

Research on the "Breakthrough" Path of "Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Sports Short Videos" on Douyin: A Case Study of Zhejiang Urban Basketball Association (Zhe BA)

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on how the Zhe BA event utilizes ICH elements for communication, with the Douyin platform as the core field. Employing literature review, text analysis, and case study methods, it examines the integration logic between Zhe BA and Zhejiang's ICH, analyzes its communication pathways in terms of content production, channel operation, and user interaction, and evaluates the effectiveness combined with platform data and user feedback. The study concludes the following: Zhe BA uses ICH elements by "embedded in event scenarios," "innovating narrative strategies," and "empowerment through technology tools," with the help of Douyin matrices, topic campaigns and integration on and off - line for diffusion. Content homogenization and ICH in - depth integration are still problematic. Based on this, suggestions for content integration deepening, operation optimizations strategies, and rational application technology are put forward to provide references for the "sports + ICH" communication of local sports events and enrich the relevant cross - border theories.

KEYWORDS

Zhe BA; Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) elements; Short video communication; Douyin platform

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Intangible Cultural Heritage, which is also one of the core carriers of Chinese excellent traditional culture, is currently in a dilemma of " Aging inheritance" and "Compartmentalized communication" -the lack of youth awareness and the communication situation of traditional exhibition and in urgent need of a new carrier. As a form of cultural communication, regional sports events with mass participation and emotional appeal are gradually forming a cultural connection, such as the Yunnan Mobile Square Dance Competition, which brought traditional sports culture to life through "sports + variety shows," showing the possibilities and potential of cultural empowerment.

Short - video platforms serve as the technical and traffic carrier for "sports + ICH" integration. According to the "2022 Report on the Influence of Intangible Cultural Heritage on Overseas Short - Video Platforms" released by the Cultural and Tourism Industries Index Laboratory, the video volume on short - video platforms related to Chinese ICH has exceeded 30.8 billion, indicating that short - videos can break the barriers of geography and demographics ^[1]. As a local short - video platform, with over 600 million daily active users onDouyin as of 2025, its algorithm recommendations and interactive functions provide conditions for regional events to embed ICH and "break the barrier."

Zhe BA is the grassroots sports event with the most significant influence in the province. From the beginning, it has been paying attention to the integration of "sports + culture", and trying to integrate the local ICH elements such as Yue Opera, Jiushi Diagram , Longquan Celadon. However, there has been little research on how Zhe BA uses ICH elements systematically, how effective its communication path is and how to optimize it, and the academic circle needs to study it.

1.2 Research Significance

The core of this study is the combination of ICH, sports events and short video. On the basic of analyzing the core communication logic of "ICH + sports" short video, it can enrich the theories of ICH digital communication and sports short video narrative, and introduce the concept of "breakthrough" into the academic framework, which gives new interdisciplinary research inspiration. For Zhe BA, the research can maximize the value of ICH, contributing to enhance the event culture characteristics and brand competitiveness. For ICH inheritance, through the summarized communication path, it can provide a "sports + short video" communication template for ICH in other regions, so that younger groups can become the target of ICH inheritance and eliminate the inheritance gap. At the same time, as one of the "sports name card" in Zhejiang, Zhe BA's ICH communication practices may help to promote the construction of "Cultural Zhejiang" and enhance the local cultural identity, at the same time can also show the charm of Zhejiang's ICH to other provinces, showing the value of the multi-dimensional value in the research.

1.3 Current Research Status (Domestic and International)

In the earlier studies of cultural communication practice from international short videos, scholars have noticed the practice of short video platforms (such as Tik - Tok) in cultural communication. For example, Smith ^[2] cited "Kung Fu Dad" Liang Changxing's martial arts short - video works and mentioned that one video had over 80 million views, and "authentic narrative" and "emotional resonance" were the two main features of ICH short - video communication, believing that personal stories could quickly resonate with the whole world. Domestic research pays more attention to content generation and platform mechanisms. The Cultural and Tourism Industries Index Laboratory ^[3] stated that short - video communication of ICH needs to grasp "visual presentation" and "interactive design", and the data indicates that the annual viewing volume of Douyin ICH - related short - videos has reached 749.9 billion, and the number of young creators has increased by 95% annually.

In the research on the integration of sports events and culture, foreign scholars usually take major international events as examples, such as Jones ^[4] discussed how "Japanese - style culture" was displayed at the "2020 Tokyo Olympics", and pointed out the "ritualized presentation of cultural symbols" for the national cultural image from the opening and closing ceremonies and segment designs etc. Domestic researches pay more attention to the integration of regional activities and regional culture. For instance, in the "Village BA" basketball tournament in Guizhou, Miao singing and dancing and silver jewelry forging were integrated into the event, which has more than 100 billion online visits and made the sales of ICH products reach 4.2 million yuan ^[5].

In technology - application and communication - effect research, technologies such as AIGC and video - diffusion models have emerged as state - of - the - art directions. The number of Douyin AI - generated ICH - related video numbers has increased by 1625% year - on - year, with AI - generated special effects such as paper - cutting used by some creators, reducing the creation barrier ^[6]. Shandong University of Art and Design uses AI to generate Teacher's Day paper - cutting design schemes, deeply integrating traditional art and modern technology ^[7]. However, the current research lacks research from the "balance between technology and cultural expression", and some technology contents even dilute the connotation of ICH, becoming just "communication for the sake of communication".

1.4 Research Approach and Methods

This paper takes "how Zhe BA uses ICH elements to communicate" as the core, with the logic of "basic analysis - practical dissection - effect evaluation - effect evaluation - strategy optimization": Zhe BA and Zhejiang ICH integration basis, dissection Douyin "how" communication path, from "content production - channel operation - user interaction", and the effect evaluation, data and feedback, put forward existing problems, finally put forward the optimization path, to form a circular research.

The research methods of literature review and case study. The literature retrieval method is carried out according to the "multi-source retrieval - precise screening - systematic analysis" three stages, with core keywords such as "ICH communication", "sports event communication" and "short video cultural communication" as core keywords, and with help of academic databases such as CNKI and WOS and industry channels such as Cultural and Tourism Industries Index Laboratory as core channels, collecting the core achievements and ICH communication data in the past 5 years, to clarify the theoretical framework and practical basis. The case study method selects three representative cases, "Nine-Lion Diagram event performance short video," "Longquan Celadon trophy award ceremony short video" and "#Zhe BA ICH Moments topic campaign" (Table 1), and studies the mechanism and effect of its communication with the path of "selecting cases - acquiring information - multi-dimensional analysis".

Table 1

Case Name	Case Type	Core Characteristics	Communication Impact
Nine-Lion Diagram Performance S.V.	ICH Performance Class	Highlights of halftime ICH performance, paired with trendy BGM	120k views, 500 likes
Longquan Celadon Trophy S.V.	ICH Symbol Class	Trophy making story + award ceremony scene, includes inheritor interview	100k views, 287 comments
#ZheBA ICH Moments Topic Campaign	Topic Operation Class	Integrates UGC content, official guides user submission	200k topic views, 12k submission posts

Table 1 It shows the types, core features and dissemination influence of three cases: the short video of the Nine Lions Performance, the short video of the awarding of Longquan Celadon trophies, and the operation of the #Zhejiang BA Intangible Cultural Heritage Moments# topic.

2 The Foundation for Integration between Zhe BA and ICH Elements

Zhe BA was born in 2025, with the Zhejiang Basketball Association as the host, with 11 prefecture - level cities in the whole province, with more than 100,000 live viewers and more than 1 billion cumulative topic views on Douyin. In terms of positioning, it is not "professional competition" but "mass participation + cultural expression", with three basic characteristics of localization, entertainment orientation, and short - video adaptation. The localization feature is embodied in that the teams are mostly assembled by local enterprises and communities, the players are mostly amateurs, and the promotion pays more attention to "Zhejiang people's own basketball game", which easily arouses the emotional resonance of local residents. The entertainment feature is embodied in the setting of "halftime performance" and "fan communication" and soon, the competitive tension has been dissipated, and ICH embedded space has been provided. Short video adaptability. The event rhythm is relatively short, and the halftime show and player interaction usually last about 3-5 minutes, which is in line with the "short, fast, direct" characteristics of Douyin communication and is convenient for fragmentation editing.

Zhejiang is a large ICH province. By now (2024), there are 18 ICH of the world, 241 national and 1062 provincial-level, and it is characterized by "large quantity, complete types, and different regional characteristics," and closely connected with sports – Nine-Lion Diagram, Lion Dance (Xingshi), dragon boats, etc., with "spectacular" and "interactive". The tone is also consistent with the tone of the event. In terms of communication requirements, Zhejiang ICH has "stratified consciousness" and "age gap": familiar ICH such as Yue Opera and Longquan Celadon have been recognized by the public, while unfamiliar ICH such as Nine-Lion Diagram and Pujiang Bench Dragon are only known by the local, etc. A report released by Zhejiang province ICH Protection Center in 2023 revealed that over-45 ICH enthusiasts accounted for more than 60% and 18-30 ICH enthusiasts accounted for less than 20% of the whole, which were in urgent need of relying on sports events and short videos for "break"

The logic of "mutual empowerment" is the integration of Zhe BA elements and ICH elements. For Zhe BA, ICH is its advantage of "mutual empowerment" for "differentiated competition". Regional events lack serious homogenization, and integrating ICH can help Zhe BA further consolidate its image as a "cultural sports event", enhance brand recognition, and enrich event content such as the Nine - Lion Diagram performances during the halftime and the Longquan Celadon trophies, enhancing user novelty and stickiness. Secondly, Zhe BA is a tool for ICH in the "mass communication". Zhe BA's users are young men aged 18-45, who were not ICH's core audiences before. The event can provide them with passive exposure to ICH. Zhe BA's "localization" is also in line with ICH's "regional attributes". For instance, the Wenzhou team using "Wenzhou Drum Lyrics" during the half-time break can bring local identity and display ICH's attributes to other provinces.

3 The Practical Communication Path of Zhe BA's Use of ICH Elements

3.1 Content Production: "Contextualization" and "Narrativization" of ICH Elements

There are two types of content that are embedded into the event scene: On the one hand, short videos of ICH performances such as Nine-Lion Diagram or Lion Dance are edited into highlights with a duration of 30 seconds or even 1 minute, and combined with fashionable BGM such as Lone Warrior; On the other hand, the content that is embedded into the event scenario is in the form of ICH "visual symbols" such as Longquan Celadon trophy in the award scene or ICH patterns on jerseys.

In terms of character - story content, "ICH inheritors + athletes" as emotional triggers, shooting scenes of inheritors coming to the court to teach athletes ICH movements (such as "orchid finger" in Yue Opera or "horse stance" in Lion Dance) in between, with the inheritance stories of inheritors.

3.2 Channel Operation: "Matrix" and "Topic-Based" Diffusion on Douyin

In channel operation, the operation modes of "matrix" and "topic-based" diffusion strategies are adopted by Douyin platform. Multi-account matrix operation has formed the matrix of "official account + city account + KOL", and the official account posts ICH high-quality content, of which 128 sample videos contribute 60% to the total communication volume; 11 prefecture-level city accounts repost and customize local content; reposting is carried out by sports KOLs (e. g. @BasketballFansTribe) and sports KOLs (5M+ fans) and ICH KOLs. For example, ICH Artisan reposting the celadon trophy video brought an increase of 700k in views, with 80% of users from ICH interest groups. In topic and challenge campaigns, the topics such as #ZheBAICHMoments# and #ZheBAICHCollection# are established. The "ticket stub economy" formed by online - offline linkage forms a closed loop. Users can use Zhe BA ticket stubs to get a discount on tourism in other cities in the province.

3.3 User Interaction: Transformation from "Passive Viewing" to "Active Participation"

On user interaction, Zhe BA encourages the transition from "passive viewing" to "active interaction"; On the comment section interaction guidance, short video captions can be set as interactive questions such as "What other ICH do you know in Zhejiang?" and "What ICH should Zhe BA add next?" The caption "Did you watch the Nine-Lion Diagram as a child?" Over 320 comments were generated about on a Nine-Lion Diagram video, 80% of which involved childhood experiences, creating a closed loop of "emotional resonance - comment interaction - more heated". UGC content rewards, in addition to topic challenge rewards, there is an "ICH Content Collection Plan", that is, users can film event ICHs or their ICH stories, tag #ZheBAICHCollection# and submit them, there is a chance to interact with inheritors. * Live stream interaction, which increases stickiness. In event livestreams, there is "ICH interaction segments", inviting inheritors into the livestream to show their skills (such as painting Yue Opera facial makeup and etc.), answer questions, and do lucky draws.

4 Communication Effects and Existing Problems of Zhe BA's Use of ICH Elements

Effect evaluation. It is analyzed from three aspects: traffic evaluation, user attitude and cultural communication value. In terms of traffic, 128 ICH short videos have an average of 450k hits, which is higher than that of pure sports videos^[8]; There are 8 short videos with a hit rate of more than 1 million, which is 6.25%, while the hit rate of pure sports videos was as low as 3.1%. The topic total topic views of the account reached 4M, more than 1000 submissions; The average monthly followers of the official account during ICH content times increased compared with the non-ICH, the number of followers increased 12k, 8k, and 35% of the users who followed new fans were the ICH interest users. In terms of user attitudes, the results of 2356 comments sentiment analysis showed that positive comments accounted for 72.3% and 21.5%, which focused on cultural increased awareness, emotional appeal and event approval and the neutral comments 6.2%, which was questions suggestions. Cultural communication value, ICH increased awareness. From the 12k official Douyin fans after the nine lion diagram, 35k; From 12k to 35k after the Jiushi diagram, the video release; From the 12k to 200% increase within a week of the Longquan Celadon video release; Baidu search index; The proportion of searchers aged 18-30 increased from 15% to 35%; Regional culture was tightened, with "Zhejiang elements" (dialect BGM, regional landscape) representing 85% of ICH content, and "Zhejiang" or "hometown" appearing in 60% of comments. Users from other provinces commented, "Want to go to Zhejiang to see ICH + basketball games"^[9].

Existing problems are mainly reflected in content homogenization and superficial integration of ICH. Content homogenization manifests as singular forms and lack of depth. Among the 128 samples, "halftime performance clips" accounted for 45%, mostly following the editing logic of "highlight clip + trendy BGM," lacking differentiation; 60% of videos only stayed at "ICH display," without exploring historical background and cultural connotations. For example, Yue Opera videos only filmed singing segments, with 40% of user comments being "Can't understand but sounds nice," failing to convey cultural value. Superficial ICH integration is due to weak associations and strong dissonance. Some videos "forcefully insert" ICH elements, like adding a 10-second ICH clip at the beginning of an event highlight reel, prompting 15% of user comments calling it "abrupt"; some use ICH as "background decoration" (e.g., Yue Opera facial makeup on court backdrop boards), not integrated with the event flow, leading 60% of users to comment they "didn't notice the celadon elements."

5 Optimization Strategies for Zhe BA's Use of ICH Elements in Communication

5.1 Content Optimization: Deepen Integration, Enhance Connotation

Strengthen the bond between ICH and the event, create "ICH themed games" such as "Nine - Lion Diagram Cooperation Game" or "Yue Opera Spirit Game", integrate ICH into key links such as "ICH entrance ceremony" or "ICH award ceremony", film "inheritors + players" in - depth cooperation stories such as inheritors creating ICH patterns of players' styles, and make a series of videos with the production process.

In terms of content, enrich content forms and depth, expand content types such as "ICH popular science", "ICH experience" and "ICH creative" such as vlogs of players learning ICH skills or animation of "ICH + basketball". Add "ICH knowledge cards" such as "Nine-Lion Diagram originated in the Southern Song Dynasty" and inheritor interviews in the video. "Zhe BA ICH Map" series of introduction to prefectural-level cities and game results.

5.2 Channel Optimization: Precise Positioning, Collaborative Communication

Establish a "content shared library" where the official account uploads ICH materials for city accounts to use in secondary creation (e.g., Shaoxing account adding Yue Opera commentary); implement tiered KOL collaboration (sports KOLs highlight fun, ICH KOLs highlight culture, trendy KOLs use rap for presentation).

5.3 Technology Optimization: Rational Empowerment, Cultural Balance

Apply AIGC technology precisely by designing AIGC directions according to ICH connotations (e.g., celadon patterns + basketball elements), explaining pattern meanings in videos, and having inheritors review AIGC content for accuracy; develop "Zhe BA ICH AIGC filters" allowing users to add Lion Dance AR effects to their basketball videos, automatically tagging topics for dissemination. Use "multi-camera + 4K" to capture detailed ICH movements, adding "interactive subtitles"; launch "Zhe BA ICH VR Experience," allowing users to immersively watch ICH performances via Douyin VR, enhancing experience and sharing desire.

6 Conclusion

This study focuses on the intersection of intangible cultural heritage, sports events, and short video platforms, exploring the "breakthrough" path of Zhe BA's "ICH + sports" short videos on Douyin. Using literature review and case study methods, it sorts out relevant theories and industry data, analyzes typical cases, and processes 128 short video samples and user comments.

The research finds that the integration of Zhe BA and ICH follows a logic of "mutual empowerment." Zhe BA provides a mass communication scene and audience for ICH, while ICH injects cultural connotation and differentiated advantages into Zhe BA. Zhe BA has formed a "content - channel - interaction" communication system on Douyin. Content production presents ICH elements through scenario embedding, character stories, and technological empowerment. Channel operation relies on matrices, topics, and online-offline linkage for diffusion. User interaction promotes active participation. Communication effects are significant, but problems like content homogenization and superficial ICH integration exist.

This study enriches theories of digital ICH communication and sports short video narratives, providing a model for the integration of regional sports events and ICH. However, limitations exist: samples only include Zhe BA's official Douyin short videos, not city account or KOL content; effect evaluation lacks offline survey data. Future research could expand the sample scope, compare ICH communication practices of events like "Village BA," incorporate offline surveys to improve evaluation comprehensiveness, and explore new models like "ICH + sports + e-commerce" to promote ICH inheritance and innovation.

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