep mountains" to gain billion-level exposure "overnight," creating a "traffic" miracle unimaginable in traditional models [2]. However, accompanying this "traffic" carnival is a profound "retention" anxiety.

## (II) Problem Statement: The Sustainable Development Dilemma from "Traffic" to "Retention"

"Traffic," in the context of the digital economy, refers to the access volume, attention, and click-through rates of online platforms. It is characterized by high perishability, volatility, and profit-seeking. "Retention," in contrast, points to the long-term vitality of an IP, manifested as sustained user stickiness, stable community participation, and the continuous precipitation of cultural value.

The core dilemma currently facing the IP-ization of rural sports is precisely the misalignment and fracture between "traffic" and "retention":

The "Internet Fame Curse": "Traffic" attracted by algorithms and "spectacle" effects can easily dissipate rapidly due to aesthetic fatigue or the emergence of new hotspots. Will rural sports IP repeat the "flash in the pan" fate of countless "internet-famous" check-in spots?

The "Short-term Monetization" Temptation: Immense "traffic" brings a strong impulse for commercial monetization. Local governments, platforms, and capital, eager to "harvest" dividends, may lead to excessive commercialization and homogenized development, thereby "overdrawing" the IP's cultural foundation [3].

The "Fading Away" Concern: When the external "traffic" (tourists, media) recedes, can the IP truly "remain" in the locality and bring sustained well-being to the rural community? Or will it only leave behind a mess and a "suspended" daily life?

Therefore, the core issue of this study is: How can rural sports event IP achieve a fundamental shift from "traffic" to "retention"? What are the internal obstacles to this shift? And what is the sustainable development logic for its realization?

## (III) Research Field and Methodology

This paper selects Zhaoqing City, Guangdong Province, as the observation field for practical reflection. As a major center of Lingnan culture, Zhaoqing's rural sports resources are highly representative: on one hand, it possesses quasi-IP forms with a strong mass base and immense "spectacle" potential, such as "dragon boat racing"; on the other hand, it has deeply rooted "local-based" traditional martial arts cultures like Choy Li Fut and Wing Chun. These resources possess both the potential for "traffic" explosion and the value for "retention" cultivation. However, their IP-ization and digitization processes are relatively lagging, providing an excellent "forward-looking" case for us to reflect on the "traffic-retention" problem.

This study strictly adheres to a "non-quantitative, no charts" qualitative research paradigm, employing a method that combines theoretical speculation with case reflection. This paper does not aim to provide an empirical summary of a "Zhaoqing model." Instead, it uses Zhaoqing as a "mirror" to

deeply analyze the fallacies of "traffic logic," systematically construct the cultural core of "retention logic," and conduct a critical reflection and reconstruction of the role of digital technology in this transformation.

## **2. THE FALLACY OF "TRAFFIC LOGIC": SHORT-TERM EFFECTS AND ALIENATION RISKS OF RURAL SPORTS IP DRIVEN BY DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY**

"Traffic logic" is an operational mindset centered on digital platform algorithms, with the primary goal of maximizing exposure, attention, and topicality in the short term. When this logic dominates the digitization process of rural sports IP, it can easily trigger a series of alienation risks.

### **(I) The Generation of "Traffic": Rural Sports as "Digital Spectacle"**

Digital technology, especially short video and live-streaming platforms, possesses a natural "spectacle-manufacturing" attribute. They tend to filter and amplify content that is most visually impactful, emotionally evocative, novel, and conflicting [7]. The reason rural sports can "explode" in popularity lies precisely in the "contrastive charm" formed by their "authenticity," "grassroots nature," and modern urban civilization. This makes them easily captured by algorithms and shaped into a "digital spectacle":

**Spectacular Presentation:** Such as the elaborately dressed villagers and cheerleaders in the "Village Super League," or the fiery scenes and rudimentary facilities of the "Village BA." These elements are highlighted and magnified by camera close-ups and editing, composing "original ecological" spectacles that satisfy the romanticized imagination of urban populations regarding "rural China."

**Emotional Resonance:** The pure passion, simple joy, and intense competition displayed in the events strike a chord with people through live streaming and short videos, becoming an emotional "release valve" for the fast-paced, high-pressure modern society, thus rapidly triggering viral communication.

### **(II) The Traps and Alienation of "Traffic Logic"**

However, when the value of an IP is narrowed down to "traffic" data, its development falls into the trap of the "society of the spectacle" [7].

**Cultural "Performancization":** The core of "traffic logic" is "being watched." To continuously obtain the value of "being watched" (i.e., traffic), the IP operators (be it the government or the villagers) will develop an unconscious catering. They will begin to "perform" a "rurality" and "authenticity" that is expected by the external gaze. Culture alienates from a "natural" life practice into a "conscious" landscape performance [4]. For example, authentic folk rituals may be "directed" to be more "watchable," and traditional competition rules may be modified for "dramatic conflict." This "performative" authenticity, once seen through, will cause the IP's foundation to collapse.

**Subject "Marginalization":** In the "traffic" carnival, the real "protagonists" are often not the villagers as cultural subjects, but the platforms, algorithms, internet celebrities, and swarming tourists. Villagers may be reduced from masters of the IP to "background props" for the "spectacle," "actors" in the "performance," or providers of cheap services. The "enabling" [3] brought by digital technology may alienate into "digital exploitation." The value-added benefits of the IP are captured by the controllers of "traffic" (platforms, MCN agencies, capital), while the originators and inheritors of the culture fail to receive commensurate returns.

**Value "Homogenization":** A "traffic" orientation inevitably leads to the imitation of "blockbusters." When one "Village Super League" becomes popular, countless "Village X" events will spring up everywhere. This homogenized replication not only rapidly dilutes the uniqueness of the IP but also traps the development of rural sports IP in a cycle of "involution" and "ephemeral existence," its deep regional cultural value being obscured by the superficial "internet-famous" label.

### 3. THE SHIFT TO "RETENTION LOGIC": THE CULTURAL CORE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR RURAL SPORTS IP

Achieving the shift from "traffic" to "retention" is, in essence, a shift from an "attention economy" to an "identity economy" and a "belonging economy." "Traffic" is the brief pause of "eyeballs," while "retention" is the long-term belonging of "hearts and minds." This shift cannot be achieved through technological iteration or marketing techniques; it must return to the IP's cultural core.

#### (I) The Essence of "Retention": "Strong Connections" Based on Cultural Identity

"Retention" is not "data that is retained" but "people who actively stay." It signifies that the IP has established a "strong connection" with its users (including local villagers and external audiences) that transcends the "watch-be watched" relationship. The construction of this "strong connection" relies on the following three cultural-logical pillars:

##### Cultural Authenticity:

This is the anchor for "retention." In an era of high homogenization and "spectaclization," "authenticity" is the scarcest resource. The "authenticity" of rural sports IP lies not in its "rudimentary" or "rustic" nature, but in its "irreplaceability," deeply rooted in the specific local society, historical context, and lifestyle. It is a "living" cultural practice, a natural expression of the villagers' collective memory and emotions [5]. The "retention" value of Zhaoqing's dragon boat culture, for instance, lies not in winning or losing the race, but in the series of cultural practices closely linked to the local land, beliefs, and community structure, such as the "dragon awakening," "eye-dotting" ceremonies, clan coordination, and the post-race "dragon boat feast."

##### Community Subjectivity:

This is the cornerstone of "retention." "Retention" must ultimately "remain" in the rural community. If the IP's development leads to the "hollowing out" of the community (e.g., villagers moving out, daily life being disturbed), then "retention" becomes impossible. A sustainable IP must be "community-led," meaning villagers are the true masters of the IP, the core participants, decision-makers, and primary beneficiaries [6]. The IP development process should be internalized as a process of community building and rural governance, and its achievements should be fed back into the village's public services and living environment. When the IP "grows together" with the community, it gains the most stable foundation for "retention" [8].

##### Value Co-creation:

This is the driving force of "retention." Modern IP is no longer "unilateral output" content but a "pluralistic co-creation" ecosystem [9]. The "retention logic" of rural sports IP requires the construction of a "value co-creation network" where local villagers, local governments, digital platforms, external audiences, and even market capital can all participate and find their place. The audience is no longer a "consumer" but a "participant" (e.g., through crowdfunding, suggestions, derivative creation); capital is no longer a "harvester" but a "co-builder." This "everyone-can-participate" openness allows the IP's vitality to be continuously regenerated and iterated in ongoing interaction.

#### (II) Digital Technology under "Retention Logic": A Role Repositioning

Under the "retention logic" framework, the core mission of digital technology is no longer to "manufacture spectacle" to "acquire traffic," but to "cultivate culture" to "precipitate retention." Its role must undergo three major shifts:

##### From "Amplifier" to "Connector":

The primary value of technology is not to amplify the "spectacle" for more people to see, but to more closely connect "people" with "people," "people" with "culture," and "people" with "community." For example, using digital platforms to establish "cloud-based fan clubs" for Zhaoqing's dragon boat teams or martial arts halls, allowing overseas fans to learn about daily training in real-time, participate

in jersey design, and crowdfund training expenses, thereby establishing a long-term, quasi-community emotional connection with the IP.

From "Traffic Inlet" to "Empowerment Tool":

Technology should not just be an inlet for external "traffic," but more importantly, an empowerment tool for internal "subjects" [2]. Digital technology should "empower the people," helping villagers (like dragon boat paddlers, martial arts inheritors) to open their own social media accounts, master digital storytelling skills, and tell "authentic" local stories, using the genuine charm of "individual IPs" to counteract the superficiality of the "grand spectacle."

From "Harvester" to "Incubator":

The commercial value of technology lies not in the "fast money" of "traffic monetization," but in the "long-term money" of "value incubation." Digital technology (like e-commerce, crowdfunding, blockchain) should be used to provide "long-chain" support for the transformation of the IP's cultural value into industrial value, incubating "IP+" new business formats (e.g., IP + local agriculture, IP + cultural-creative handicrafts, IP + research-study education), allowing value to be precipitated locally in the countryside [4].

#### **4. PRACTICAL REFLECTION: EXPLORING THE PATH FROM "TRAFFIC" TO "RETENTION" IN ZHAOQING'S RURAL SPORTS IP-IZATION**

Using "retention logic" as a reference system to reflect on the current state of IP-ization for Zhaoqing's rural sports (especially dragon boat and martial arts), we can find that its "traffic" potential is enormous, but its "retention" mechanism is lacking. Zhaoqing's practical exploration must transcend the "traffic fallacy" and cultivate the "cultural logic."

(I) Zhaoqing's "Traffic" Potential and "Retention" Dilemma

Zhaoqing's "traffic" potential is self-evident: events like the Zhaoqing International Dragon Boat Invitational are spectacular and visually stunning; martial arts IPs like the "Birthplace of Choy Li Fut" possess deep historical heritage and legendary color. These are all excellent materials for creating "digital spectacles."

However, its "retention" dilemmas are also very apparent:

"Festival Dependency": The vitality of the event IP is highly concentrated on "competition days" or "festival days," lacking "daily" content supply and operation. Audiences "leave right after watching," making it difficult to precipitate them as long-term fans.

"Government Dominance": Many event activities have a strong administrative color. The mark of the government "setting the stage" is too heavy, while the subjectivity and spontaneity of the community and villagers are insufficient [10]. This compromises the IP's "authenticity" and "grassroots nature" (the initial codes for "traffic"), making it even more difficult to form a "community-led" "retention" foundation.

"Industrial Disconnection": The sports IP lacks deep integration with local agriculture (like tribute oranges, cinnamon), manufacturing (like Duan inkstones, jade), and tourism (like Star Lake, the ancient city wall). The IP's cultural value remains "suspended" in the air, failing to effectively transform into industrial chain value that can "remain" locally.

(II) Reflections on Zhaoqing's Practical Path from "Traffic" to "Retention"

Path 1: Transcending "Festival-style" Thinking, Constructing "Daily" Narratives (Reconstructing Cultural Authenticity)

Reflection: "Traffic logic" chases the "grand scenes" of "major events." "Retention logic" treasures the "daily state" of "ordinary people."

Path: Change the IP operation model that is cyclical with "festivals." Zhaoqing should utilize a digital matrix (short video, public accounts, live streaming) to make IP operation "daily." For example, establish "personified IP" accounts for every dragon boat team and every martial arts hall in Zhaoqing. Broadcast not only the competitions but also the "daily life": the arduous training of the paddlers, the rhythmic secrets of the dragon boat drummer, the details of a martial arts master teaching his disciples, the entire process of making the "dragon boat feast." This "daily," "full-of-life" narrative is the only way to build the IP's "persona," cultivate a "nurturing" emotional bond with fans, and precipitate "die-hard retention."

Path 2: From "Government-led Staging" to "Community-led Operation" (Reshaping Community Subjectivity)

Reflection: "Traffic logic" favors centralized operation that "handles everything" to ensure the "spectacle" is "controllable" and "perfect." "Retention logic" relies on decentralized "community vitality."

Path: The Zhaoqing government should shift from "organizer" to "service provider." It must truly "empower" the local dragon boat associations, martial arts associations, and villager councils with the right to manage, operate, and narrate the IP [8]. The government's core tasks are to provide the "digital new infrastructure" (like event live-streaming networks), offer "digital literacy" training (teaching villagers how to operate accounts), and guard the "safety bottom line." Letting villagers become the "CEO" and "spokesperson" for the IP is the only way for the IP to truly "remain" in the countryside.

Path 3: From "Cultural-Tourism Monetization" to "Value Symbiosis" (Reconstructing Value Co-creation)

Reflection: The monetization path of "traffic logic" is short-sighted and singular (tickets, advertising, tourism). "Retention logic" pursues the "long-term value" of "symbiosis."

Path: Zhaoqing should abandon the singular model of "sports setting the stage, cultural tourism performing" and construct an "IP + N" value symbiosis ecosystem.

IP + Local Agriculture: Use the "striving" spirit of the dragon boat IP and the "health" concept of the martial arts IP to "culturally empower" and "digitally endorse" Zhaoqing's agricultural products (like tribute oranges). Embed "agriculture-supporting e-commerce" into event live streams, turning "traffic" into "sales" and "fans" into "customers."

IP + Research & Study Education: Utilize the "inheritance" value of the martial arts IP to develop "digital martial arts hall" online courses and offline "kung fu summer camps," transforming "audience retention" into "educational retention."

IP + Digital Cultural Creation: Use technologies like blockchain to develop the dragon boat "dragon head" and martial arts "boxing manuals" into unique "digital collectibles," exploring new paths for the "fan economy" and "copyright economy," and achieving pluralistic co-creation of IP value [9].

## 5. CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTS

### (I) Research Conclusions

This study, taking the sustainable development of rural sports event IP as its theme, "traffic-retention" as its analytical framework, and Zhaoqing's practice as its reflection object, draws the following conclusions:

The "traffic" miracle of rural sports IP is a product of the collision between digital technology and the "authenticity" of local culture. However, "traffic logic" has natural "spectacular," "performative," and "short-term" tendencies, making it the biggest trap for the sustainable development of IP.

Achieving a fundamental shift from "traffic" to "retention" requires completing a "cultural logic" paradigm revolution: that is, shifting from "technology-oriented" to "cultural self-awareness," from "spectacle-centric" to "community-subject-centric," and from "unilateral monetization" to "value symbiosis."

Under "retention logic," the role of digital technology is reconfigured as a "cultural connector," a "community empowerment tool," and a "value incubator." Its core mission is to serve the deep narration of "cultural authenticity," the activation and consolidation of "community subjectivity," and the ecosystem construction of "value co-creation."

## (II) Practical Implications

For Zhaoqing and the vast regions of China rich in local sports resources, the implication of this study is: one must maintain "cultural composure" in the face of the digital wave. One cannot be deceived by the "traffic" bubble but must be wary of the "alienation" and "suspension" of local culture and community ecology by "traffic logic." The true success of IP-ization is not measured by "how many people came" (traffic), but by "what was left behind" (retention)—a more confident culture, a more cohesive community, and a more sustainable industry.

## (III) Limitations and Prospects

As a qualitative paper focusing on theoretical speculation and logical construction, this study's main contribution is proposing the "traffic-retention" cultural logic analytical framework. Its limitation lies in its failure to provide empirical data or specific fieldwork support for the "retention" transformation. Future research can, under this framework, delve into specific villages in Zhaoqing and other areas, using in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and other methods to empirically test the practical effectiveness, specific obstacles, and micro-operational mechanisms of the "retention logic," thereby making the theoretical framework more operational and instructive.

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