Exploration of the Communication Logic and Path from Traffic to "Retention": Post-observation of the Phenomenon of "Su Chao"

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Abstract: The Jiangsu Urban Football League concluded with Taizhou claiming the championship. As a groundbreaking media phenomenon in 2025, this event has sparked extensive scholarly and media discussions on urban branding, news communication models, and public historical perspectives. This paper argues that the media spectacle of "Su Chao" is shaped by the convergence of visual, narrative, and interactive symbols. Through the mimesis dissemination on all-media platforms, a communication environment of "reflecting reality — obscuring reality — hyperreality" has been formed. To sustain the practical value of "Su Chao", the paper advocates avoiding excessive symbolic dissemination, guarding against traffic traps, and preventing the risk of "entertainment to death."

Keywords: Su Chao; Media spectacle; Simulation communication; Brand value

1. Introduction

As the Jiangsu Provincial Urban Football League (hereinafter referred to as "Su Chao") concludes, reflecting on this football tournament that ran from May 10 to November 1, people can perceive how "Su Chao" constructed a passionate and regionally distinctive football world through various symbols, images, and narratives during its media dissemination. This world not only presented authentic football matches but also underwent media processing and creative transformation, forming a unique media spectacle through simulacrum communication [1]. People can positively affirm that "Su Chao" achieved dual improvements in social attention and public participation through media convergence, realizing both cultural and economic benefits, while providing replicable and promotable practical models for local characteristic IP development. However, with the tournament's conclusion, the "Su Chao" heat inevitably experienced a cliff-like "cooling down." People need to consider how to transition from the "high-temperature" to "cooling-off" event hiatus before the new round of "Su Chao" begins, explore practical models to transform "high-temperature" into "normal-temperature" operations, and continue promoting collaborative efforts

among all participants to sustain the practical value of "Su Chao."

2. Review of the research

The "Suzhou Super League" (Su Chao), recognized as the most representative "phenomenon-level communication event" of 2025, has attracted extensive scholarly and media research from multiple perspectives. A literature search on CNKI using the keyword "Su Chao" as of November 23 reveals that before September, the sources of related literature were predominantly newspaper articles. From September to November, academic journal articles gradually increased and showed a trend of surpassing others. This change aligns with Su Chao's evolution from "early official promotion" to "mid-to-late mass communication." Meanwhile, institutions like the School of Physical Education at Nanjing Normal University have seen faculty and students publish research closely tied to sports disciplines, demonstrating how sporting events can drive academic impact. The media industry has also seized this opportunity, producing frequent special features and thematic reports that foster collaboration between academia and industry. Overall, the research perspectives are diverse, with three categories standing out in the communication field:

2.1. Media dissemination empowers new urban image shaping

Wang Dan argues from the perspective of "urban image construction" that "through value-driven positioning, narrative innovation, and code co-creation, "Su Chao" not only provides valuable references for the modern transformation of urban image construction in the new era, but also signifies the formation of a replicable and scalable innovative paradigm for urban image communication" [2]. Jia Fangjun, Director of Huangshi City's Converged Media Center and senior journalist, observes that "Su Chao" offers clear solutions for media centers to enhance "urban image dissemination" and "cultural tourism industry upgrading" [3]. Wang Xiaowan et al. propose that the "Su Chao" model marks a profound symbolic shift in modern urban branding, moving beyond the superficial logic of "sports events = advertising space" to an ecological closed-loop system encompassing "Competitive IP-Space Optimization-Economic Derivation-Cultural Coding" [4].

2.2. Sports events empower new media communication models

Lei Ming, Chief Editor of Xinhua Daily, analyzed the full-chain dissemination strategy of viral sports IP under Party media dominance, focusing on dimensions such as mainstream media agenda-setting, discourse innovation, cross-media coordination, and resource integration [5]. Wei Haiyan, Chief Reporter of Yanfu Mass Daily Press Group, proposed that the breakout success of "Su Chao" stemmed from the media's value elevation through narrative innovation and relationship activation [6]. This transformation evolved media roles from information transmitters to co-creators of meaning, connectors of relationships, and enablers of value, demonstrating innovative approaches for local media in the context of media convergence. Chen Yi from Changzhou News Media Center noted that "Su Chao" not only promoted the event and city but also profoundly influenced media reporting methods and communication patterns, serving as a test of deep media integration and innovative communication strategies [7].

2.3. People-centered empowerment: New dimensions in historical perspectives on the people

Through comparative analysis of the "Village Super League" and "Jiangsu Super League" cases, Liu Jing and Li

Guo discovered that both competitions established a progressive dynamic chain of "public initiative—cultural empowerment—resource integration—media dissemination" [8]. They proposed that "the intrinsic driving force of mass sports fundamentally manifests as the people's active participation in sports." Xu Nuoxuan and Du Changliang identified three core characteristics of community football events—non-professional engagement, ritualized cultural symbolism, and de-commercialized governance—that effectively stimulated public sports participation and strengthened cultural identity [9]. Xu Haitao and colleagues leveraged the resource advantages of media convergence to deconstruct the "emotional" elements embedded in these events [10]. By employing "emotional storytelling" to resonate with audiences, they precisely controlled reporting pacing and content, effectively guiding public engagement, and delivered a "well-placed shot" in urban cultural and economic development.

3. The communication logic behind the traffic of "Su Chao"

This event has garnered numerous labels. From a media perspective alone, various outlets have provided comprehensive coverage of the "Su Chao" through multiple angles. Traditional media like Xinhua Daily and People's Daily have delivered authoritative analysis and dissemination via in-depth reports and commentaries. New media platforms such as TikTok, Kuaishou, and sports communities like HUPU have leveraged user-generated content to rapidly spread event-related topics, memes, and short videos online, creating viral spread. In terms of hashtag-driven social interactions, capitalizing on Jiangsu's distinctive' loose "regional culture, netizens crafted personalized" character designs' for each participating team. These labels not only reinforced inter-city regional identity but also became trending topics in social interactions. Thus, the "Su Chao" has evolved beyond being merely a sports competition into a meticulously crafted visual spectacle, gradually transforming into a captivating media phenomenon.

3.1. Visual symbols: From "cultural carriers" to "ultra-authentic identity symbols"

The 13 teams of "Su Chao" have transformed urban cultural symbols from "authentic heritage" into "hyper-realistic communication tools" through visual elements like AI anthropomorphism, city mascots, and team emblem interpretations. These visual symbols are continuously replicated and amplified during dissemination, ultimately transcending their original cultural connotations to become media tools that evoke emotional resonance and identity among audiences. For instance, Taizhou Team's emblem incorporates Fengcheng elements, reinterpreting regional characteristics through modern visual language. This design not only represents a sports team but also becomes a symbol of Taizhou's urban identity. This symbolic process allows audiences to form unique perceptions of the team and city through media exposure, even without attending matches in person. Notably, this "hyper-realistic" symbolic system is not entirely detached from reality but rather presents a more engaging and communicative form through media processing based on real-world foundations.

3.2. Narrative symbol: From "event record" to "super meaning production machine"

Through narrative reconstruction of the "Su Chao" matches, the media have infused the games with heightened drama and humanistic depth. Reports spotlight grassroots players' career trajectories, urban narratives behind the teams, and heartwarming moments both on and off the pitch. These elements effectively counteract the alienating effects of competitive sports, fostering emotional resonance among audiences. This narrative approach also enables the "Su Chao" to transcend traditional sports reporting limitations, expanding from isolated sporting events

to multifaceted social discourse. Consequently, the league evolves beyond mere football matches into a collection of emotionally charged stories, offering viewers richer viewing experiences and intellectual stimulation. Whether through technical analysis of matches, emotional discussions about fan culture, or the vibrant social dynamics of ticket-hunting, the event successfully engages broader audiences. This media-guided, user-driven topic production model transforms the "Su Chao" from a sporting spectacle into a cultural feast shared by all.

3.3. Interactive symbols: From "watching participation" to "ultra-real social behavior"

"Su Chao" transforms "spectator behavior" into "ultra-real social symbols" through social media interaction design. Especially on social media platforms, topic tags with a regional teasing nature, such as "Scattered Jiangsu", not only bridge the distance between netizens but also further enhance their attention and sense of participation in "Su Chao." The phrase "The game comes first, friendship comes fourteenth" does not originate from the actual match atmosphere but is an interactive symbol created by the Nanjing Release WeChat official account through "official meme play", which quickly became a label of "regional identity" for Jiangsu people. People confirm their identity as "Jiangsu people" through "meme play." To some extent, "ultra-real participation behavior" has replaced actual on-site participation, becoming the primary way for the public to gain a sense of belonging.

4. Hidden risks in the propaganda of "Su Chao"

Media-driven spectacles through live streaming, short videos, and hashtag-driven social platforms have created hyper-realistic viewing environments and immersive atmospheres. While these innovations provide audiences with unprecedented viewing experiences and streamlined access to event information, they simultaneously create a disconnect between spectators' perceptions and the actual sporting experience. In the current era of deep media intervention, the essence of the Su Chao—its regional identity and social dynamics—has been progressively reconstructed through "simulacra", blurring the boundaries between reality and symbolic representations. Applying Baudrillard's simulacrum theory, the study observes that the Su Chao, as a digital-era communication model, generates traffic frenzy through multimedia platforms via visual branding, trending topic marketing, and narrative reconstruction [11]. This process has cultivated a communication ecosystem characterized by "reflecting reality, obscuring reality, and hyper-realization." Public perception of the league increasingly stems from media symbols rather than live matches, ultimately establishing a "hyper-realistic event system" that operates independently from physical competitions.

4.1. Hyper-realistic scenarios constructed through narrative framing

Cutting-edge technologies like live streaming and slow-motion replays deliver multi-dimensional coverage of matches. During pivotal moments, the live feed seamlessly transitions to capture players' expressions, dynamic movements, and audience reactions, immersing viewers in the adrenaline-pumping atmosphere. Enhanced by professional commentators' vivid commentary and in-depth analysis, audiences interact through real-time bullet comments and discussions, significantly enriching the viewing experience. However, the media's portrayal is meticulously curated and edited, presenting only selected footage and curated content. While media outlets employ exaggerated rhetoric and emotional storytelling to heighten engagement, these techniques often create a disconnect between the actual game dynamics and the presented narrative.

4.2. Information cocooning under the echo wall effect

Fans and media outlets transform thrilling moments, humorous clips, and players' unique performances from matches into short videos that rapidly spread across platforms. These videos typically deliver strong visual impact and entertainment value, quickly capturing massive audience attention. Platforms then curate personalized content based on user interests, allowing viewers to easily access information they care about. However, the fragmented nature of short videos hinders comprehensive match understanding. When consuming information, audiences tend to favor content that aligns with their values, hobbies, and existing beliefs, while ignoring or avoiding information that contradicts their views. This selective exposure traps audiences in their information comfort zones, further exacerbating information homogenization.

4.3. Simulation generation in label-based social interactions

Jiangsu's distinctive "loose" culture has gained viral traction online, with netizens creatively branding participating teams with humorous regional labels. This cultural phenomenon sparked extensive discussions and social engagement, significantly amplifying the event's reach. However, while these labels are entertaining, they also exhibit biases and stereotypes. As oversimplified representations of local culture, they fail to authentically capture the diversity of cities. Overuse of such labels may foster regional misunderstandings and prejudices. The media's excessive focus on regional elements could divert public attention from football's competitive essence to regional rivalry, enhancing event buzz but undermining its core values. This approach ultimately hinders the sustainable development of football competitions.

5. Sustainable path of the practical value of "Su Chao"

The "Su Chao" phenomenon not only showcases the thriving development of Jiangsu football but also highlights a unique model for transforming traffic into lasting influence. Through innovative communication methods and precise content positioning, "Su Chao" successfully attracted widespread attention and sparked phenomenal social discussions within a short period, achieving a "dimensional elevation" of urban image. For instance, cities with relatively weak traditional cultural and tourism resources, like Huai'an and Suqian, transformed "Canal Culture" and "Chu-Han Culture" into national communication symbols through team emblems like "Liangli Ma" and the classic "Farewell My Concubine" scene. Changzhou achieved generational breakthroughs in urban image by adopting a self-deprecating narrative of "Changzhou → Diaozhou → Jinzhou," converting its traditional image as an "industrial city" into a youthful symbol of "humor and optimism." However, "Su Chao" has yet to fully withstand the test of time and faces many uncertainties in the future. Lu Wenxuan argues that "Su Chao" must guard against challenges to sports authenticity from media distortion, capital erosion, and excessive administrative intervention [12]. It needs to resolve the paradox of diluted participation during scale expansion and continue cultural negotiations under pressure from capital symbolization and administrative discipline, ultimately transforming short-term hype into sustainable public engagement rooted in local identity and cultural practices. This study suggests that "Su Chao" should avoid excessive symbolic dissemination, remain vigilant against falling into traffic traps, and prevent becoming "entertainment to death" to continuously consolidate its practical value.

5.1. Avoid excessive symbolic dissemination and diversify perspectives in sports event coverage

Symbolic production must anchor itself in "authentic core values", ensuring sports event communication remains

grounded in the true essence of "sportsmanship." To enhance reporting quality and communication effectiveness for the "Su Chao", media should adhere to authenticity principles, focus on the events themselves, and present comprehensive, objective depictions of match realities. Beyond highlighting results and highlights, a deeper exploration of behind-the-scenes stories is essential to showcase the full scope of competitions and the essence of sportsmanship. The media should adopt diversified reporting approaches, avoiding overemphasis on regional rivalry or sensationalism while appropriately increasing coverage of event culture and football philosophies to elevate cultural depth and influence. Utilize new technologies to innovate reporting formats, enhancing audience engagement and interactivity to improve viewing experiences. For instance, establishing a "symbol-real" bidirectional flow mechanism can help audiences better appreciate the diversity and charm of football.

5.2. Guard against traffic traps and foster a positive communication ecosystem

To overcome the label trap and echo chamber effect while promoting free information flow and rational dialogue, platforms should reduce over-reliance on user preferences and increase content diversity and randomness. Platforms should enhance user guidance to encourage rational discussion participation and discourage emotional or one-sided expressions. For controversial topics, experts and scholars should be invited to provide analysis and direction, avoiding blind conformity and emotional reactions. Simultaneously, users should improve media literacy by actively seeking diverse information and rationally evaluating different viewpoints. On social media, users can broaden their thinking and cognitive horizons by following media outlets and accounts with varying perspectives, reading articles and comments from multiple viewpoints, and engaging in discussions. This approach enhances analytical and judgmental capabilities while expanding intellectual horizons.

5.3. Preventing the overindulgence in entertainment and prioritizing people-oriented services

The "Su Chao" should adhere to a people-centered development philosophy, making the fulfillment of public sports needs the cornerstone of its development. In event planning and organization, it should fully consider the public participation willingness and experience, providing more opportunities and high-quality services. For instance, increasing match frequency and team participation to allow more amateur players to engage; optimizing schedules to avoid conflicts with public work-life schedules; upgrading venue facilities and service quality to create better viewing and playing environments for spectators and players, thereby aligning events with public expectations. Additionally, organizing football-themed cultural activities such as lectures, training sessions, and exhibitions can popularize football knowledge, enhance public awareness and passion for the sport, further deepen the integration between events and communities, and promote sustainable development.

6. Epilogue

The media spectacle phenomenon of "Su Chao" is the result of multiple factors working together. Conducting multidimensional analysis and research on it helps us better understand the communication patterns and cultural values of sports events in contemporary society. This paper primarily focuses on "Su Chao", with limited attention paid to similar events in other regions, and the generalizability of the research findings requires further verification. Communication practices have proven that the "simulacrum communication" of sports events is not a monster but an inevitable choice to enhance communication power in the digital era. The key lies in ensuring that symbolic production serves real values, such as promoting urban cultural dissemination, creating industrial

economic benefits, and serving the promotion of mass sports. The study anticipates that the Jiangsu Football City League will become more mature in media communication, making greater contributions to the prosperity of sports culture and social-economic development.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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