

# What Types of Chinese Rural Sports Attract Attention: Take the Village Basketball Association as an Example

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**Abstract:** In August 2022, a video clip of the 'Beautiful Village Basketball Association' in Guizhou, China, known as the 'Village Basketball Association' (VBA), went viral on Tik Tok (Tik Tok, a social media platform for creative videos of music, is the largest knowledge communication platform in China.). Using this as an example, this study analyzes the reasons for the VBA's rapid popularity as a reflection of the new elements of rural sports communication. Results herein bridge current gaps of sports communication in contemporary Chinese villages and explores a new form of cultural empowerment for rural sports. Moreover, 71,325 comments from the VBA's ten most popular Tik Tok clips were analyzed in Python using high-frequency word analysis, sentiment analysis, and co-occurrence word analysis through text mining methods. The study found that the atmosphere, which features bustling noise and excitement, is the main attraction for the public. The distinctive cheerleading and rewards of the VBA also starkly contrast with the NBA. Third, the main participants are local villagers and public participation is extremely high. Lastly, because no form of capital is involved, it is perceived as a purely sporting activity so that many people are tempted to join.

**Keywords:** China; Rural Sports; Web Crawler Technology; Short Video; Sportsmanship

## 1. Introduction

Rural sports in China are usually centered in largely agricultural and rural areas<sup>[1]</sup> with the following characteristics: first, it is mainly composed of peasants who have, intergenerationally, lived in the villages, have settled down, and subscribe to a stable cultural structure<sup>[2]</sup>. Second, there exists a regional culture centered on the land, where villagers are familiar with each other and the population is relatively stable<sup>[3]</sup>. Third, massive sports activities are often organized to bring villagers together to rally for unity and pass down cultural memory, making the village both cohesive and centralized<sup>[4]</sup>. Currently, there remain inevitable difficulties in developing Chinese rural sports: first, because of urbanization and industrialization<sup>[5]</sup>, many farmers have left the villages to participate in urban life, signaling a decline in sociocultural appreciation of rural land and the loss of future progenitors of the area's culture, therein making it difficult to carry out many rural sporting activities<sup>[6-7]</sup>. Second, whenever rural culture is mentioned, people often associate it with negative terms such as poverty, ignorance and underdevelopment. This greatly contrasts urban culture, which is often associated with terms such as wealthy, civilized, and advanced<sup>[8]</sup>. This perpetuates the cultural marginalization of rural sports and weakens the state of its overall discourse<sup>[9]</sup>. Lastly, the utilization of rural sports is seriously inadequate, the depth of excavation is insufficient, the propaganda method is rigid, and the effect of cultural dissemination is unsatisfactory<sup>[10-11]</sup>. Hence, some excellent rural sporting activities can only be confined to local dissemination. However, identifying what specific kind of cultural sporting content is used by the villages can attract public interest. This can be combined with short videos to effectively show the characteristics of Chinese rural sports and generate cultural identity<sup>[12-13]</sup>, allowing a better complement between the culture and the form of dissemination used.

## 2. Review of the Literature

### 2.1 A Review of Research on Rural Culture and Social Media

The relationship between rural culture and the social media focuses on the content, the form, and the feedback loop between them<sup>[14-15]</sup>. The communication of rural culture refers to the act of communication where rural culture is used as a means of delivering information, which has potential for rural development and poverty alleviation<sup>[16]</sup>. No matter how great the rural culture is, it nonetheless requires novel forms of media to communicate it<sup>[17]</sup>. Modern media has revolutionized the form of expression of rural culture and is represented by new forms of electronic and digital media. This largely relies on technology for the delivery of information<sup>[18]</sup>, preserve traditional techniques<sup>[19]</sup>, expand the space for cultural development in rural societies<sup>[20]</sup>, and facilitate cultural interaction between various classes<sup>[21]</sup>. The key to communicating rural culture lies in a threefold interaction of the cultural content, the immersion of local knowledge, and the implementation of emotional strategies<sup>[22]</sup>. The second of which is the utilization of new forms of communication, emphasizing the global interactive communication system of the internet<sup>[23]</sup>, strengthening digital technologies<sup>[24]</sup>, and fostering digital thinking among villagers<sup>[25]</sup>.

### 2.2 A Review of Research on Rural Sports and Short Videos

Short videos are currently the most popular form of communication, with the most common length being 15-second, 30-second, or 1-minute length videos uploaded on various popular social media platforms. Its low barriers to produce, strong interaction rates, high timeliness, and widespread communication<sup>[26-27]</sup>, make up apparent gaps that are present in other forms of media<sup>[28]</sup>, allowing it to gain a large number of fans<sup>[29]</sup>. This ultimately gives it high levels of effect across most (if not, all) platforms<sup>[30]</sup>.

Short videos are perfect in presenting rural sporting content rapidly, which effectively re-empowers the voices of farmers<sup>[31]</sup>. It obtains a large amount of evaluation and capacity for immediate feedback, which promotes the reproduction of rural sports<sup>[32]</sup>. When using short videos to communicate the rural culture, it is primarily important to focus on the demand of users and understand what the public likes about rural sports to enhance their sense of immersion and recreation<sup>[33]</sup>. If it does not quickly gain the attention of users, they will skip away quickly. Secondly, using webcasts to demonstrate the originality and ecology of rural sports enhances cultural identity<sup>[34]</sup>. Lastly, To achieve a digital ethnography<sup>[35]</sup>, it increases the interaction<sup>[36]</sup> and promotes an active discussion of rural sports among internet users and encourages them to share socially for a secondary communication.

### 2.3 Research Blanks

Chinese scholars are currently likelier to use short videos to study the urban and recreational culture, which is contrast to the already fewer studies on rural culture. With the huge cultural differences arising from the different historical backgrounds of villages in China and other countries, there exist only a few studies on the rural culture of modern China on the International Science Citation Index database. There are also only a few studies exploring rural sports becoming a hit compared to other popular sports. This proves an already existing gap on the scholarly attention on successful communication of rural sports.

## 3. Research Case and Methodology

### 3.1 Research Case

In August 2022, a clip of a basketball match in the village of Taipan in Qiandongnan Prefecture, Guizhou Province, China reached 1,000,000 views with over 100,000 comments after it was uploaded on the popular social media site TikTok. Approximately 262.2 million people watched the live stream on the day of the final match, driving the sporting culture of local villages to the top of the trending list and turning it into a model of rural sporting revitalization. The match was called the 'VBA' by netizens because it resembled the NBA and most of the participants were villagers aged between 22 to 40 (Figure 1).

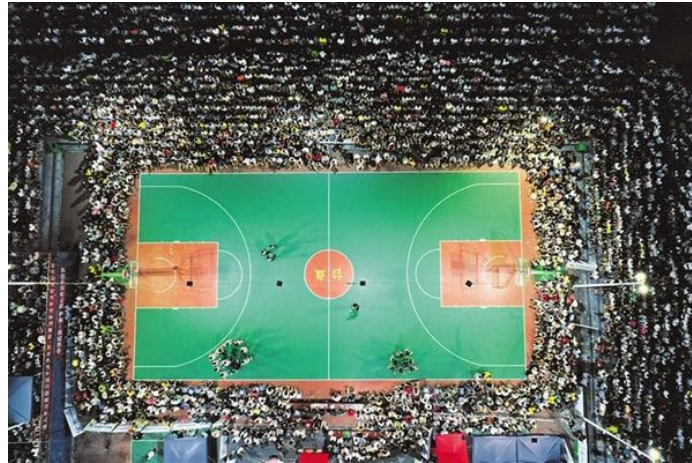


Figure 1: VBA. Source: Eye on the Sky News (2022).

### 3.2 Data Collecting

Firstly, Python was used to obtain videos with the keyword 'VBA' from the database through the API interface of Tik Tok, which were arranged in descending order according to the number of plays. Eventually, ten short videos were obtained, as shown in Table 1 below (statistically analyzed at August 25, 2022). Where the comment data were also crawled.

Due to the limitations of Tik Tok, each video could only crawl about one-third of all the comments, initially receiving 71,325 comments. The second step used Microsoft Office software to clean the comment data. This process included removing blank comments, images, and unrecognizable emojis. This was then followed by merging similar words and converting English letters to cases, resulting in 58,300 comments as samples. Next, Micro-word Cloud software was applied (Micro-word Cloud is a software developed by Beijing Jiahetianyuan Technology Development Co., Ltd. as a pragmatic online word cloud graph generator, supporting word frequency analysis, sentiment analysis, etc.) to analyze comments in terms of high frequency words, sentiment, and co-occurring words.

Table 1: Top 10 "CBA" Short Videos

No.	Publishing Platform	Date	Video Title	Number of Comments (pieces)
1	CCTV News	August 9,2022	Thousands of people, a rare seat, and a scalper for the trophy!	32000
2	Bai Xing Guan Zhu	July 21, 2022	Guizhou Countryside Basketball Association is full of audience, which resembles the NBA live!	52000
3	Communist Youth League of Guizhou	August 3, 2022	A perfect ending! This is the most spectacular aspect of basketball!	28000
4	Charming Shipping	August 11,2022	The VBA cheerleading team in Qiangdongnan, Guizhou province, is on fire.	11000
5	CBS Records	August 4,2022	Guizhou VBA, basketball tournament and sportsmanship.	17000
6	Bai Xing Guan Zhu	August 3,2022	The NBA has basketball beauties, Guizhou VBA has ethnic beauties.	6719
7	Mr.Xiao Ping	August 5,2022	With this love for basketball, could Guizhou join the CBA league?	16000
8	Henan City Channel	August 3,2022	On the 3rd of August, Li Ping, the VBA team from Qiangdongnan, Guizhou, won the championship.	8509
9	Colorful Guizhou Recommender	August 5,2022	Wu Zhongqing, the top point scorer in Guizhou VBA finals.	9169
10	Eastern Miaoling Boy	August 12,2022	The atmosphere, sportsmanship, and the match scene of basketball in rural Guizhou.	2907

### 3.3 Data analysis

#### 3.3.1 Analysis of high frequency words

The high frequency words referring to the words which are found more regularly in the sample

provide an understanding of those discussed by the commenters. Following Table 2, the top 12 words all showed up more than 2000 times and were regarded as the significant high-frequency words, which was explored in the co-occurrence analysis.

Due to the large sample size, the 100 high-frequency were lexically classified to rapidly narrow down the topic discussions and the sentimental expressions of the sample. The adjectives usually express emotions, such as 'awesome', 'finger heart', 'look good', etc. The nouns usually represent subjects of discussion, such as the CBA, atmosphere, sports, among others. The verbs usually express behavioral intentions and suggestions, such as 'hope', 'promote', 'join', etc. The adverbs usually represent degrees, such as no, really, don't, etc. Lastly, the conjunctions are auxiliaries that make statements coherent, such as this is, and also, etc.

Eventually, four initial discussion topics were proposed: the first was a discussion of the video content, with associated words such as basketball, sports, atmosphere and awesome. The second was a discussion of the comparison between VBA and other events, with associated words such as CBA, NBA and football. The third was a discussion of the ethnic culture associated with VBA, cheerleading, villages, and awards. Lastly, the fourth was a discussion of suggestions for the development of VBA, with associated words such as 'hope' and 'promotion'. Subsequently, a co-occurrence analysis of high-frequency words was conducted to modify the topic of discussion through textual tracking.

Table 2: List of Top 100 High Frequency Words

Rank	Word	Frequency	Rank	Word	Frequency	Rank	Word	Frequency	Rank	Word	Frequency
1	Awesome	9003	26	Cheerleading	1117	51	Popularize	655	76	Excellent	399
2	CBA	6411	27	Look	1116	52	Scene	633	77	Life	394
3	Atmosphere	5779	28	Really	1062	53	Appreciate	607	78	Development	393
4	Finger heart	5352	29	Sobbing	957	54	Approachable	595	79	See	391
5	Guizhou	3962	30	Do not	951	55	Referee	578	80	Play	389
6	Basketball	3572	31	National	936	56	Besides	572	81	Like	388
7	Laugh	3375	32	Love	930	57	Nationwide	570	82	Extraordinary	376
8	This is	3029	33	Culture	910	58	Join	563	83	Participation	375
9	Applaud	2816	34	Prefer	888	59	Admire	543	84	National team	375
10	Compare with CBA	2795	35	exercise	887	60	Player	515	85	Time	374
11	No	2305	36	Audience	873	61	Joyful	506	86	Worth	373
12	Interesting	2049	37	Still	860	62	Passion	487	87	Folk	368
13	Sports	1956	38	Wonderful	858	63	Place	471	88	Learn	367
14	NBA	1942	39	Incredible	836	64	Activity	471	89	Definitely	358
15	VBA	1789	40	Rose	803	65	Business	464	90	If	354
16	Competition	1720	41	Nation	794	66	Commercializati on	455	91	Public	349
17	Can	1664	42	Village	776	67	Sports sprit	445	92	Occasion	342
18	Capital	1577	43	Fighting	766	68	Association	441	93	Major	337
19	Purity	1548	44	Feel	763	69	Well done	435	94	Stand up	327
20	China	1496	45	Watch	749	70	People	427	95	Indeed	326
21	Football	1496	46	No more	738	71	Need	426	96	Organize	326
22	Exactly	1479	47	Real	723	72	World	423	97	Think	326
23	So good	1326	48	Compare with NBA	722	73	Happy	413	98	Unlikely	324
24	Hope	1250	49	Cry	705	74	Chinese basketball	406	99	Support	321
25	Should	1136	50	Award	659	75	Level	406	100	Desire	317

### 3.3.2 Analysis of Sentiment

According to the results of the sentiment analysis (Figure 2), 80.41% of the comments were positive, 7.98% were negative, 4.04% were neutral and 7.57% were unidentifiable. This shows that most people have positive feelings towards VBA. Among the positive comments (Table 3), words such as 'prefer', 'finger heart' and 'interesting' ranked high and were explored further in the co-occurrence analysis. Among the negative comments, no clear negative words were found, such as 'dislike', 'hate', and 'boycott'. Moreover, the Micro-word Cloud software once identified 'no' and 'do not' as negative words automatically. However, a textual tracing of the words revealed that they conveyed the meaning of 'no injustice in the VBA' and 'I hope not to be capitalized', which is in fact a positive statement and a neutral expression, respectively. To find the negative emotion, a textual tracing of 100 high-frequency words were conducted which revealed that 'epidemic', 'capital', 'compare with the CBA', and 'cheating' can be regarded as negative words in this study (this will be further explored in the co-occurrence analysis).



The study also counts the total number of co-occurrences of each high-frequency word (Table 4). Results show that the higher the total number of co-occurrences, the more word pairs the word forms, further narrowing down the topics discussed by commenters. Following Figure 3 and Table 4, the study divides the topics discussed by Internet users into the following: 1) VBA culture; 2) behavioral intentions; 3) development proposals; 4) negative sentiment; and 5) evoking association. These were the key high-frequency words which were analyzed for co-occurrence and textual tracing.

Table 4: Total number of co-occurring words

Rank	Word	Total number of co-occurring words	Rank	Word	Total number of co-occurring words	Rank	Word	Total number of co-occurring words
1	Awesome	13814	34	Village	1995	67	Worth	1024
2	Finger heart	9154	35	Real	1993	68	Need	1000
3	Basketball	9089	36	No more	1954	69	Commercialization	995
4	Atmosphere	8936	37	Audience	1888	70	If	984
5	CBA	8808	38	Cheerleading	1876	71	Award	980
6	Guizhou	7443	39	Still	1841	72	Life	976
7	This is	6965	40	Nation	1750	73	Compare with NBA	972
8	No	5802	41	Fighting	1693	74	World	955
9	Laugh	5380	42	Nationwide	1686	75	Public	953
10	Sports	4977	43	Popularize	1661	76	Learn	919
11	Applaud	4710	44	So good	1583	77	See	890
12	VBA	4059	45	Feel	1574	78	Referee	886
13	China	4025	46	Appreciate	1562	79	Time	865
14	Competition	4006	47	Sobbing	1492	80	Level	861
15	Purity	3646	48	Scene	1477	81	Definitely	842
16	Exactly	3603	49	Watch	1453	82	Stand up	831
17	Compare with CBA	3531	50	Wonderful	1444	83	Play	828
18	Interesting	3308	51	Player	1440	84	Incredible	825
19	Hope	3262	52	Join	1329	85	Folk	822
20	NBA	3161	53	Participation	1277	86	Like	818
21	Can	3075	54	People	1273	87	Well done	813
22	Football	3032	55	Approachable	1248	88	Joyful	809
23	Capital	3031	56	Passion	1219	89	Excellent	800
24	Should	2908	57	Activity	1199	90	Think	789
25	Look	2815	58	Place	1194	91	Professional	742
26	Do not	2693	59	Business	1162	92	Organize	730
27	Nation	2609	60	Cry	1159	93	Occasion	684
28	Prefer	2492	61	Besides	1136	94	Unlikely	661
29	Exercise	2391	62	Happy	1129	95	National team	653
30	Love	2364	63	Association	1108	96	Admire	641
31	Rose	2269	64	Development	1051	97	Support	613
32	Culture	2190	65	Sports spirit	1050	98	Indeed	602
33	Really	2159	66	Chinese Basketball	1025	99	Extraordinary	565
						100	Desire	552

### 3.3.3.1 The Culture of the VBA

(1) The analysis of co-occurring words of 'atmosphere'.

Among the total number of co-occurrences, emotional words such as 'awesome' and 'finger heart' were excluded, making way for other words such as 'basketball' and 'Guizhou' because the videos showed the basketball matches in Guizhou. The word 'atmosphere' also appeared with the highest frequency, indicating that netizens discussed the word atmosphere the most while watching the VBA.

The total number of occurrences for 'atmosphere' appeared 8,936 times, with the discussion of 'atmosphere' focusing on the two main aspects. The first is the evaluation of atmosphere where keywords such as 'atmosphere' and 'so good' appeared 570 times, representing comments such as '*such a good atmosphere for basketball, the main function of sports is to enrich our cultural life, the basketball atmosphere is so good, if every province in China has such an atmosphere, the national team would have been graded a long time ago*'. The word 'awesome' appeared a total of 569 times including representative comments are '*awesome, the atmosphere is so good, so that the entertainment life of farmers is full of joy*' and '*the atmosphere is so good, the CBA steps up to the next level, it's awesome*'. The word 'finger heart' appeared a total of 319 times, the representative comments are '*this atmosphere has nothing to do with money, it's the joy of the villagers that everyone is able to join, no ticket is needed, the awards are very approachable, finger heart*' and '*it doesn't matter if you win or lose, the main thing is the atmosphere,*

*I want to go to the scene too, finger heart'.*

The second compares the basketball atmosphere of the 'VBA' with the 'CBA', 'football' and the 'NBA'. 'Atmosphere' and the 'CBA' appeared 316 times with comments such as, *'basketball should be popularized, there is no NBA or CBA that can provide such an atmosphere, as basketball is not a sport for a few people, so that more people would enjoy watching the match'*, and *'look at that, watching the CBA is like sitting in the Colosseum, it's been too far for the audience to watch'*. The word 'football' appeared 231 times with comments such as, *'if football has such an atmosphere, there is no need to worry about it'*, and *'if every city had an atmosphere like this, Chinese football and basketball would not be like this now'*. The word 'NBA' appeared 177 times with comments such as *'the scene of the NBA finals are not as popular as this, this is the culture and atmosphere of basketball'*, *'the atmosphere, the integration of the audience and the playground, is so similar to the NBA'*.

### (2) Analysis of the co-occurrence of the word 'sport'

The word 'this is' itself does not have any meaning, but nonetheless co-occurs with the word 'sport' for 795 times, therein representing comments such as *'a real sport should be the kind of sport that the general public can participate in, which can truly reflect the spirit of sports'*; *'this is the direction that Chinese society should promote and develop in a healthy way, not just an elite game for a few people'*; *'this is the way sports should be, no capital involved, no brand name, no corruption of money'*, *'this is the way sports should be, it should be for the public to participate'*; and *'this is what sport should be like, it should be for all, either as players, cheerleaders or audience'*.

A textual tracing of comments containing 'this is' are reveal that these comments are mainly focused on 'sport' with sentences such as 'this is what sport looks like' among others. The question was then brought up: what is sport like? An analysis of the co-occurrence of 'sport' revealed that both 'sport' and 'nationwide' co-occurred 220 times with comments such as *'developing sports is an effective way to promote the health of the public, which is what sport is all about'* and *'The purpose of sport is to achieve the nationwide exercising'*. The word 'purity' was used 140 times with comments such as, *'Perhaps this is the most purity part about sport, for people who love and enjoy themselves'*; and *'Purity of sport does not involve capital or care about winning or losing, instead there is only the spirit and original intention of sport'*.

To better understand 'this is what sport looks like', the three terms 'refereeing', 'match-fixing' and 'social norms' were found in the comments and were traced back to the content. The comments related to 'refereeing' include: *'with this kind of atmosphere, referees should be fair and impartial without daring to cheat'*. Comments related to 'match-fixing' include, *'there is no performing, that's the real match'*. Comments related to 'social norms' include *'the main thing is that there is no social norms, it's just pure sports, plus the villagers love it, so it's inevitable that it will be on fire'*.

Therefore, when watching the VBA, commentators emphasize the essence of the sport— that it should be pure, fair, and equitable. It must also be accessible to all and that there should be equal opportunities. It also should not be an elite sport where only a small number of people participate, but should be a sport for the public instead.

### (3) Analysis of the co-occurrence of 'capital'

The total number of co-occurrences of 'capital' is 3031, and the discussion revolves around three aspects: the first is praise for the fact that VBA has not been capitalized. The co-occurrence of the word 'no' was 368 times, with comments such as, *'it's a place that hasn't been tainted by capital'*, *'no bribes, no corruption, no capital, no dirty tricks, the players play for love, the referees assist to be fair and the audiences watch for fun, this is called sport'*.

The second proposes for the development of the VBA where 'intervention' occurs 220 times with comments such as, *'as long as the capital does not get involved, such a basketball atmosphere will be maintained forever'*. The word 'do not' was used 285 times, with comments such as *'the capital should never get involved, do not let the purity and passion of the sport turn into a tool for the enrichment of capital'*. The word 'hope' was also used 183 times with comments such as *'I hope the capital does not get involved, instead, basketball should stay pure'*.

Third, the benefits of the capital were discussed. Without any obvious co-occurring words found, the comments can only be scanned manually for content. Comments such as *'personally I think we can try to bring in the capital, relying on the pure sports has its limit'*, *'I hope there is not too much capital involved, with a small amount of the capital can improve the facilities of the stadium'*, and *'Perhaps advertainmentments can improve the village roads, water and electricity condition'*.

**(4) Analysis of the co-occurrence of 'cheerleading' and 'award'**

The total number of co-occurrences of 'cheerleading' was 1,876 times and the discussion revolved around two aspects: the first is the positive comments on the cheerleading with 'awesome' appearing 173 times, representing comments such as *'cheerleading is the highlight, awesome'*. The word 'interesting' appeared 81 times with comments such as, *'this cheerleading squad which is full of Guizhou ethnic characters is more distinctive than those regular ones, it looks much better'* and *'the cheerleading squad of the villagers is very distinctive and interesting'*.

There were also 135 entries found which compared the NBA with the CBA with comments such as *'the national costumes and performances are superior to the cheerleading of the NBA'* and *'they are superior to the cheerleading of the NBA in terms of appearance, elegance, culture and costumes'*. The CBA appeared 54 times with comments including *'the CBA cheerleading should be like this, promoting the traditional culture of various ethnic groups that can sing and dance well'* and *'the CBA should learn from the VBA of Guizhou, instead of the Western cheerleading'*.

The total number of the word 'award' was used in the comments 980 times, while the word 'approachable' was used 81 times. Both represent comments such as *'the purest basketball match, the most approachable award, the hottest atmosphere'* and *'the awards were quite approachable'*. 'It' was seen 93 times along with the word 'awesome' and 62 times with the word 'really', with comments such as *'it is really interesting, the award for the champion is a cow, awesome'*.

**3.3.3.2 Behavioral Intentions**

Behavioral intention refers to the action of the commenters influenced by the content of the video after watching it (which is normally a verb) as represented by the words 'desire', 'join' and 'play'. The total number of the word 'desire' appeared 552 times, with the word 'scene' appearing 84 times, representing comments such as *'I desire to watch on scene when there is another one, and I want to enjoy the great scenery and ethnicity of our country'*. The word 'atmosphere' was also used 59 times with comments such as *'I desire to watch and feel the atmosphere there, it's the way sports should be'*.

'Join' was found 1,329 times, 56 times in partnership with the keywords 'really want to', thus representing comments such as *'really want to join them'* and *'really want to join in and cheer for them'*.

The word 'play' was found 828 times, while 'want to' was found 40 times, with comments such as, *'I suddenly want to play'* and *'I want to play too after watching this passionate match'*.

**3.3.3.3 Development Proposals**

The words 'hope', 'should' and 'popularize' represent the development proposals of the VBA. The word 'hope' revolves around two aspects: one is the hope that it will not be overtly capitalized, which appears 183 times with the word 'capital', with comments such as *'I hope there will be no capital involved and the original passion will be preserved'* and *'I hope it will not be polluted by the capital'*. Another is that the development of basketball and football in China can be based on the form of VBA. Representative comments include *'I hope that all places will learn from each other and create a good atmosphere for watching and playing, so that we can see the hope of Chinese basketball and football'* and *'If every province has such a place with such a good atmosphere, there will be a bright future for Chinese basketball and the same for national football'*.

The word 'should' appeared 2,908 times, and was seen with the word 'CBA' 191 times, therein representing comments such as, *'the CBA should learn from the VBA to bring the charm of basketball to the audience'* and *'the CBA should also introduce ethnic minority teams to its basketball beauties in the future'*. The word 'national' was also used 118 times with comments such as, *'the national team should learn from them'* and *'the national villages should be popularized, and it is worth learning from this match'*.

The word 'popularized' appeared 1,661 times and together with the word 'national' occurred 390 times, which meant that it was popularized nationally. The word 'worth' occurred 181 times, indicating it was worth popularizing. The word 'should' occurred 100 times, indicating it should be popularized. Lastly, the word 'nationwide' occurred 42 times, indicating it was being popularized nationwide.

**3.3.3.4 Negative Sentiment**

(1) 'Pandemic' — Following textual traceability, commentators expressed rhetorical questions about the phenomenon of gathering, which is regarded herein as an expression of negative emotions. These lead to comments such as, *'do not congregate during an epidemic unless it is necessary'*, *'If there is an*



*epidemic, isn't this causing trouble for the country', and 'Is epidemic well under control?'*

(2) Predicting the disadvantages of the intervention of the capital — The word 'intervene' forms a co-occurring pair with the word 'capital'; whilst it did occur the same amount of time, the representative comments include *'the match draws high attention, there will be capital intervened next year, besides, a large number of investors will get involved. With ticket sales limited, the award fund raised by a large amount, cheating going on behind the scenes, and even the players will probably be gradually replaced by out-of-town players', and 'once the capital intervened, the atmosphere changes, and it's not for the public anymore'.*

(3) Criticism of the CBA — The word 'shame' appeared 12 times and was represented by comments such as, 'there is no shame in the CBA'. The phrase 'what a disgrace' appeared 10 times, representing comments such as *'what a disgrace to the CBA'*. The word 'ashamed' appearing 8 times, with representative comment including *'would the CBA be ashamed to watch this?'* Other words which co-occurred with negative emotions and occurred 6 times were 'disgraceful', 'close down' and 'worse than'.

(4) Criticism of the shoddy play and cheating, which was represented by comments such as *'it is better than some games, after all, no shoddy play, no cheating', 'because it's fair and equitable which is better than playing football' and 'as long as there is no cheating, it can be great'.*

### 3.3.3.5 Evoking Association

(1) 'When' — The total number of occurrences of the high-frequency word 'when' was 865, therein representing comments such as *'when I was a child, there was only one concrete basketball court in our county, and every year there were crowds of people playing in it' and 'I remembered when I was a child, the various sporting activities organized by the state factories, where the people were really happy'.*

(2) 'Epidemic' — Due to the impact of the pandemic in recent years, the paper specifically traces the text to the 'epidemic' which is represented by comments such as *'many traditional festivals have been cancelled because of the epidemic', 'the main thing is the contrast under the epidemic and the demand of the public for this kind of communal activity', and 'because of the epidemic, our village basketball matches for the New Year have been cancelled, whereas in previous years they were played every season'.*

## 4. Findings

Reasons for the popularity of the VBA include the following points:

(1) The Live atmosphere was jovial and had high attendance, which was also the main attraction for the reviews and was notably highly praised by netizens.

(2) Basketball is both a global and local sport with regional and national characteristics seen in the VBA, which contrasts with the NBA and CBA and creates a contrasting topic and attracts particular attention.

(3) The VBA is voluntarily formed by local villagers on their own initiative and is a group activity of the ordinary residents, instead of being an elite sport. The match was broadcast live throughout, without being swayed by capital, cheating, outside support and match-fixing. It is generally agreed that it is a pure sport and that the essence of sport is physical fitness, joyful exercise, public participation, fairness, and equity.

(4) The VBA is also approachable. On the one hand, audiences are supposed to have a close view and directly feel the charm of competitive sports, which makes the commentators eager to watch. On the other hand, the champion of the VBA is rewarded with a cattle, the second placer with two sheep, and the third is awarded with two piglets. Such awards contrast the huge amount of money awarded for the contests. Furthermore, there were also cheerleaders (mainly old ladies and men who dressed in Hmong costumes and performed Hmong dances) which caught the eyes of the commentators.

(5) The basketball match is a competitive event that inspires the viewers to have strong desire to participate and associate. For example, commenters expressed a desire to visit, join, and play. More even recalled their experiences of being involved in sport during their childhood

(6) The onset of COVID-19 have reduced the gatherings in mainland of China, Canceling many large-scale sporting activities in the last three years. Nevertheless, the VBA was held at a time when the pandemic was at its steady stage and had an exciting and enviable atmosphere.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Short videos are a new form of cultural communication. With the reasons for the explosion of the VBA, the following new elements should be considered for the future communication of rural sports:

(1) Rural sports should be close to the daily life of the ordinary people and should consider the participation of the general public rather than being an elite activity where a few people are involved. Moreover, it must be approachable. Nowadays, many events today leave the crowd far away from the ground, seriously affecting the viewing experience.

(2) Rural sports should be combined with ethnic culture and incorporate ethnic costumes, performance and language to create a visual contrast with popular culture and produce a distinctive aesthetic.

(3) As long as sporting activities are involved, they must be fair, equitable, and transparent to maintain the 'purity' of the sport. Because the main participants in rural sports are local villagers, an accidental injustice can snowball to a pernicious effect which discourages villagers.

(4) Balancing the interests of commercialization after rural sports have been greatly incentivized. This makes it necessary to regard commercialization and introduce commercialization to improve the infrastructure, as deemed appropriate. However, it should not be over-commercialized to avoid destroying the originality.

(5) Sporting activities should be introduced to rural culture because these stimulate the enthusiasm of the public, elevate the cultural atmosphere, and promote the rapid popularity of rural sports.

(6) The development of rural sports after the pandemic remains full of opportunities. The effective release of stress can quickly revitalize rural sporting matches by positively applying it and subsequently relieving the tensions that have been accumulated.

Limitations of this paper. First, due to the limitations of the TikTok platform on comment crawling, the comments were not completely collected, leading to a missing sample for the study's dataset. Second, few negative comments were obtained for the study, although new findings may be identified to improve the communication of rural sports. Finally, inaccurate topic generalization may produce serious bias during several attempts at LDA topic modelling in Python. This is because the themes and emotions discussed by netizens in the sample are intertwined. For example, the word 'atmosphere' includes both praise for the atmosphere of the VBA and criticism of the atmosphere of the CBA: there is a sense of praise for the fact that the VBA is not being manipulated by capital, but there is also a sense of negativity about the disadvantages of capital intervention. This means that a theme contains both positive and negative emotions. Thus, the sample is inappropriate for LDA topic modelling through Python which should be manually judged based on micro word cloud analysis. Nevertheless, this may also lead to subjective judgements in the text tracing section. This might also be a part that could be further improved in the future to explore more interactions in the comments.

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