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The Impact of IP Branding of Contemporary Chinese Football Clubs on Urban Soft Power

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Abstract. Contemporary Chinese soccer is in a contradictory stage of low competitive performance and high social enthusiasm. Despite the poor international performance of the national soccer team, policy-driven and grassroots tournaments have provided new opportunities for soccer IP construction. Soccer club IP has also gradually become an important carrier for the enhancement of urban soft power, with the values of economic radiation, cultural identity and international dissemination. This paper focuses on the impact of soccer club IP on urban soft power and its construction path, adopting the case study method and literature research method, selecting typical cases such as Guizhou "Cun Chao", Zhejiang Greentown, Chongqing Tongliang Dragon Club, etc., and combining the theoretical literature of communication science and local practice to reveal the multiple paths and effectiveness of IP construction. Their success depends on policy support, technical empowerment and youth training. In the future, we should focus on the differentiated paths for small and medium-sized cities and the reverse cultural export in the context of globalization. The study provides city policy makers with theoretical support and practical reference for the development of modern soccer industry.

Keywords: Soccer, Cultural symbols, Brand design, Urban culture.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of the Internet, grassroots leagues such as "Wu Hook Soccer" have emerged strongly, a large number of soccer self-media bloggers are spreading soccer culture online, and the school soccer policy has achieved initial results. This study focuses on the social influence of Chinese soccer, which presents a double-sided picture of hope and disappointment; this study is very meaningful to the future development of the soccer industry and the construction of urban culture; this study mainly focuses on the importance and methods of the construction of soccer clubs' IPs; it utilizes the literature analysis method and the case study method to find and read relevant information and literature, and the advantage of these two methods is that it can well analyze football culture, and it can also analyze football culture. The advantage of these two methods is that they can well analyze the development prospect of soccer culture as a symbol of the city and a carrier of collective memory, combining communication theory with real cases, which is conducive to the research; the ultimate research goal of this study is to come up with a replicable way applicable to the development of the contemporary Chinese soccer industry. This involves not

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only the competitive level of the team, but also the culture, history, and values of the club, which is related to the future development of the soccer culture and the city [1].

2. Literature review

Xiong A-feng emphasizes the huge industrial chain behind soccer and the huge development prospect in the article " High-Quality Development Paths for Football Industry in the Context of Building a Sports Powerhouse" [2]. In the article "The Implications of European Membership Soccer Clubs for the Development of Chinese Professional Soccer Clubs", the drawbacks of the development of Chinese soccer under different operation modes are also mentioned [3]. Although this article explains the role of the membership model in maintaining the stable operation of clubs, it also mentions that it cannot be copied completely and does not give a model of club operation that meets China's national conditions." Mold Clay to Make a Vessel: The Philosophical Exploration of Stadiums as Collective Memory Landscapes" suggests that sports venues are multidimensional landscapes that carry collective memory and political identity, but contemporary Chinese soccer clubs tend to use urban sports centers as their home stadiums, a form of leasing that drastically reduces the sense of cultural identity [4].

On March 25th the World Qualifying Tournament was held in Hangzhou, tens of thousands of fans went to the Olympic Sports Center to cheer for the national football team, which directly drove Hangzhou's tourism spending to 308 million, and hotel bookings surged by 230% year-on-year. At a time when the proportion of tertiary industry has increased significantly, the use of urban sports elements to enhance the city's brand image and promote the city's brand marketing has become a planning direction that is more in line with the context of the times [5]. With the accelerated speed of information dissemination, the increase of additional products of competitive sports, the expansion of venues, the expansion of broadcasting channels, the public no longer enjoys the delayed results of the game, but can participate in the game in real time through the medium of offline cheering, online viewing, Internet chat rooms and so on. In the new development stage, only by continuously improving the sports consumption mechanism and continuing to optimize the sports consumption market environment can accelerate the growth of the sports industry [6]. The integration of city cultural symbols into the IP brand construction of soccer clubs will become a general trend.

3. Impact of IP construction on urban soft power

3.1. Social cohesion

Soccer club IP plays a role in promoting residents' sense of belonging and social integration. Henri Tajfel, in his study of social identity theory, proposed that "an individual recognizes that he belongs to a particular social group, and also recognizes the emotional and value significance that being a member of the group brings to him". Collective identity theory therefore suggests that fans often attribute themselves as members of a soccer club rather than just consumers. Soccer grew rapidly in Britain during the Industrial Revolution, as the working class needed a sport as an emotional outlet for the group, and as a team game for eleven individuals and inexpensive to organize, soccer became the obvious choice for regional representation. Today, the audience of soccer in the UK has expanded from the working class to the whole society, and its influence is increasing day by day. Chinese soccer has a different historical background, but the social cohesion that soccer culture brings is still very influential. Hunan's fourth-grade fan Lin Zijin, who is seriously ill, traveled to

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Phoenix Hill Stadium to meet his idol Wei Shihao, and the fans chanted "Rise Up" in the rain. Fans have a common love for soccer, and this sense of belonging can break down occupations and classes, allowing people who do not know each other to encourage and shout for Lin Zijin, who is also a fan. Soccer is developing in the direction of national sport, and the inheritance of this culture requires the common participation of the whole society. Under the division by region, soccer clubs are more suitable as social emotional carriers than traditional spirits and customs [7].

3.2. City symbols and cultural identity

Soccer club IP has symbolic significance as a city cultural symbol. Symbol systems such as team names, team logos, slogans, etc. naturally carry the history and collective memory of the city, and the development process of soccer culture is closely linked to the process of regional modernization and urbanization, which can become a symbol of the city and the country. Chongqing Tongliang Dragons FC has incorporated the local intangible cultural heritage "loong dance" into the team name and logo. With the deep integration of martial arts, intangible cultural heritage and tournaments, Tongliang Dragons FC has also been elevated from an ordinary soccer team in the Chinese League A to the height of a local cultural symbol [8]. Tongliang Dragons FC has a low average age, excellent performance in the league, and the courage to fight, with the label of straightforward and unconvincing. Using soccer as a carrier, the living habits and group styles of city residents will also be deeply branded [9]. Liverpool is a strong team in the Premier League, but it is also the name of the city, and many people know Merseyside precisely through the derby with Everton. This shows that modern soccer has its origins in the city, and the relationship between the game and the city is a complex process of constant mutual integration and influence, and the formation of soccer culture must be influenced by the culture of the city. It can be said that soccer has coalesced different city cultures into one, and has contributed to the cultural construction of cities. Club IP strengthens citizens' sense of belonging and identity through common emotional ties, forming a sense of "urban community".

3.3. International communication and city branding

As a "soft business card" for city internationalization, club IP can significantly increase the city's popularity. In the live broadcast of the tournament, the phenomenon of cultural dissemination is inevitable, and if the landmarks and cultural elements of the city are implanted in the TV and network broadcast, the city will receive additional attention. Guizhou's "Cun Chao" to competitive sports as a carrier, so that the previous low exposure of ethnic minorities, remote townships can also harvest traffic, not only played the event brand, creating social and economic benefits, but also spread the unique charm of local customs and rural culture. With the help of live broadcasts, online platforms and focused coverage by mainstream media, the "Cun Chao" tournament has continuously conveyed a comprehensive image of rural vitality, humanistic characteristics and sportsmanship to the outside world [10]. The brand symbols of Chinese cities are mostly historical humanities and natural landscapes, and the former seldom includes sports culture. Although this kind of photo-taking content is representative of the city's culture, it can't form a sense of identity in the hearts of tourists, and naturally it can't attract more people to come here. Therefore, the model of closely linking city culture and soccer culture is worth being promoted. Therefore, the IP construction of soccer clubs can also publicize the brand image of the city and let the city go global.

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4. Contemporary Chinese soccer club IP construction way

4.1. Youth training system

A club is a concept of an aggregate, and essentially fans like the players who work together on the pitch. Therefore, players can play a greater role in publicity as a symbol than the club as a whole, and the construction of club IP cannot be separated from the shaping of players' personal image. Although the direct purchase of stars can improve the strength and image of a club in a short period of time, the cultivation of local players who are closely related to their clubs can better reflect the symbolic significance of the players and stimulate the identity of the fan base [11]. National soccer rookie Wang Yudong was born in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province, and returned to his hometown Zhejiang Ostrich Football Club after participating in the Milan Cup, and played a few games for the Ningbo team. 23 years after joining Zhejiang Greentown, and 24 years after joining in January to form a striker combination with Owusu. Compared to the foreign aid Ousu, Zhejiang Greentown club will Wang Yudong molded into a native future star, although initially Ousu's topic is higher, the number of goals and assists is more, but as Wang Yudong's growth course is publicized, social hotspots and athletic status also have more rebound. Secondly, youth training will directly drive the player's surrounding relatives and friends to become participants in the soccer culture, further expanding the scope of influence. Therefore, the construction of youth training system can not only promote the development of player quality, but also improve the club IP, the development of the club can not be separated from the youth soccer reserve talent training this fundamental project [12].

Words like “at”, “or”, “with”, etc. should not be capitalized unless they are the first word of the title. Follow the rule of Capitalization in title. Do not capitalize short prepositions (less than 5 letters), articles, and short coordinating conjunctions.

4.2. IP digitalization

In recent years, the continuous development of virtual reality technology has further improved the level of immersive viewing, and the online image of clubs and players, as an intangible asset, is an important link in the construction of club IP. The game Pro Evolution Soccer creates virtual cards for every player in the real world based on the player's match data and physical functions, and the data values of these cards fluctuate according to different performances in different seasons. Under the regulation of FIFA, the objectivity and fairness of these virtual images can be guaranteed. The popularity of players and clubs will also be further enhanced through online communication, such as videos and games. During the Qatar World Cup, the organizing committee constructed virtual stadiums through meta-universe and digital twin technologies to bring fans a better viewing experience [13]. These virtual images can be derived from a variety of secondary creative products and become the carrier of club publicity and cultural dissemination.

4.3. Information matrix

Nowadays, the promotion of soccer clubs needs to cater to a wider audience, and online communication needs to produce different contents to maximize the attention resources of the audience in a limited time, so the information matrix is essential [14]. The message matrix will be centered on a soccer event, with different focuses derived from it. Facing senior fans, clubs can put videos about the team's technical and tactical analysis and lineup prediction; when the audience is not a fan, the content can be shifted towards the historical and cultural characteristics of the team's

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location; for the youth group, pushing the high-flame clips of the players and the second-generation content is more likely to attract attention. Different groups have different strategies to push the flow, but essentially need to accumulate a sufficient amount of quality content in the early stage. For example, when Manchester City introduced their new recruit Khusanov, the Premier League and City officials released several different messages on social media, including highly specialized tweets discussing Khusanov's tactical position, videos introducing his hometown of Uzbekistan, and vlogs of the new recruit's daily life after joining the team. The Premier League and City's official new media communication matrix enables them to the new media matrix created by the Premier League and Manchester City has enabled them to plan distinctive content and target it to the preferences of different audiences [15]. Chongqing Tongliang Dragon Football Club has a similar communication strategy. The club puts videos with different contents on short video platforms, such as clips of team matches, internal activity clips, and local cultural and tourism promotional videos; pushes tweets on public numbers, such as team profiles and the historical and cultural background of Tongliang; and launches interactive contents with high participation on Weibo, such as quizzes and polls. Through the deep binding with Tongliang, the club forms a high-quality information matrix, which is based on the users' stay time, liking, and response to the content of the different panels of the game, such as competition, food, and history. Based on the data of user's stay time, likes, and completion rate in different sections such as athletics, food, history, etc., we can realize the accurate placement of the subsequent content. The high-quality information matrix can match the publicity content favored by different audiences in different media through saturated placement, and users can receive publicity information of different contents even if they show no interest in them after touching the relevant contents for the first time, so as to reach the mechanism of constant trial and error and re-matching.

5. Recommendations

The long-term development of clubs cannot be separated from the strong help of local governments. At the competitive level, local governments can take the lead in organizing multi-level tournaments, integrating the existing league system, and realizing a smooth transition from school soccer to professional soccer. At present, China's youth soccer has built a competition system with the integration tournament of The China Youth Football League as the leading event, supported by the U series league of professional ladder teams of the sports department, the league of member associations, and the four-tier league of school soccer of the education department, but there are problems such as chaotic scheduling and the lack of high-quality matches. Various types of leagues can reallocate resources under the guidance of the government, standardize fixtures by level, and improve the mechanism of promotion and relegation. In addition, the government can invest in the construction or renovation of professional soccer stadiums to provide clubs with modern home grounds and drive the development of the surrounding business district through the tournament economy [16]. Etihad Stadium, as the home stadium of Manchester City, not only leads the world in terms of turf maintenance and supporting facilities, but also boasts Manchester City's team history memorial and honorary showroom. These precious collective memories can enhance the IP's historical heritage, improve the club's brand influence, and attract more audiences. Local governments can also provide policy support for clubs to bring in foreign coaches or players, such as visas and settlement, to enhance the club's competitive level and commercial value.

In addition, the construction of IP brands requires extensive public participation. For example, in the "School Walk" column by self media blogger "Wang Chuqi", not only soccer fans, but also all school students may be attracted to learn about the sport by participating in the offline activities.

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This kind of activity is disseminated online and offline at the same time, with a high degree of participation and influence, which can help the official media to complete the construction of the information matrix and expand the audience group.

The construction of soccer clubs' IP brands requires a balance between athletic performance, cultural heritage and commercial results, and the multi-dimensional enhancement of the city's soft power through technological empowerment and mass co-creation. These IP construction paths are interlocked, with soccer leading to cultural dissemination, then urban culture leading to social traffic, and finally, the development of urban soft power while driving the cultural tourism economy, historical heritage and team performance. This successful path of developing urban soft power through soccer club IP construction can be categorized as the core equation of "development = youth training + digital + media".

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that building soccer club IP brands is in line with the development direction of the current era. Clubs such as Chongqing Tongliang Dragon and Zhejiang Greentown have already demonstrated the role of soccer culture in enhancing the soft power of a city, while actual cases such as Guizhou Cun Chao show that the construction of brand IP can expand the influence of cultural communication. Thus, it is further concluded that the IP brand construction of soccer clubs needs to be carried out in three dimensions: youth training system, IP digitalization and information matrix. This study provides a lot of valuable references for future research in this direction, mainly affecting the relationship between soccer culture and urban soft power, proposing to integrate the development of sports culture into the kernel of the city's spiritual civilization, and future research should focus more on the replicable path of IP construction, and carry out an in-depth exploration in the practical aspects.

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