

The Digital Catalyst: How Grassroots Sports Are Fueling Rural Revitalization in a Less-Developed Chinese County

Alan Qian¹

¹ Stevenson School, United States

Correspondence: Alan Qian, Stevenson School, 3152 Forest Lake Road, Pebble Beach, CA 93953, United States.

Received: October 2, 2025; Accepted: October 13, 2025; Published: October 14, 2025

Abstract

In recent years, leveraging digital media to advance rural revitalization has become a pivotal strategy throughout China. This study investigates the Guizhou “Village Super League” (VSL) as a catalytic initiative in this context, exploring how digital new media magnify its socioeconomic and cultural influence. Based on a qualitative case study of the VSL, we conducted 16 in-depth interviews with strategically selected stakeholders, including government representatives, event organizers, village leaders, and local digital content creators. Findings reveal a three-stage mediation model: (1) The convergence of government-led digital strategy, narratives of rural authenticity, and hybrid media engagement sparked extensive online dissemination; (2) This visibility was effectively monetized through brand commercialization, digital entrepreneurship, and the formation of digitally connected rural communities; (3) These developments collectively facilitated the reconstruction of rural cultural identity, local economic growth, and improvements in rural governance. The study thus provides a valuable framework for understanding digitally-mediated rural revitalization and offers practical strategies for replicating this success.

Keywords: digital new media, grassroots sports, Guizhou Village Super League, rural revitalization

1. Introduction

Rural revitalization is not only a strategy to promote sustainable rural development in developing countries, but also an inevitable trend towards global urbanization”.^[1] In China, where rapid urbanization and economic transformation have reshaped societal dynamics, the government has elevated rural revitalization to a national priority. With the “Rural Revitalization Strategy” launched by the Chinese government in 2018, a wide array of policies has been put in place. The initiative aims to elevate agricultural productivity, improve rural infrastructure, and promote local industries. These policies hope to alleviate rural poverty and ensure growth in China’s countryside. While initial efforts focused primarily on agriculture, tourism, and industrial integration, grassroots innovations have gradually gained momentum. A standout example is the *Guizhou Village Super League (VSL)*, which has emerged as a transformative force in rural revitalization, demonstrating the potential of community-driven initiatives to catalyze socioeconomic change.

Evolving from a local football tournament into a nationally celebrated movement, the Guizhou Village Super League has quickly drawn widespread attention since its launch in 2023. With its vibrant atmosphere, inclusive participation, and cultural authenticity, the Village Super League has caught the attention of many people, including Kaka, Iniesta, and many more. The Village Super League is a grassroots soccer tournament held in rural Guizhou which featured amateur village teams Farmers, shop owners, and students make up the teams; the football matches are accompanied by ethnic performance, traditional cuisine, and fanfare. The Village Super League is more than just a source of entertainment that blends sport, culture, and social cohesion; it has also become a stepping stone for promoting local identity, generating tourism, increasing household income, and fostering pride in rural life. The Village Super League rapidly evolved the economy in Rongjiang county (where the league stadium is located), “the Rongjiang county has received a total of 7.6585 million visits and achieved revenue of 8.34 billion yuan yuan (\$1.18 billion) since the launch of the Village Super League in 2023, according to Xu Bo, Party secretary of the county”, according to the Guizhou Government Website.^[2]

Despite the Guizhou Village Super League’s growing popularity and positive impact on rural revitalization, there remains a theoretical gap in understanding how it contributes to rural revitalization. Existing research and scholarship tend to focus on economic interventions.^[3]

Shao (2024) has found that village level football and basketball leagues have played a positive role in influencing the county economy.^[4] There is insufficient research and attention paid to the social, cultural, and communicative dimensions of revitalization, particularly those amplified through digital new media. With the rise in popularity of streaming and social media platforms such as TikTok and Rednote, the Village Super League was able to capitalize on the opportunity to push local events to reach national and even global audiences.

Therefore, this research aims to fill that gap by using the Guizhou Village Super League as a case study to explore how grassroots events can contribute to rural revitalization. More specifically, it will explore how can grassroots sports events promote rural revitalization with the help of digital new media. Through this research paper, the study will offer new insight into the intersection of sport, media, and rural development in rural areas of China.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Core Concepts

Rural sports events refer to organized athletic activities that take place in rural areas. They incorporate modern sports formats with local traditions, cultures, or indigenous games. Rural sports events are more than just physical activity or exercise; they serve as a platform to express local culture, attract tourism, boost the local economy, and foster a sense of unity within the local community.^[5] Rural sports events are often deeply embedded in local culture and community life. The Guizhou VSL belongs to rural sports as it is rooted in village life, organized by local communities, and played by ordinary villages.

Rural revitalization refers to government strategies to reverse rural decline. The concept aims to enhance economic, social, and environmental vitality in rural areas.^[6] Rural revitalization aims to bridge the division between urban and rural neighborhoods through promoting balanced development of both and fostering innovation in rural governance and industry.

Digital new media refers to digital technologies and platforms that facilitate interactive, real-time engagement.^[7] This includes social media networks, live streaming services, digital content creation, and mobile applications. Digital new media is playing an increasingly important role in promoting brands and disseminating information in rural areas.

2.2 Research on Rural Sports Events, Rural Revitalization and the Impact that it has Brought on Local Villages

With the rise in popularity of grassroots sports events, scholars have paid increasing attention to how rural sports events contribute to rural revitalization. Zhang(2020) have conducted research showing how rural sports events can stimulate local economies through tourism, hospitality, and the sale of craft products.^[8] Biao, Ye. (2024) also suggests that it can enhance community identity and participation, offering rural residents a sense of pride and belonging.^[9] Peng Jianmin and Han Keli (2024) further emphasize its significance in enhancing social cohesion, passing on rural culture, and improving residents' physical and mental health.^[10] There is an increasing number of initiatives in China that promote tourism and cultural heritage by integrating sporting events into broader rural development strategies.

2.3 Research on Digital Empowerment for Rural Revitalization

The rise of digital agriculture has transformed traditional farming systems by integrating data analytics, precision tools, and mobile technologies. Chen(2024) have paid increasing attention to the social and economic implications of digital tools in rural communities, using e-commerce and social media for marketing farming and craft products produced by villagers from the local communities.^[11] Digital agriculture enables farmers to expand their market reach while also allowing them to build personal brands, share expertise, and access new revenue streams. Especially in the communication practice of sports events and cultural activities, social media has become a core link connecting event organizers and the audience.^[12]

2.4 Research Gaps

Despite the steadily increasing role of rural sports events in revitalization strategies, there still remains a lack of attention and research from scholars in this area. Very few studies have provided thorough research on the long-term outcomes of such events. The integration of digital new media into rural sports event planning and promotion is especially underexplored. Moreover, there is a lack of interdisciplinary approaches that connect sports management, rural development, and digital communication. This limits our understanding of how digital media can serve as comprehensive tools for revitalization in rural areas through promoting rural sports events. This study will address these gaps by using qualitative Analysis and emphasizing participatory, community-based perspectives.

3. Method

3.1 Case Introduction

Guizhou is a province located in southwest China. The Guizhou Village Super League is held in Rongjiang, a county situated in the southeastern part of Guizhou. Rongjiang offers a glimpse into a slower, tradition-rooted way of life of ethnic minority groups, such as the Miao and Dong.

The official launch of the Village Super League was catalyzed after Rongjiang County was designated as a National Football Model County in China during COVID-19 in 2021. This was just the beginning, as it set the stage for the most compelling grassroots sports stories in modern China. In 2021, a foundational pillar for the Village Super League emerged with the launch of the New Media Cultural Creativity Industry Park. The park included talent training base, livestreaming center, and product workshops. This strategic layout helped build a localized digital infrastructure, paving the path for the league's rise in popularity and boost in the local economy.

The village super league officially began in January 2023. It was an eight-team tournament organized by local villagers. With players coming from local Dong ethnic villagers and no corporate sponsorship or professional management, the games were refereed by volunteers and only local villagers to watch and support. From its launch, the Guizhou Village Super League was always more than just about the game of football; it was a cultural event and a civic celebration, featuring traditional Miao and Dong performances.

In the second season after its launch, the Guizhou Village Super League had expanded to 62 teams, drawing in more teams and extending to greater areas of Guizhou and China. The league transitioned from a round-robin format to a two-phase structure, which included preliminary rounds, knockout rounds, and finals.

Looking forward, the Village Super League is hosting the Belt & Road Friendly Tournament in 2026, inviting teams from Belt & Road partner countries to participate in grassroots friendly matches. In 2028, the Village Super League plans to debut the "Village Super League World Cup," inviting amateur and folk teams from around the world to participate. The tournament is set up as a cultural-sport exchange platform and hopes to promote cross-border friendship.

3.2 Field Research

This study was conducted from June 11th, 2025, to June 20th, 2025, using answers from in-depth interviews and participant observations. To enhance the credibility and rigor of the research results, the selected interviewees had characteristics related to the research topic. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the interviewees to ensure that their backgrounds were diversified but included direct participation of the Guizhou Village Super League. Thus, the inclusion criteria are as follows: (1) he/she have been actively participating and promoting the Guizhou Village Super League, (2) he/she have been actively involved in Guizhou Village Super League for over a year, and (3) he/she live in village or communities located in Rongjian County. A total of 16 in-depth interviews were conducted. The 16 interviewees can be divided into five groups, these six groups include: CEO of companies, member of the Rongjiang County Government, members of the Guizhou Village Super League Office, village head of local villages located in Rongjiang County, key influencers promoting Guizhou Village Super League. Under CEO of companies included IV1, the Founder of the Village Super League and IV 14, the CEO of travel companies promoting the Village Super League. Members of the Rongjiang County Government included IV 2, a member of the New Media Office, IV 4, a member of the Safety Office of the Rongjiang County Government, IV 7, the Principal of the Fourth Primary School of Rongjiang County, IV 16, the Director of the Cultural and Tourism Bureau of Rongjiang County and IV 3 the accountant of the Village Super League Company. Members of the Guizhou Village Super League Office includes IV 8, the Deputy Director of the Village Super League office and IV 9, the Director of the Village Super League Office. Village heads of local villages located in Rongjiang County includes IV 5, the founder of the Cultural Heritage Studio that promote local Dong ethn culture, IV 6, a village committee secretary that forms a team to participate in the Village Super League, IV 12, the village committee secretary of the Dali Dong village who formed a team to participate in the Village Super League and promoting rural revitalization and IV 13, Inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage of Dong Songs. The key influencers promoting Guizhou Village Super League includes, IV 10, Director of Rongjian County Television Station who promotes the development of the Village Super League, IV 11, Deputy Director of the Rongjiang County Media Convergence Center who promotes the development of the Village Super League through posting short videos on new media platforms and IV 15, a live streamer who promotes the Village Super League and leads villager to prosperity through the village.

Table 1. List of interviewees

ID Code	Gender	Age	Occupation	Role	Date of Interview	Length of Interview
IV 1	Male	30-40	CEO of Company	Founder of VSL	6/11	1 hour
IV 2	Female	25-30	New Media Office	Promoting VSL	6/12	1 hour
IV 3	Female	25-30	Accountant of VSL Company	Promoting VSL and Participate in the operation of the VSL company	6/12	1 hour
IV 4	Male	25-30	Safety Office of the Rongjiang County Government	Safety Management of Village Super League	6/12	0.5 hour
IV 5	Female	30-40	Founder of the Cultural Heritage Studio	Promoting Dong ethnic culture and increasing women's income	6/13	1.5 hour
IV 6	Male	35-40	Village Committee Secretary	Form a team to participate in the VSL	6/13	1 hour
IV 7	Male	40-45	Principal of the Fourth Primary Schol of Rongjiang	Hosting school super league and promoting VSL	6/14	1.2 hour
IV 8	Male	25-30	Deputy Director of the VSL Office	Support and plan the development of the VSL	6/14	1.2 hour
IV 9	Male	45-50	Director of the VSL Office	Support and plan the development of the VSL	6/14	0.4 hour
IV 10	Female	30-35	Director of Rongjian County Television Station	Promoting the development of the VSL	6/14	0.4 hour
IV 11	Male	40-45	Deputy Director of the Rongjiang County Media Convergence Center	Promoting the development through posting short videos on new media platforms	6/14	0.3 hour
IV 12	Male	50-55	The Village Committee Secretary of Dali Dong Village	Form a team to participate in the VSL, promoting rural revitalization	6/15	1 hour
IV 13	Female	60-65	Inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage of Dong Songs	Inherit intangible cultural heritage	6/16	0.3 hour
IV 14	Male	40-45	CEO of Travel Companies	Promote the integration of the VSL	6/16	1 hour
IV 15	Female	25-30	Live streamer	Promoting the VSL, leading villager to prosperity through the village	6/16	1 hour
IV 16	Female	35-40	Director of the Cultural and Tourism Bureau of Rongjiang County	Promote the culture of Rongjiang and boot the development of tourism in Rongjiang	6/20	1.2 hours

4. Findings

4.1 How does Digital New Media help the Village Super League Go Viral

4.1.1 Government Digital Strategic Planning

The Guizhou Village Super League is a remarkable example of how digital new media can elevate a local grassroots football event to a widely recognized cultural phenomenon. Through social media platforms such as Doyin (Tiktok), Xiaohongshu (Rednote), and Kuaishou, villagers and communities in Guizhou have been able to connect with national and even global audiences. This digital outreach isn't random or spontaneous, it is a structure effort. The people of Guizhou can promote their culture, traditions, and sporting spirit in a way that traditional media could not through the digital landscape that they have developed and set up. Instead of relying on outside coverage, the villagers have taken media production into their own hands, creating an inclusive and vibrant ecosystem of digital content that reflects their identity. IV 12, the village committee secretary of Dali Dong village, explained:

Now, our Dali Village has also established a new media task force. We encourage young people to engage in more new media activities, such as on Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Kuaishou. Some of these promotions are carried out by us almost every one or two months, inviting some young people to learn and then doing some

work in the hundred villages. Currently, some of our students are working on products here. He can sell both online and offline and also promote our Da Li tribe now mainly through the Internet.

The village committee secretary shares a key strategy in communities in Guizhou, empowering the younger generation to serve as digital ambassadors for their village. The youth can use digital new media as a platform to not only promote football matches but also showcase local crafts, food, and culture. The younger generation is transforming the Guizhou Village Super League into a broader platform for cultural commerce and storytelling.

4.1.2 Narratives of Rural Authenticity

What makes the Village Super League unique and different from top down media campaigns managed by corporations is the level of community involvement in the league's digital promotion, the league thrives on grassroots participation. Everyone in the stands watching the games, whether it's elders to children understands the power of technology as a storytelling tool. IV 2, the manager of the New Media Office, helping to promote the Village Super League, said:

When our streamers get on the court, it's not like in other places where we just join in the fun and watch the fun and that's it. It's not like when our streamers get on the court, everyone knows to pick up their phones and take pictures, whether it's a live broadcast or a video. Yes, everyone is a promoter. This atmosphere has already formed in our family.

The act of documenting and sharing has become second nature to the community. With so many villagers and communities in attendance, each match becomes a collective digital event with hundreds of villagers capturing moments from their unique perspectives. These overlapping and diverse streams of content give the Guizhou Village Super League a sense of authenticity and intimacy that professional broadcasts often lack.

4.1.3 Integration of Official Media and Social Media

The sense of shared responsibility and pride among the villagers in Guizhou has helped the Village Super League transform football matches into a cultural movement. IV 2, the manager of the New Media Office, quoted what the people of Heilongjiang had to say about the Village Super League:

All people create, all people promote, just as our secretary said, when you go to the street and ask someone who made Village Super League, everyone thinks it's their own doing, because all people are involved.

A key to the league's viral success is how every individual sees themselves as both a participant and creator. The league's success is built off the community's pride in their achievement, helping make the Village Super League go viral through frequently posting promotional content, but also through deeply meaningful and engaging content to viewers outside the village.

All posts on digital new media around the Guizhou Village Super League can create a rich narrative that captures attention far beyond the pitch. The digital content shared by villagers and tourists alike depict much more than just the football culture in Guizhou, it often includes behind the scenes, celebrations, and the culture and traditions during performances and along the sidelines. Viewers online are drawn to the authenticity and grassroots energy of the Village Super League, through each media post, the humor, joy and passion are evident and displayed on everybody's faces. To ensure the long-term visibility and engagement of the Village Super League, villagers across Guizhou have developed strategies that integrated digital media with cultural expression, these include regular organization of promotional activities, the training of youth in content creation, and the development of a unified community voice. Digital new media can democratize visibility and opportunity as demonstrated through the rise of the Guizhou Village Super League. Being able to harness the tools of the digital age can create a huge advantage for economically modest communities and can receive widespread recognition.

4.2 How Does Digital New Media Monetize the Viral Attention Generated by the Guizhou Village Super League

4.2.1 From Grassroots Football to a Marketable Brand

The Guizhou Village Super League has used the viral success that it has been able to generate in the past years to be able to transform the competition into a cultural sensation, but more importantly, it has also opened meaningful avenues for economic development through digital new media. The widespread online attention that the Village Super League has been able to generate online is not only just a measure of its rising popularity but is actively being translated into economic opportunity through the strategic use of digital platforms. Some examples of the league is able to monetize the process at multiple levels include IP licensing, brand partnerships, and individual content creators building sustainable careers.

The IP licensing of the Guizhou Village Super League as a marketable identity was a critical first step in the monetization process. Being able to evolve the league into a brand with economic value from a local grassroots football tournament. IV 4, a member of the Safety Office of Rongjiang County Government, explained:

They use the Guizhou Village Super League as a brand, this is an IP license, yes, right now the license, many regions, many provinces have come to Guizhou to sign this and that, to imitate this thing.

The Guizhou Village Super League can generate income through partnerships with outside regions eager to replicate its success. The establishment of the league as a licensed IP allows for collaboration that can include co-hosted matches, branded merchandise, tourism packages, and media rights.

4.2.2 Digital Entrepreneurship and Livestreaming Economy

The league isn't only leveraging properly managed cultural capital for commercial gain; they also use the important roles of individual digital entrepreneurs and live streamers to gain value. Many locals, who became content creator since the launch of the Village Super League have become influential micro-celebrities and businesspeople. IV 2, the manager of the New Media Office, gave an example:

Not everyone can find that many people who earn millions a year, but this is needed. One is that he is willing to work hard because this is hard work. Take Watermelon Girl for example, everyone earns over a million a year, over two million a year.

They use "Watermelon Girl" as an example, highlighting how virality, when paired with consistency and audience engagement, can lead to high levels of income and attracting more attention to the Guizhou Village Super League. These streamers use the league as a launchpad for their own digital careers, making not only entertaining content, but also marketing themselves, local products, and the spirit of the villages and communities in Guizhou.

4.2.3 Building a Sustainable Digital Future for Rural Communities

Rural communities have integrated modern media tools into their everyday work, showing how the digital engagement has been able to transform the economy in rural villages and communities. Their motto, "turning mobile phones into new farm tools, data into new farm supplies, and live streaming into new farm work," captures this shift perfectly. Villagers were able to document their lives, share their stories, and promote their businesses directly to consumers across the internet using this new media approach. During the Village Super League, as the game is going on the side, live streamers would often sell Guizhou specialty products from the stalls set up around the stadium, blending sports entertainment with e-commerce. This creates a closed loop of community promotion, viewer engagement, and income generation. However, sustaining this monetization required more than access and knowledge on using a smartphone, it demands a commitment to learning and adaptation, especially in the rapidly evolving landscape of digital media. IV 2, the manager of the New Media Office, said:

We have always been conducting free training. This is because the knowledge of this new media is updated very quickly at each stage. You need to keep learning and keep an empty cup mentality. You need to constantly enrich yourself, so that you can master the latest first-hand information and first-hand news, so that you can quickly keep up with the development of The Times and become a relatively good streamer.

These training sessions equipped the villagers with the tools and confidence to succeed as content creators, online sellers, and digital marketers. To ensure that a few individuals do not monopolize the benefits of the league's popularity, there is emphasis on continuous education for the whole community.

The Guizhou Village Super League has helped to diversify the local economy and reduced the community's dependence on traditional agriculture through inspiring new entrepreneurial ventures, from souvenir sales to mobile media startups. Villagers have turned what was once a grassroots sports league into a hub of economic innovations through combining strategic branding, grassroots influencer marketing, livestreaming commerce, and ongoing digital training. Small rural regions can gain visibility, build sustainable, locally rooted economies through harnessing the power of digital media through the right infrastructure and community engagement.

4.3 What Impact does the Guizhou Village Super League Bring to Rural Area

4.3.1 Reconstructing Rural Cultural Identity

The Guizhou Village Super League has not only been able to capture viral attention but also triggered a wave of transformation across rural areas in Guizhou. The Village Super League has brought a significant social, economic, and cultural impact to the countryside through combining grassroots football with new media and community engagement. The league has been able to inspire youth development, revitalize local economies, foster a stronger community spirit and healthier lifestyles. The league represents a new model of rural empowerment in China.

One of the most significant and visible impacts the Guizhou Village Super League has is the revitalization of rural economies. Many locals have called it a “super economy”. The league can draw in massive attention, both on social media and in person with tourists, it can channel a previously unimaginable amount of traffic and visibility into small village markets. IV 3, the accountant for the Village Super League Company, explains:

On our side, football has developed further, it has a stronger sports atmosphere, and then like we are developing car brand stores, and also to fill us with the wrong traffic, yes, there is our super economy, super good, this summary is particularly good, yes, In fact, it's about making the traffic of Spring and Autumn accessible to every common person, he, every common person's pocket, and truly achieving development. The above line is gone, you go in. This, like in the first week, everyone was very self-motivated. A long time ago, we didn't have that, our only organization was the village head, and then the spring bullet chat drive, hey, sign up, that's it.

Through the creation of a local infrastructure where even small vendors and entrepreneurs can benefit from the influx of visitors and digital traffic generated from the Guizhou Village Super League. The “super economy” has allowed for rural communities that were once overlooked to have the opportunity to develop commercial outlets, increase employment, and circulate economic activity within their population.

4.3.2 Driving Rural Economic Development

Beyond just economic growth, the Guizhou Village Super League has played a crucial role and influence on rural digital participation and entrepreneurship. Content creators, returning students, and digital workers in villages, who all previously lacked media visibility, have been inspired by the massive surge in popularity in the Village Super League. IV 2, the manager of the New Media Office, revealed the official statistics:

Cultivating more than 23,000 publicity accounts, 4 hosts with over 10,000 followers on group platforms, 46 hosts with over 100,000 followers, more than 100 people employed, and more than 300 college students returned to their hometowns to start businesses.

The Guizhou Village Super Leagues is a talent incubator, economic catalyst, and not just a sports event. Armed with skills and platforms that allow them to grow businesses, build audiences, and create value locally, many young people who once left their villages in Guizhou for work or education have now returned to the countryside. The Guizhou Village Super League has created professionalized local media, jobs, and strengthened rural economies.

4.3.3 Optimizing Rural Governance

The Guizhou Village Super League has not only impacted the villages economically and created opportunities for many villagers but is also has an educational and developmental impact on rural youth. Teamwork, resilience, and physical fitness are some of the values that have been fostered in the surrounding communities through participation in football. IV 7, the Principal of the Fourth Primary School of Rongjiang said:

Student who can persist in playing football has some advantages that our classmates do not have, such as the first one, um, teamwork ability. As for the second one, the student's ability to be willful and frustrated is something that none of our classmates can match. The third and most important reason is the physical condition of the students.

Sports like football offer a valuable platform for character development and self-discipline in villages where educational resources may be limited and recreational opportunities are scarce. Students can find strength and identity through participation in sports and collective activities. These soft skills are especially important for students who might struggle to compete academically with peers. Apart from having an educational and developmental impact the Guizhou Village Super League has had a cultural impact by helping reduce screen addiction and reengaging the rural youth in real-world activities. IV 7, the Principal of the Fourth Primary School of Rongjiang further explains:

I just showed some calligraphy and painting, some football activities, as long as he is not at home, when he comes out, he doesn't sleep in, doesn't play with his mobile phone, doesn't do these things, he can participate in these activities well to cultivate some learning habits, or some other things, as long as he is not addicted to his mobile phone, then he can do some other things with interest, It can be more attractive than the phone itself.

A common challenge in both rural and urban areas is the passive entertainment and excessive mobile phone use especially with children and teens, the Village Super League is able to provide an alternative through the exciting

structure of their events. Young people are reconnected with the offline world, encouraged to pursue hobbies and exposed to structured routines through community led football matches and associated are or cultural events.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Main Findings

To investigate the Guizhou Village Super League in Guizhou Province, China, this study used a qualitative case study approach. Through conducting 16 in depth interviews with stakeholders in the league, that included government officials, league organizers, media promoters, and village leaders, this study was able to obtain enough analysis to answer the central research question: *How can grassroots sports events promote rural revitalization with the help of digital new media?*

The research question is able to be broken down into three section focusing on the factors contributing to the popularity of the Village Super League, the monetization of online traffic and the impacts of rural revitalization. The interviews were able to touch on all three sections. The league was able to gain nationwide attention because of the integration of digital new media with grassroots community participation. The viral attention generate by the league was strategically translated into economic opportunity through evolving the league into a brand identity. Using IP licensing, tourism, partnerships, and merchandise sales, the Village Super League is able to sustain economic benefits beyond the matches themselves. The league stimulated tourism, small business growths, and employment, the impact of the league extends beyond economics into broader rural revitalization.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to an expanded understanding of rural revitalization by emphasizing the underexplored dimensions of social, cultural, and communicative agency. This research paper is able to bridge the gap in existing scholarship that has largely focused on top-down economic interventions by introducing an interdisciplinary lens that combines sports studies, digital media, and rural development. What makes the Village Super League a unique model is its participatory media driven rural transformation where local communities are not passive beneficiaries but active agents of change. This study also extends the boundaries of digital agriculture to include digital cultural production and rural storytelling as tools for revitalization.

5.3 Practical Implications

Investing in digital infrastructure, content creation training and grassroots sport programs are some of the important strategies that this research highlights for rural revitalization and development. Many governments and development practitioners use the Guizhou Village Super League as a model and catalyst to implement initiatives that integrate sport, culture, and digital media to empower communities. By supporting localized content creation and fostering inclusive participation, other rural regions can replicate this model to drive revitalization from within.

References

- [1] Yang, J., Yang, R., Chen, M. H., Su, C. H. J., Zhi, Y., & Xi, J. (2021). Effects of rural revitalization on rural tourism. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 47, 35–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2021.02.008>
- [2] Rongjiang County Government. (2024, July 12). *Village Super League: A new engine for Rongjiang County's high-quality development*. Rongjiang County Government Official Website. https://www.rongjiang.gov.cn/xwzx_5903512/rjyw_5903513/202407/t20240712_85091552.html
- [3] Liu, W., Zhai, F., Bai, Y., & Guan, J. (2025). Non-mega sport policy and economic development—A quasi-natural experiment based on the "National Football Model Counties." *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*.
- [4] Shao, Y. Evaluation of the influence of "Village Super League" and "Village BA" on the county economy of Hunan Province based on network analysis and XGBoost model. (n.d.).
- [5] Yan, L., & Xu, J. (2024). The success factors of community events: A case study of the village super league in Rongjiang (China). *Event Management*, 28(6), 883–894. <https://doi.org/10.3727/152599524X17077053867854>
- [6] Li, J., Liu, Y., Yang, Y., & Jiang, N. (2019). County-rural revitalization spatial differences and model optimization in Miyun District of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Region. *Journal of Rural Studies*.
- [7] Liu, J., & Li, F. (2024). Rural revitalization driven by digital infrastructure: Mechanisms and empirical verification. *Journal of Digital Economy*, 103–116. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdec.2025.01.002>
- [8] Zhang, Y., Wang, H., & Liu, Z. (2020). The role of sports in promoting health and social cohesion in rural

China. *International Journal of Rural Health*, 15(3), 125–137.

- [9] Biao, Y. (2024). The role of 'Village BA' in enhancing rural sports public services: A case study of rural revitalization in Guizhou-China. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 4, 469–478. [https://doi.org/10.58557/\(ijeh\).v4i4.266](https://doi.org/10.58557/(ijeh).v4i4.266)
- [10] Peng, J. M., & Han, K. L. (2024). Explanation of the significance of folk sports culture in contemporary rural revitalization. *Contemporary Sports Science and Technology*, 14(28), 134–136, 142.
- [11] Chen. (2024). Research progress and prospect of rural digital economy in China—Bibliometric analysis based on CiteSpace. *E-Commerce Letters*, 13, 6007. <https://doi.org/10.12677/ecl.2024.1341841>
- [12] Du, J., Chen, M.-Y., & Wu, Y.-F. (2020). The effects of social media on sporting event satisfaction and word of mouth communication: An empirical study of a mega sports event. *Information*, 11(10), 482. <https://doi.org/10.3390/info11100482>

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).