

Digital "Empowerment" and Value Co-creation Mechanism of Sports Event IP from the Perspective of Rural Revitalization: A Qualitative Study Based on Zhaoqing's Rural Sports

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Abstract: Against the macro backdrop of the comprehensive promotion of the Rural Revitalization strategy, rural sports events are leaping from marginal community activities to a key arena for reshaping rural landscapes and activating endogenous dynamics. Phenomenon-level events, represented by the "Village Super League," highlight the immense potential for the IP-ization of rural sports. However, existing research has largely focused on the "enabling" effect of digital technology (i.e., technological instrumentalism) or the commercial "operation" path of IP, overlooking the profound reconstruction of rural social power structures and value creation logic by digital technology. Grounded in the contemporary perspective of Rural Revitalization, this paper takes Zhaoqing's rural sports (especially its deep traditions of dragon boat racing, martial arts, etc.) as the qualitative research field. It innovatively proposes a "Digital Empowerment" theoretical framework, distinguishing it from traditional "digital enabling." "Empowerment" refers not only to the improvement of technical efficiency but, more importantly, to the substantive acquisition of discourse power, organizational power, economic power, and cultural interpretation power by rural subjects (villagers). The study argues that digital empowerment is the prerequisite and foundation for realizing the value co-creation of rural sports event IP; "enabling" without "empowerment" easily leads to "digital alienation" and "value deprivation." This paper deeply discerns the four-fold dimensions of digital empowerment (discourse, organization, economy, and culture) and constructs a mechanism model for the value co-creation of rural sports IP based on this. This mechanism includes four key links: "subject activation - resource identification - scene co-creation - value sharing." It clarifies how, under digital empowerment, pluralistic subjects—such as villagers, local governments, digital platforms, market capital, and local elites—shift from traditional "value chain" relationships to new "value network" relationships. The study finds that the practice of Zhaoqing's rural sports shows that only when digital technology truly "empowers the people," making villagers the true protagonists of the IP, can the cultural authenticity and economic sustainability of the IP be unified, and value co-creation be achieved. This research aims to provide a new theoretical perspective and practical path for the non-quantitative, sustainable development of rural sports IP, in order to avoid the "traffic trap" and "capital suspension," and to truly realize the comprehensive revitalization of rural subjects.

Keywords: Rural Revitalization, Rural Sports, Sports IP, Digital Empowerment, Value Co-creation, Qualitative Study, Zhaoqing.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Problem Statement

The Rural Revitalization strategy is the central pillar of China's work on agriculture, rural areas, and farmers in the new era. Under this grand narrative, the value of the countryside is being reassessed. The function of rural areas is no longer limited to traditional agricultural production but is endowed with diverse missions, including ecological conservation, cultural inheritance, social governance, and national leisure [1]. In this process, local sports events, represented by Guizhou's "Village Super League" ("Cun Chao") and "Village BA" ("Cun BA"), have, with the catalysis of digital media, evolved from spontaneous activities in remote corners into national cultural phenomena. This signifies that rural sports are becoming an undeniable "endogenous driving force" in the Rural Revitalization

strategy, and their inherent IP (Intellectual Property) value is being activated as never before.

Zhaoqing City, as an important cradle of Lingnan culture, possesses particularly rich rural sports resources. Whether it is the time-honored Duanzhou dragon boat racing, the traditional martial arts found throughout the countryside (such as Choy Li Fut and Wing Chun), or the folk sports activities in various counties and districts (like Deqing and Gaoyao), all are imbued with deep cultural heritage and a broad mass base. These "original ecological" sports activities are not only a means for villagers to stay healthy but also core vehicles for community identity, folk inheritance, and social interaction. At the junction of the digital wave and the Rural Revitalization strategy, how to transform Zhaoqing's "dormant" local sports resources into "living IP" with sustained vitality and economic driving force has become a major issue demanding an urgent solution.

However, examining the current fever for rural sports IP-ization, a tendency towards "traffic anxiety" and "path

dependency" is increasingly prominent. Much research and practice excessively focus on how to replicate the communication miracle of the "Village Super League," narrowing digital technology down to a "traffic-driving tool" and equating IP-ization with "commercial monetization" and "cultural-tourism integration" [2]. This "technological enabling" theory and "industrial operation" theory, while perhaps bringing "internet fame" in the short term, harbor immense risks: First, the risk of "cultural suspension." An excessive pursuit of "spectacular" communication may cause local sports to detach from their original cultural soil and community fabric, deteriorating into "performative" symbols to satisfy the external gaze. Second, the risk of "subject alienation." Under the dual strong intervention of "government dominance" and "capital moving to the countryside," villagers, as the main subjects of the events, may be "marginalized," reduced from being masters of the IP to "background props" or cheap labor. Third, the risk of "value deprivation." Digital platforms, by virtue of their "algorithmic hegemony" and "data monopoly," may capture the lion's share of the IP's value, while the villagers' returns are disproportionate to their contributions, forming a new "digital divide" and "digital exploitation" [3].

Therefore, the core question of this paper is: Do we merely need digital "enabling," or do we need a deeper digital "empowerment"? If digital technology cannot bring about a substantive increase in the power of rural subjects, will IP-ization alienate into a new round of "legitimized plunder" of rural value? This study argues that we must transcend the instrumental rationality perspective of "enabling" and turn to a rights-based perspective of "empowerment." We must deeply explore how digital technology can genuinely "empower the people" and, on this basis, construct a "value co-creation" mechanism with the deep participation of pluralistic subjects (especially villagers).

1.2. Literature Review

Research on Rural Sports and Rural Revitalization: Existing research fully affirms the diverse values of rural sports, such as improving farmers' health literacy, reconstructing rural social capital, and inheriting local culture [4]. With the emergence of the "Village Super League" phenomenon, research hotspots have shifted to "cultural-sports-tourism integration" pathways and summaries of typical case experiences [1]. These studies are mostly descriptive and policy-suggestive, lacking deep theoretical excavation of the "endogenous dynamic" mechanism of rural sports in rural revitalization. Especially in the digital age, discussions on fundamental governance issues like "who is the subject" and "how to develop" are still insufficient.

Research on Sports Event IP: This field has yielded rich results, but it mainly concentrates on professional sports and large-scale commercial events [5]. The research paradigm is highly market-oriented, focusing on IP's business models, brand operation, value assessment, and legal protection. These theories, dominated by "capital logic," are difficult to apply directly to the rural sports field, which has strong "public good" and "cultural product" attributes. The core of rural sports IP is "rurality" and "community," and its development cannot fully replicate the path of professional sports IP.

Research on Digital Enabling and Value Co-creation: "Digital enabling" is a popular topic, but most studies interpret it as technology's enhancement of efficiency and

innovation of models [2]. The "value co-creation" theory (originating from service-dominant logic) emphasizes that customers (users) transform from passive value recipients to active participants in value creation [6]. Research has begun to explore how digital platforms promote value co-creation, but the settings are mostly in the commercial sector. Research that combines "digital enabling" with "value co-creation" and places them in the specific social context of "Rural Revitalization" for non-commercial, qualitative analysis—especially in conjunction with "sports IP"—is almost non-existent.

Research Related to "Digital Empowerment": Distinct from "enabling," "empowerment" is a concept with stronger sociological and political connotations, emphasizing the enhancement of autonomy, discourse power, and decision-making participation by endowing individuals or groups with new capabilities, resources, and opportunities. In recent years, some scholars have begun to reflect on the limitations of "digital enabling," proposing concepts like "digital empowerment" [7] and "digital feedback," focusing on the power-reconstructing role of digital technology for disadvantaged groups. However, the systematic application of "digital empowerment" theory to rural sports IP research has not yet been documented.

In summary, the theoretical contributions of this study are: First, to clearly distinguish between "digital enabling" and "digital empowerment" in rural sports research, constructing a qualitative analysis framework centered on "empowerment." Second, using Zhaoqing's rural sports as a qualitative observational blueprint, it couples the two major theories of "digital empowerment" and "value co-creation" to deeply reveal the internal mechanism for the sustainable development of rural sports IP.

1.3. Research Design: A Qualitative Study Based on the Zhaoqing Field

This study strictly adheres to the requirement of "no quantitative analysis, no charts or graphs," adopting a qualitative research method.

Research Paradigm: It adopts a grounded theory approach that combines theoretical speculation with case exemplification. The "theory" of the study originates from a deep construction of "digital empowerment" and "value co-creation," while the "qualitative field" is based on long-term observation and literature review of Zhaoqing's rural sports (especially dragon boat racing and martial arts).

Field Selection: Zhaoqing is representative. Its rural sports forms are diverse (with both "major IP" potential like dragon boat racing and a "diffuse IP" foundation like martial arts), its cultural heritage is deep, and it is located in the radiation zone of the Pearl River Delta Economic Circle, facing the dual tasks of digital transformation and rural revitalization. This paper will use Zhaoqing's iconic rural sports forms as exemplars to elaborate the theoretical framework.

Research Approach: The logical main line of this paper is: How "digital empowerment" (prerequisite) catalyzes "subject activation" (driver), which in turn drives "value co-creation" (mechanism), ultimately achieving "rural revitalization" (goal). The entire paper will not rely on statistical data but will construct a theoretical model through in-depth analysis of "mechanisms," "logics," "paths," and "dimensions."

2. Theoretical Distinction: The Limitations of "Digital Enabling" and the Proposition of "Digital Empowerment"

2.1. The Instrumental Rationality of "Digital Enabling" and Its Limitations

In the current discourse, "digital enabling of rural sports" is usually understood as: 1. Communication enabling: Using short videos and live-streaming platforms to make events "go viral"; 2. Organizational enabling: Using online tools to improve event organization efficiency; 3. Industrial enabling: Using e-commerce and cultural-tourism platforms to monetize IP.

This view of "enabling" is essentially a form of "instrumental rationality" [8]. It treats digital technology as a neutral, exogenous variable external to rural society. Its implicit logic is "Technology + Countryside = Development." The limitations of this perspective are:

Ignoring the Power Structure: It evades the questions of "who is enabling," "for whom is it enabling," and "who is being enabled." Technology and platforms are not neutral; they carry capital logic and algorithmic preferences. If rural subjects (villagers) lack the ability to use, master, and reflect on technology, the so-called "enabling" is likely to evolve into "being enabled"—that is, being swept away by platforms, capital, and traffic.

Leading to Subject Absence: In the "enabling" discourse, villagers are often seen as passive "resources" or "the managed," rather than as agentic subjects. The development path is designed by external parties (government, experts, capital), and villagers merely need to "cooperate" and "execute."

Causing Value Alienation: IP-ization guided by "enabling" easily falls into the "traffic-first" trap. To cater to the external gaze, events may be reformed "beyond recognition," and their original endogenous values, such as community cohesion and cultural inheritance, are overwhelmed by the external value of economic monetization.

2.2. "Digital Empowerment": A Rights-based Shift for Rural Sports IP-ization

In response to the limitations of "enabling," this study proposes a "Digital Empowerment" framework. This is a "rights-based" shift, emphasizing that the core value of digital technology lies in reshaping the power relations of rural society and enhancing the autonomous development capabilities of rural subjects. In the context of rural sports IP-ization, "digital empowerment" includes at least four dimensions:

Discourse Empowerment:

This is the most superficial but also the most critical empowerment. Traditionally, rural sports were "voiceless," their image defined by external media. Digital technology (especially UGC, User-Generated Content) breaks this monopoly. Villagers pick up their phones and become the "narrators," "recorders," and "communicators" of their own culture. Taking Zhaoqing's dragon boat racing as an example, the training footage, event commentary, and festive rituals self-filmed by villagers are more infectious and "authentic" than the "polished" reports from professional media. This collective "grassroots narrative" allows the rural sports IP to shift from "being watched" to "self-narration," reconstructing

the IP's cultural image and emotional connection.

Organizational Empowerment:

Digital technology reconstructs the organizational and mobilization models of the countryside. Traditional rural sports (like Zhaoqing's martial arts halls and dragon boat associations) relied on kinship, geography, and the authority of "local talents." Digital tools (like WeChat groups, Mini-Programs) provide lower-cost, broader-coverage, and flatter organizational possibilities. Villagers can spontaneously organize events, recruit volunteers, and raise funds through online communities [9]. This "digital association" enhances villagers' self-organization and self-service capabilities, making the IP's operation no longer solely dependent on "top-down" administrative directives or "outside-in" capital intervention, thus strengthening community resilience.

Economic Empowerment:

This is the most substantive empowerment. Digital technology (e-commerce, live-stream e-commerce, digital payment, crowdfunding) provides a "short-circuit" link for the value monetization of rural sports IP. The economic returns from the IP no longer have to pass through lengthy intermediaries and channels. Taking Zhaoqing as an example, when holding a rural martial arts festival, local agricultural products (like Deqing's tribute oranges) and cultural-creative souvenirs (like martial arts attire) can be sold simultaneously via live-streaming. Villagers (the collective) can obtain direct economic benefits from the IP traffic, achieving an endogenous cycle where "sports set the stage, and the economy performs." This immediate and direct feedback on returns is the strongest incentive for villagers to continuously invest in IP construction.

Cultural Empowerment:

This is the deepest empowerment, namely the return of cultural interpretation and innovation rights. Digital technology is used not only to "communicate" culture but also to "recreate" it. On one hand, digitization (like 3D modeling, VR experiences) allows Zhaoqing's ancient boxing manuals and dragon boat designs to be "immortalized" and "activated." On the other hand, the "derivative creation" (remix) attribute of digital media encourages villagers (especially returning youth) to combine traditional sports with modern trends (like anime, electronic music, designer toys), creating new IP forms. This empowerment transforms local culture from a static heritage in a "museum" into a "living," constantly iterating life form.

In summary, "digital empowerment" is an empowerment chain that progresses from discourse, organization, and economy to culture. It transforms villagers from "passive objects" to "agentic subjects," which is the fundamental prerequisite for achieving value co-creation in rural sports IP-ization.

3. The Value Co-creation Mechanism of Rural Sports IP Driven by Digital Empowerment

Traditional IP development follows a "value chain" logic: upstream (event organizer) produces content, midstream (media) disseminates it, and downstream (sponsors, derivatives) monetizes it. "Value co-creation," however, is a "value network" logic, emphasizing that the IP's value is jointly created by pluralistic subjects in interaction [6]. Driven by digital empowerment, this co-creation mechanism can be realized.

This study constructs a cyclical mechanism model containing four links: "subject activation," "resource identification," "scene co-creation," and "value sharing."

3.1. Subject Activation: From "Bystanders" to "Co-creators"

Digital empowerment first activates the "co-creation" willingness of pluralistic subjects.

Villagers (Protagonists): The direct benefits and sense of honor brought by digital empowerment (especially economic and discourse empowerment) lead to an unprecedented rise in villagers' cultural confidence and subject consciousness. They are no longer "performing on command" but "I want to show." Taking Zhaoqing's rural martial arts as an example, villagers spontaneously excavate their village's boxing history, organize manuals, and film teaching videos, showing strong enthusiasm for IP co-construction.

Local Government (Servants): Seeing the huge socio-economic benefits brought by the "Village Super League," the local government's positioning shifts from "manager" to "servant." Digital empowerment provides new levers (like big data decision-making, smart cultural tourism). The government no longer "takes care of everything" but "sets the stage" for value co-creation through digital infrastructure, policy support, and business environment optimization.

Digital Platforms (Connectors): The "authentic" content of rural sports IP is a "high-quality traffic pool" for digital platforms (especially short video). Platforms are no longer just "channels" but proactively intervene to become "co-creators," providing traffic support, technical assistance (like VR live-streaming), and operational guidance, aiming to deeply bind with the IP and achieve mutual growth of platform value and IP value.

Local Elites ("New Gentry" / Returning Youth): They are the crucial "bridge." They (e.g., Zhaoqing-native university students, urban white-collars) understand both the local culture and possess digital skills. Digital empowerment provides them with a pathway for "digital return." They use their professional knowledge to help villagers operate social media accounts, plan creative products, and connect with external resources, becoming the core "operators" and "translators" of IP co-creation.

3.2. Resource Identification: The IP Asset-ization from "Latent" to "Conscious"

Rural sports resources (like Zhaoqing's dragon boats) were originally "latent" cultural habits, their value implicit. Digital empowerment promotes their transformation into "conscious" IP assets.

Digital Mining of "Cold" Resources: Digital technology acts like a "searchlight," allowing many "cold" resources on the verge of being lost to be "seen." For example, through villager UGC mining and big data analysis, a unique folk sports item in a remote Zhaoqing village can be discovered, and its IP-ization potential identified.

Symbolic Refinement of "Hot" Resources: For "hot" resources like dragon boat racing and martial arts, digital empowerment accelerates the refinement of their core symbols. Through interaction and feedback on social media, co-creating subjects (especially villagers and returning youth) can quickly capture the cultural elements most popular with the outside world (e.g., a specific dragon boat eye-dotting ceremony, a signature move in a martial arts routine) and "IP-ize" them into logos, mascots, and slogans, achieving a "cold

start" for the IP asset.

3.3. Scene Co-creation: The Spatio-temporal Fusion of Online and Offline

The core of value co-creation is "experience," and experience happens in specific "scenes." Digital empowerment breaks the barriers between online and offline scenes, achieving a "spatio-temporal fusion" of scene co-creation.

Digital Enhancement of Offline "Authentic" Scenes: This is the foundation. Zhaoqing's dragon boat arenas, rural martial arts halls, and other physical spaces must maintain their "original flavor." The application of digital technology (like 5G live-streaming, AR guides, smart security) is not to "replace" the site but to "enhance" the immersion, safety, and convenience of the on-site experience.

Interactive Creation of Online "Cloud" Scenes: Digital platforms (live-streaming rooms, metaverse spaces, event Mini-Programs) open up a "second scene." This is a pure co-creation space. Audiences interact in real-time with villagers on-site and other audiences online through bullet comments, digital gifts, online voting (e.g., selecting the "most beautiful drummer"), and topic discussions. This sense of "telepresence" and interaction is itself an important component of the IP's value [10].

Scene Fusion of "Local Culture" and "Internet Culture": The peak of value co-creation is the "chemical reaction" between the two cultures. For example, villagers use internet buzzwords while live-streaming a dragon boat race; audiences spontaneously flood the screen with "Chinese Kung Fu" while watching a martial arts performance. This online-offline "intertextuality" and "resonance" continuously enrich and iterate the IP's cultural connotation, generating "spillover value" far beyond the event itself.

3.4. Value Sharing: From "Traffic Dividends" to "Revitalization Dividends"

For value co-creation to be sustainable, it must close the loop with "value sharing." Digital empowerment provides the possibility for building a fairer, more transparent sharing mechanism.

Pluralistic Sharing of Economic Value: As mentioned earlier, digital (economic) empowerment allows IP returns to be distributed directly and in diverse ways. Besides traditional revenue from tickets and advertising, this includes live-streaming gifts, e-commerce profit-sharing, cultural-creative crowdfunding, and copyright income (e.g., licensing for "derivative creation"). Zhaoqing's villages can explore establishing "Rural Sports IP Cooperatives," using the village collective as a unit to integrate digital revenues into the collective economy, to be reinvested in village public affairs (like renovating ancestral halls, funding education, and supporting the event).

Inclusive Sharing of Social Value: IP-ization brings not only money but also the reconstruction of social capital. The holding of events (like dragon boat racing), amplified by digital technology, greatly enhances villagers' sense of community identity, pride, and cohesion. This "unity" and "spirit" are the most valuable assets for rural governance and long-term development.

Intergenerational Sharing of Cultural Value: Digital empowerment allows local culture to be "livingly inherited." Zhaoqing's youth, by watching short videos and participating in online discussions, regain a strong interest in their parents'

"old antiques" (like traditional martial arts) and actively join in learning and disseminating them. IP-ization achieves "digital feedback" to culture and "intergenerational sharing," ensuring the continuation of the rural cultural lineage.

4. Qualitative Dilemmas and Realization Paths: Reflections Based on the Zhaoqing Field

Digital empowerment does not happen automatically, and value co-creation is not a smooth path. In a specific practical field like Zhaoqing, promoting "empowerment" and "co-creation" must confront a series of qualitative dilemmas and explore targeted realization paths.

4.1. Qualitative Dilemmas: The "Paradoxes" of Empowerment and "Traps" of Co-creation

The "Matthew Effect" of Empowerment and the "Digital Divide": Digital empowerment often preferentially empowers those "capable individuals" (like village cadres, returning elites) who already possess certain cultural, economic, and digital skills. Ordinary villagers, especially the elderly, may be excluded from the "empowerment" process due to insufficient "digital literacy," leading to an exacerbation of power imbalances and the "digital divide" within the countryside [3].

"Platform Dependency" of Co-creation and "Algorithmic Obscuration": Value co-creation is highly dependent on digital platforms. But the commercial logic of platforms (pursuing traffic, click-through rates) often conflicts with the cultural logic of rural IP (pursuing authenticity, community). Platform algorithms may "select" and amplify content that is more "spectacular" and "conflicting," while "obscuring" the gentler but more culturally profound daily content. This leads to the IP's development being "hijacked" by algorithms.

Subject's "Cultural Disorientation" and "Performativity": Faced with the "gaze" of the outside world and the lure of traffic, rural subjects (villagers) may fall into "cultural disorientation." They might unconsciously begin to "perform" a version of "rurality" that is "expected" by tourists and algorithms. Using Zhaoqing martial arts as an example: should one insist on "original ecological" skill demonstration, or switch to more ornamental "martial arts routine performances"? This tension between "authenticity" and "performativity" is the most central cultural dilemma in the IP-ization process [9].

"Short-term Cashing-out" of Value and "Capital Suspension": The intervention of market capital is a "double-edged sword." Capital seeks short-term, high-efficiency returns, which may lead to "predatory" development of the IP (e.g., excessive commercialization, soaring ticket prices, environmental damage), while ignoring the long-term cultivation of the community and the "slow nurturing" of culture. Capital logic may "suspend" the local logic, causing the IP's vitality to be "overdrawn."

4.2. Realization Paths: Genuinely Moving from "Digital Enabling" to "Digital Empowerment"

Faced with the above dilemmas, if rural sports IP-ization is to achieve sustainable value co-creation, the following realization paths must be adopted:

Path 1: Adhering to "Subject-Centrism" — Inclusive Digital Literacy Education.

The prerequisite for "empowerment" is "cultivating power." The primary task for local governments (like Zhaoqing's) is not "driving traffic" but "educating people." Villager digital literacy education must be incorporated into the strategic planning of rural revitalization as a "new agricultural skill." Through public welfare training, youth "one-on-one" assistance, and other forms, villagers (especially middle-aged and elderly) must be enabled to master digital tools, understand digital rules, and possess "competence" in the digital age. This is fundamental to preventing the "digital divide" and "elite capture."

Path 2: Guarding the "Cultural Core" — Establishing Protection and Innovation Mechanisms for "Authenticity".

The foundation of IP is culture. A "culture-centric" governance framework must be established. For example, establishing a "Local Culture Council" composed of villager representatives, local talents, and folklore experts to conduct a "cultural one-vote veto" review of the IP's commercial development and content innovation. At the same time, using digital technologies (like blockchain) to "confirm the rights" and "archive" the core elements of Zhaoqing's dragon boat and martial arts IP, legally guaranteeing the villagers' cultural interpretation rights.

Path 3: Building a "Pluralistic Alliance" — From "Platform Dependency" to "Platform Co-governance".

One cannot "demonize" platforms and capital, but must "use them well" and "regulate" them [5]. The local government should take the lead in establishing a "pluralistic co-governance alliance" among the government, platforms, village collectives, and market entities. On one hand, the government should use public data advantages to guide platform algorithms to tilt towards "cultural value" and "public interest" (e.g., giving traffic support to "authentic" content). On the other hand, it should, through negotiation, ensure that village collectives receive a "guaranteed minimum + profit-sharing" fair share of IP revenues (like live-streaming gifts, e-commerce), breaking the "platform exploitation."

Path 4: Activating "Local Elites" — The Cultivation and Incentivization of "Digital Gentry".

"Returning youth" and "digital local talents" are the best "bonding agents" for achieving empowerment and co-creation. They are "dual-identity" individuals who can effectively translate and balance "local logic" and "market logic." Zhaoqing and other places should issue special policies to attract and incentivize these local elites to return to their hometowns to start businesses, supporting them in establishing "Rural Sports MCN agencies" or "Digital Cultural-Creative Cooperatives," allowing them to become the "lead geese" guiding villagers toward "digital empowerment."

5. Conclusion and Prospects

5.1. Main Conclusions

This study, from the perspective of Rural Revitalization and using Zhaoqing's rural sports as a qualitative observation field, draws the following conclusions through a coupled analysis of "digital empowerment" and "value co-creation" theories:

The core of rural sports IP-ization development should be a fundamental shift from "digital enabling" (technological instrumentalism) to "digital empowerment" (rights-based

theory). "Empowerment" is the purpose and destination of "enabling," and its core is the substantive enhancement of rural subjects' (villagers') discourse power, organizational power, economic power, and cultural power.

Digital empowerment is the dynamic prerequisite for rural sports IP to achieve value co-creation. "Co-creation" without empowered subjects is pseudo-co-creation, which can easily alienate into "digital exploitation" and "cultural suspension" of rural value by capital and platforms.

Value co-creation driven by digital empowerment is a dynamic cyclical mechanism including "subject activation - resource identification - scene co-creation - value sharing." It requires pluralistic subjects (villagers, government, platforms, elites, capital) to reposition themselves in a new "value network" and jointly participate in the production, communication, consumption, and distribution of the IP.

The realization of "empowerment" and "co-creation" is not a smooth path and faces four major qualitative dilemmas: the "digital divide," "algorithmic obscuration," "cultural disorientation," and "capital suspension." The path to realization lies in adhering to "subject-centrism" (digital literacy), guarding the "cultural core" (authenticity protection), building a "pluralistic alliance" (platform co-governance), and activating "local elites" (digital gentry).

5.2. Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in providing a new "sociological" and "political economy" perspective for understanding phenomena like the "Village Super League," which transcends "communication studies" and "industrial economics." It constructs a "digital empowerment - value co-creation" qualitative analysis framework.

The practical implication is: For the IP-ization practice of rural sports in Zhaoqing and other regions, this study warns that the key to development lies not in how much "technology" and "capital" is invested, but in what kind of "mechanism" and "power" distribution structure is built. The foothold of rural revitalization is the "revitalization of people." The IP-ization of rural sports, in the final analysis, is a profound practice concerning "who is the protagonist of the countryside in the digital age."

5.3. Limitations and Future Prospects

As a non-quantitative, theoretical-speculative article, this study focuses on the construction of "mechanisms" and the deduction of "logic." Its use of Zhaoqing's rural sports practices is for "exemplification" rather than "empirical proof." Future research could, within this framework, conduct deeper fieldwork and participatory observation to perform an in-depth dissection of specific Zhaoqing cases (e.g., the digital transformation of a specific dragon boat team or martial arts hall) to test and enrich the theoretical mechanisms

proposed in this paper. Furthermore, as digital technologies (like AIGC, Metaverse) evolve, the forms of "digital empowerment" will inevitably change, which also provides broad space for subsequent research.

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