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A Study on the Commercialisation and Brand Building of Sports Event IPs

-- Taking Individual Badminton IP Events as an Example

Zhehao Dai

Computer Science and Technology (Teacher Education), Fuyang Normal University, Yingzhou District, Fuyang, Anhui, 236037, China

Abstract: Against the backdrop of the state's promotion of high-quality development in the sports industry and the ongoing deepening of the national fitness strategy, sports event IPs have become a core driver and vital engine for the transformation and upgrading of the sports industry. With the upgrading of consumption and the widespread adoption of digital technology, public demand for sports consumption is becoming increasingly diverse and quality-oriented, whilst the commercial value and brand influence of sports event IPs are becoming increasingly prominent. As a sport with high popularity and a vast participant base in China, badminton has seen the rapid rise of personal IP tournaments built around retired top athletes in recent years, becoming a new growth point in the exploration of sports event commercialisation. This paper systematically reviews domestic and international research from the past decade on the commercial operation, brand building, value conversion and digital transformation of sports event IPs, summarising the main directions, core viewpoints, research methods and limitations of existing studies. The research reveals that current domestic studies predominantly focus on highly professionalised sports such as football and basketball, as well as large-scale multi-sport events, whilst paying insufficient attention to strong sports with a solid grassroots foundation, such as badminton. Furthermore, research on individual athlete IP events remains largely confined to descriptive analysis and the listing of issues, lacking a systematic analysis of the mechanisms by which individual IPs are transformed into independent event IPs. Taking the 'Lin Dan Cup' badminton personal IP event as a case study, this paper conducts an in-depth analysis across four dimensions: commercial operation models, brand-building pathways, digital empowerment mechanisms, and risk management strategies. It summarises the event's developmental experiences and existing shortcomings, whilst proposing targeted optimisation pathways. The study aims to fill the theoretical gap in the field of domestic badminton individual IP events, refine the theoretical framework for the commercialisation and brand building of sports event IPs, and provide practical guidance for retired athletes in China wishing to establish individual IP events and cultivate indigenous, independent event IPs.

Keywords: Sports Event IP; Commercial Operation; Brand Building; Individual IP Events; Badminton.

1. Research Background and Significance:

1.1. Research Background

In recent years, the state has successively introduced a number of policies to promote the development of the sports industry, clearly setting out strategic objectives to cultivate indigenous sports event IPs, promote the upgrading of sports consumption, and construct a modern sports industry system, thereby providing solid policy support for the cultivation and development of sports event IPs [1]. At the same time, the comprehensive advancement of the National Fitness Strategy has significantly enhanced public awareness of sports participation, with sports consumption demand continuing to be released. Consumption scenarios such as event viewing, sporting experiences and leisure and entertainment are constantly expanding, and the market potential for sports event IPs continues to grow.

Badminton is one of the most widely played and popular racket sports in China, possessing multiple attributes including competitiveness, entertainment value and social interaction. According to relevant statistics, the number of people participating in badminton in China is vast, with the number of grassroots events increasing year on year and enthusiasm for participation running high[2]. At the same time, Olympic and world champions such as Lin Dan, Chen Long and Bao Chunlai have retired one after another. Leveraging their individual sporting achievements, public influence and fan base, they have established personal badminton IP tournaments named after themselves, such as the 'Lin Dan Cup' and the 'Chen Long Cup'[3]. Leveraging the star power of their founders, professional event organisation and accessible entry barriers, these tournaments have rapidly garnered industry attention and market recognition, emerging as a new force in China's sporting events sector.

However, alongside this rapid development, these personal IP badminton tournaments also face numerous practical challenges. Firstly, their revenue models are limited; most events rely excessively on government subsidies and corporate sponsorship[1]. Diverse monetisation channels—such as the development of event broadcasting rights, the sale of merchandise, and brand licensing—have yet to be effectively established. Consequently, their ability to generate self-sustaining revenue is weak, placing significant pressure on sustainable operations; Secondly, brand recognition is insufficient. With vague positioning and severe homogenisation of content, it is difficult to establish a distinctive brand image or create memorable market touchpoints. Consequently, most events have short lifespans, and their influence is difficult to sustain; Thirdly, there is excessive reliance on the founder's personal brand. The value of the events is heavily tied to the founder's personal IP,

lacking an independent brand identity, operational framework, and value foundation. Should the founder's popularity wane or negative public sentiment arise, the event's visibility and commercial value will suffer a direct blow; Fourthly, digital capabilities remain low. Most events still rely primarily on traditional offline operations and promotion, failing to fully utilise digital technologies such as new media, big data, and VR/AR to optimise event organisation, enhance user experience, and expand the reach of their outreach, making it difficult to adapt to new trends in sports consumption in the digital age.

Against this backdrop, a systematic analysis of the current status, challenges and root causes of the commercialisation and brand development of badminton personal IP tournaments, coupled with an exploration of effective pathways for transforming personal IP into independent tournament IP, and the establishment of sustainable operational models and brand systems, holds significant practical importance for promoting the healthy development of China's badminton personal IP tournaments and supporting the rise of indigenous, self-sustaining tournament IP.

1.2. Significance of the Study

1.2.1. Theoretical Significance

Current research on sports event IP in China exhibits a marked bias in focus[4]. Most studies concentrate on leading sports such as football and basketball, as well as major international events like the Olympic Games and the World Cup, whilst paying insufficient attention to traditional Chinese strongholds such as badminton and table tennis. In terms of event types, existing research predominantly centres on government-led and corporate-sponsored events, with a relative scarcity of systematic studies on events centred around individual athletes' IP.

Furthermore, existing research on individual IP events largely remains at the level of describing the current situation and identifying issues. Whilst common problems such as a single-dimensional profit model, over-reliance on the founder, and weak brand development have been highlighted, there has been a failure to delve deeply into the root causes of these issues. Nor has a comprehensive theoretical framework been established covering the empowerment of individual IP, the cultivation of event IP, and the formation of independent IP; in particular, there has been a lack of in-depth exploration of the core mechanisms governing the transformation of individual IP into independent event IP.

This paper takes badminton personal IP events as its research subject. This approach not only fills a theoretical gap in the field of domestic badminton personal IP events but also enriches the theoretical framework for the commercial operation, brand building and value transformation of sports event IPs. It provides a theoretical reference and research paradigm for subsequent studies of a similar nature, thereby promoting the extension of sports event IP research in China into niche sectors and emerging business models.

1.2.2. Practical Significance

From an industry perspective, the establishment of personal IP tournaments by retired top athletes in China has become an industry trend[5]. Beyond badminton, retired athletes from sports such as table tennis, tennis and basketball have also been actively launching their own personal IP tournaments. However, the majority of these personal IP tournaments face common operational challenges, including difficulties in generating profit, weak brand presence, high dependency on external factors and short lifecycles, creating an urgent need for scientific theoretical guidance and practical strategies that can be implemented.

Through a systematic analysis of the 'Lin Dan Cup's' commercial operations, brand building, digital practices and existing challenges, this paper summarises its strengths and weaknesses and proposes targeted optimisation strategies. These will not only provide direct guidance for the sustainable development of the 'Lin Dan Cup', helping it to break free from over-reliance on the founder's personal brand and establish an independent, mature tournament IP system; but also serve as a reference for similar badminton tournaments based on individual IPs, such as the Chen Long Cup and the Bao Chunlai Cup, helping them avoid developmental pitfalls; simultaneously, the research conclusions can be extended to individual IP tournaments in other sports, such as table tennis and tennis, providing a universal reference for the cultivation and operation of individual IP tournaments for retired athletes in China, thereby promoting the large-scale and high-quality development of indigenous sports event IPs and supporting the transformation and upgrading of the sports industry.

2. Current State of Research at Home and Abroad

2.1. Current State and Development Trends of Overseas Research

Overseas sports industries boast a long history, a high degree of marketisation and mature event IP operational systems. Research on the commercialisation, brand building, value management and individual IP events in the sports sector began early, yielding abundant results and a comprehensive framework. This research covers multiple dimensions, including commercial value assessment, brand asset management, operational model innovation, the fan economy, digital empowerment and risk governance, and has formed a relatively mature theoretical framework and research paradigm.

Regarding research into the commercial value of sports event IP, scholars generally agree that high-quality event IP constitutes the core asset of the sports industry, characterised by scarcity, high added value and strong monetisation potential, with market-oriented operations being key to maximising the value of event IP. Mullin et al. (2020) focused on the monetisation of event IP value, proposing that broadcasting rights, sponsorship, ticketing, merchandise and brand licensing constitute the five core monetisation channels, and that a diversified monetisation system is a vital safeguard for the sustainable development of event IP.

In research on sports event IP brand building, international scholars have emphasised topics such as brand positioning, brand equity, brand loyalty and integrated marketing communications. Aaker's (1991) five-star model of brand equity has been widely applied in sports event IP research, with scholars using this model to construct event IP brand evaluation systems based on dimensions such as brand awareness, recognition, associations, loyalty and equity; Kotler (2019) emphasises the importance of integrated marketing communications in event IP brand building, arguing that multi-channel, multi-platform and multi-format integrated communications can effectively enhance the recognisability and influence of event IPs, whilst strengthening brand identification among audiences and

sponsors.

Regarding research on personal IP in sporting events, foreign scholars have predominantly explored this from perspectives such as the fan economy, the celebrity effect, IP conversion and risk management. Research generally holds that athletes' personal IP possesses strong traffic-generating power and a solid fan base, which can assist in the rapid launch of events, the accumulation of attention and the attraction of commercial resources; however, the binding of personal IP to event IP also carries significant risks, as factors such as fluctuations in the popularity of personal IP, negative public sentiment and the career lifecycle can all affect the stable development of event IP. Two core controversies exist within the academic community: firstly, the demarcation of boundaries between personal IP and event IP—namely, how to leverage personal IP to empower events and foster the formation of an independent brand identity; and secondly, the dual effect of the founder's influence—specifically, how to mitigate the impact of a decline in the founder's popularity on the event IP and achieve independent, sustainable development.

In recent years, the rapid development of digital technology has driven international research to focus on the digital empowerment of event IPs, with a particular emphasis on the application of technologies such as VR/AR, big data, artificial intelligence and social media in event organisation, user experience, communication and promotion, and commercial monetisation. Research indicates that digital technology can break down spatial and temporal barriers, enhance audience engagement, interaction and immersion, expand the reach of event coverage, precisely target specific audiences, and optimise operational efficiency, thereby injecting new momentum into the commercialisation and brand building of event IPs.

Overall, research on sports event IPs abroad has established a mature theoretical framework and practical experience. In particular, achievements in the operation of individual IP events, diversified monetisation, brand independence and digital transformation provide important insights for the development of individual badminton IP events in China.

2.2. Current Status and Development Trends of Domestic Research

Domestic research into sports event IPs began relatively late. Following the State Council's issuance of the 'Several Opinions on Accelerating the Development of the Sports Industry and Promoting Sports Consumption' in 2014, the marketisation of the sports industry accelerated, the commercial value of sports event IPs gradually became apparent, and related research grew rapidly; after the deepening of sports industry reforms in 2015, research interest continued to rise, research outputs became increasingly diverse, and the scope of the field gradually expanded. Current domestic research primarily focuses on four key areas: commercial operation, brand communication, value assessment and case analysis, exhibiting characteristics of policy orientation, market-driven approaches, a focus on the domestic context and an emphasis on practical application.

In terms of research on commercial operation, scholars have focused on topics such as market-oriented operational models, optimisation of profit channels and resource integration. Gong Zaipeng[6] (2020) compared domestic and international operational models, pointing out that fully market-oriented operations can effectively mobilise social resources, enhance efficiency and meet consumer demand, representing an inevitable trend in the development of China's sports event IPs; at the same time, he identified issues prevalent in domestic events, such as single-source revenue models, over-reliance on sponsorship and insufficient self-sustaining capacity, and proposed the construction of a diversified monetisation system to enhance profitability. Feng Zixiong[7] (2020) focused on self-produced sports IP, constructing an operational framework centred on content innovation, brand building and channel expansion, emphasising that content quality is the core competitive advantage and that a differentiated positioning is key to standing out.

In the field of brand communication research, new media communication, integrated marketing and fan engagement have emerged as key areas of interest[8]. Lu Tao[9] (2018), drawing on integrated marketing communication theory, analysed the role of new media platforms such as Douyin, Weibo and WeChat in the dissemination of sports IPs. He argued that new media offers rapid dissemination, broad coverage, strong interactivity and low costs, enabling a swift increase in event visibility and bridging the gap with audiences; he proposed the establishment of a multi-channel, multi-dimensional integrated communication system to maximise brand value. Some scholars have focused on the fan economy, exploring how fan engagement can strengthen retention, enhance loyalty, drive consumer conversion, and empower the commercialisation of sporting events.

In terms of case studies, domestic scholars predominantly select well-known sporting IPs to conduct SWOT analyses, strategic research and value assessments. Wang Gui[2] (2021), using the Li Yongbo Cup 3v3 Badminton Tournament as a case study, employed the SWOT-AHP model to analyse its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and constructed a development strategy framework. The study identified professional organisation and a strong grassroots following as strengths, whilst pointing to ambiguous positioning, low commercialisation and insufficient promotion as weaknesses; Lan Senlin and Yang Haoping [3](2026), using the Lin Dan Cup as a case study, explored pathways for service innovation and experience enhancement in individual badminton IP tournaments through digital empowerment, proposing to optimise registration, scheduling, live streaming and interaction via digitalisation to improve service quality and satisfaction.

Although domestic research has achieved certain results, significant shortcomings remain: firstly, research coverage is uneven, focusing on football, basketball and major events, with limited attention paid to strong disciplines such as badminton; secondly, research lacks depth, consisting largely of descriptions of the current situation, lists of problems and recommendations for solutions, whilst lacking theoretical frameworks, mechanism analysis and empirical testing; thirdly, research on individual IP tournaments is scarce, with very few dedicated studies; in particular, no systematic conclusions have yet been reached regarding the core issue of transforming individual IP into independent tournament IP, making it difficult to effectively guide practice.

3. Research Framework and Theoretical Basis

3.1. Complementarity of Existing Research

A synthesis of domestic and international research findings

reveals that scholars have undertaken extensive and rigorous work on topics such as the commercialisation of sports event IP, brand building, operational management and value conversion. This has yielded a wealth of findings and established a mature theoretical framework, providing a solid theoretical foundation for understanding the developmental patterns, operational logic and value mechanisms of event IP, whilst also offering important guidance and reference for the cultivation of event IP in China.

Research in China and abroad exhibits significant complementarity: foreign research began earlier and has a mature system, focusing on theoretical and long-term development issues such as commercial value assessment, brand asset management, risk governance and digital empowerment; it adopts a macro perspective, employs scientific methods and produces systematic results. Domestic research, whilst having started later, has developed rapidly; it focuses on practical and short-term development issues such as market-oriented operations, brand communication, analysis of local case studies and the formulation of practical strategies; it adopts a localised perspective, features content closely aligned with reality and offers practical conclusions. The two complement one another, jointly driving the continuous deepening of research into sports event IP.

3.2. Shortcomings of Existing Research

Existing research still exhibits clear limitations and shortcomings, primarily manifested in three aspects:

Firstly, there is a marked bias in the choice of research subjects. Both domestic and international research is heavily concentrated on top-tier professional leagues such as football and basketball, as well as major international events like the Olympics and the World Cup, whilst paying very little attention to the event IPs of China's traditional strongholds such as badminton, table tennis and volleyball. In terms of event types, research primarily focuses on government-led and corporate commercial events, with a severe lack of systematic research on athlete personal IP events; this gap is particularly pronounced, making it difficult to cover the development of the entire industry.

Secondly, research lacks depth, and core issues have not been systematically explored. Domestic research largely remains at a superficial level, limited to describing phenomena, summarising current conditions, listing problems and proposing countermeasures, whilst failing to delve into underlying causes, construct core mechanisms or conduct empirical testing. This is particularly evident in research on individual IP events, which merely points out issues such as single-source revenue streams, dependence on founders, weak branding and short lifespans, without analysing the underlying logic or root causes, nor constructing scientific and systematic solutions.

Thirdly, case studies lack specificity and fail to provide in-depth analysis of typical examples. Existing case studies predominantly focus on large, established event IPs, with insufficient attention paid to emerging business models for individual IP events in dominant sports such as badminton; The few studies on badminton events merely offer superficial analyses of tournaments such as the Li Yongbo Cup and the Lin Dan Cup, lacking comprehensive, in-depth examination of commercialisation, brand building, IP transformation and risk management. Consequently, it is difficult to distil targeted and universally applicable strategies.

In summary, current research on sports event IPs exhibits significant shortcomings and gaps. Conducting systematic and in-depth research focused on individual IP events in dominant sports such as badminton holds significant theoretical value and practical significance. Accordingly, this paper selects the 'Lin Dan Cup' as a case study to conduct an in-depth analysis of its operational model, brand development, digital practices and challenges. It explores the mechanisms for transforming personal IP into independent event IP and proposes optimisation strategies, with the aim of filling research gaps, enriching the theoretical framework, and providing practical guidance for the sustainable development of domestically-owned event IP.

This study's theoretical contribution establishes an analytical framework for the transformation of personal IPs into independent event IPs and deepens the theory of event IP value conversion. While existing research has generally identified issues such as excessive dependence on founders, weak brand independence, and short life cycles in personal IP-based events, most prior studies have remained confined to descriptive levels, failing to delve deeply into the transformation mechanism between personal IPs and event IPs. This paper systematically analyzes the internal logic and pathway mechanisms underlying the transformation of personal IPs into independent event IPs from three dimensions: IP empowerment, brand independence, and value support; it proposes a three-stage transformation model consisting of "founder IP-driven traffic generation – event content accumulation – formation of an independent brand," thereby addressing the theoretical gaps in existing research regarding IP conversion mechanisms and providing a new analytical perspective for the theory of event IP value conversion.

Practical insights indicate that building a diversified monetization system is crucial for the sustainable development of individual IP-based competitions. Currently, most such competitions rely on a single revenue model—overly dependent on government subsidies and corporate sponsorships, while possessing weak self-sustaining capabilities. Competition organizers should draw upon the operational experience of established competition IPs by expanding beyond traditional revenue streams such as ticket sales and sponsorships to actively develop diversified monetization channels—including competition copyright licensing, derivative product development, brand licensing, membership services, and offline training—thereby establishing a comprehensive commercial ecosystem based on "competition content + derivative products + value-added services," thereby enhancing the event's risk resilience and long-term sustainability.

Limitations of the study: The research perspective predominantly focuses on the event organizers, while insufficient attention is paid to the user perspective. This paper primarily explores issues related to commercialization and brand building from the viewpoint of the event organizers; however, it does not provide an in-depth examination of the perceptions, experiences, and behaviors of core user groups such as participants, spectators, and fans. As the ultimate evaluators and consumers of the event's IP value, users' needs and behaviors exert a decisive influence on the development of the event; the absence of a user-centered perspective results in a lack of comprehensiveness in the study's conclusions.

The research focus will be to deepen studies from a user perspective and refine the theory of event IP value co-creation. Future research can adopt a user-centric approach to conduct

in-depth explorations of topics such as fan engagement, user experience, community interaction, and value co-creation, while analyzing the role mechanisms through which users contribute to the brand building and value enhancement of event IPs; ultimately, this will facilitate the development of a user-participatory theory for event IP value co-creation, thereby providing more targeted guidance for event organizers in optimizing their user strategies and enhancing user retention.

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