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# Comparative Analysis of Cross-Platform Dissemination of the Village Super League on Weibo and Twitter

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**Article**

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# Abstract

Within the digital media landscape, sporting events have become important sites for emotional expression and social meaning-making, yet grassroots competitions remain underexplored in comparison with mega-events such as the Olympics. Focusing on Guizhou's "Village Super League," this study examines cross-platform differences in narrative framing and emotional expression across Chinese and international social media. User-generated content from Weibo and Twitter between 2023 and 2024 was analyzed using an LDA topic model combined with large language model–based sentiment analysis. The results show that Weibo discourse emphasizes local culture, tournament influence, and the integration of culture, sports, and tourism, with a strongly concentrated positive sentiment orientation. In contrast, Twitter discourse frames the event as a grassroots sports phenomenon and social model, exhibiting more diverse emotional expressions and a higher proportion of neutral and negative sentiments. These findings indicate that platform-specific institutional environments and cultural contexts significantly shape the narrative modes and affective structures of sporting event communication, contributing new empirical insights into digital affective publics and cross-cultural sports communication.


# Introduction

As a vital platform for public narratives and individual viewpoint expression, social media affords users a dual role as both narrators and commentators, transforming it into a space for meaning-making around societal issues and trending events [1,2]. Through commenting, reposting, and hashtag interactions on these platforms, users construct multi-layered affective publics where individual emotional experiences and collective social meanings continually intertwine and reconfigure.

Sports events, owing to their collective and symbolic nature, have long been regarded as a crucial domain for affective communication on social media. Previous research has predominantly focused on global mega-events such as the Olympics and World Cup, revealing how social media amplifies national identity, collective sentiment, and media narratives within event coverage [3,4]. However, grassroots sporting events, as bottom-up social practices, exhibit markedly distinct dissemination and participation mechanisms. Such events typically rely on community organizations, volunteer networks, and local identity, with user-generated content serving as the core driving force for event dissemination [5]. Consequently, social media functions not only as an exposure platform for grassroots sporting events but also as a space where individuals and groups construct meaning through narrative and emotional expression.

Within this process, emotional expression and discursive frameworks constitute crucial windows for observing social discourse and cultural variations. Due to differences in technical mechanisms and cultural contexts, distinct narrative styles and emotional patterns frequently emerge across social media platforms. For instance, Weibo frequently amplifies collective sentiment and social cohesion, with its dissemination logic aligning more closely with emotional mobilization and collective resonance; Twitter,

conversely, exhibits stronger individualization tendencies and diverse emotional expression, emphasizing opinion pluralism and public discourse within a global context [6]. These distinctions offer rich socio-psychological significance for comparative research, particularly in understanding how publics engage in social practices through language and emotion across different cultural environments.

While existing literature has revealed partial patterns of emotional transmission in social media during sporting events, systematic research remains scarce on the textual presentation, discursive practices, and emotional expression surrounding grassroots sporting events across different social platforms. Furthermore, prior studies predominantly relied on qualitative text analysis, lacking support from big data and computational social science methodologies. To address this research gap, this study employs Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) thematic modelling and sentiment analysis to conduct a cross-platform comparison of user comments regarding a grassroots sporting event on Weibo and Twitter (Fig. 1). It aims to reveal: (1) how the public constructs narrative themes around sporting events across different platforms; (2) similarities and differences in emotional expression patterns across cultural contexts; and (3) how platform characteristics shape mechanisms of public engagement and emotional contagion. This study seeks to deepen understanding of the narrative-emotion-platform interplay within cross-cultural sports communication, providing new empirical evidence for digital communication and social psychology research.

## Literature Review

# Three-Dimensional Discourse Analysis Model

The three-dimensional discourse analysis model proposed by Fairclough in 1992 constitutes a foundational framework within critical discourse analysis. The model conceptualizes discourse as an integral component of social practice and distinguishes three interrelated analytical levels. The textual level focuses on linguistic structures and expressive features; the level of discursive practice addresses the processes through which texts are produced, circulated, and interpreted; and the level of social practice concerns the broader ideological formations and social structures that shape and are reproduced through discourse. By foregrounding the dynamic interaction between language and society, this model provides a systematic methodological basis for examining how power relations, ideology, and social meaning are discursively constructed. [7–9].

Several sports communication scholars have employed the three-dimensional discourse analysis model to examine public perceptions of the Winter Olympics, rural basketball associations, and table tennis news across mass media and social platforms. Lu et al. examined discourse narrative tendencies in Chinese media coverage of rural basketball associations [10]. Chen et al. analyzed conceptual metaphor construction in Chinese and English table tennis reporting[11]. However, existing research predominantly focuses on mainstream media or macro-political discourse, with insufficient attention paid to affective or community-oriented topics within social media discourse. There remains a lack of studies combining three-dimensional discourse analysis with big data sentiment analysis methodologies. This research

endeavors to address this gap. Consequently, this paper explores narrative and affective patterns surrounding rural sporting events across different social media platforms, thereby offering new perspectives for digital discourse analysis.

## Rural Sports Events in Developing Countries

Within the macro-context of developing nations, mass sporting events embody not merely athletic pursuits but also multidimensional social value and developmental significance [12,13]. As vital cultural practices within grassroots communities, China's rural sporting events transcend mere physical activity, serving as crucial vehicles for fostering local identity and social cohesion [14,15]. Originating from local community football gatherings, the tournament gradually built its participant base and social visibility through sustained organization without explicit commercial objectives or institutionalized design. As its scale expanded and participants diversified, the "Village Super League" evolved from a local sporting event into a regional competition featuring a fixed schedule and dedicated spectator base.

The development of the Village Super League exhibits distinct temporal progression and grassroots origins, with its scale growing exponentially to become one of the world's most influential rural sporting events [15,16]. By 2022, a relatively stable organizational structure for the competition had gradually taken shape. In 2023, match footage and live broadcasts from the Village Super League gained widespread circulation on short-video platforms and social media, rapidly capturing significant public attention. By 2025, the General Administration of Sport of China explicitly encouraged the development of provincial, city, and village leagues for the 'three major ball sports' in its Key Points for Mass Sports Work in 2025. This further underscores the significance of rural sporting events. Media reports indicate that China's western regions host the highest volume of rural sporting activities, averaging 628.6 events annually with the highest growth rate [17]. Consequently, the "Village Super League" holds promise to become the most iconic and inspirational rural sporting event in developing nations.

## Application of Natural Language Processing Technology in Sporting Events

Natural Language Processing, as a key technology for text information processing, plays an indispensable role in sports big data research. Its focus lies in systematically reconstructing and deeply analyzing human language information through computer technology, thereby proactively uncovering latent patterns and correlations within established data and information sets [18,19]. This methodology enables the labelling of textual words and accurate recognition of semantic structures [20], thereby facilitating the extraction of structured semantic representations from unstructured textual data [21].

Multiple scholars have employed topic modelling and sentiment analysis to examine public perceptions of societal issues on Twitter or Weibo platforms, such as athletes' mental health [22], food safety [21], and

thematic narratives surrounding the Olympics [23]. However, few studies have analyzed discourse dissemination concerning rural sporting events. Given this, we examined the discursive dissemination effects of Guizhou's "Village Super League."

## Method

# Data collection

To gain deeper insights into the discursive frameworks embedded across different social media platforms, this study aligns with the Village Super League's event cycle. The text data collection period spans from 24 January 2023 to 20 July 2024. For keyword retrieval on the Weibo platform, the search terms "Guizhou Village Super League," "Rongjiang Village Super League," "Harmonious Rural Football Super League," and "Guizhou Rongjiang Harmonious Rural Football Super League" were employed to ensure coverage of core event name variations. The Twitter platform utilized "Guizhou Village Super League" and "Guizhou 'Village Super League'" as search terms. Rongjiang Village Super League," "Harmonious Rural Football Super League," and "Guizhou Rongjiang Harmonious Rural Football Super League" to ensure coverage of core event name variants. For Twitter, the English keywords "Guizhou Village Super League," "Guizhou 'Village Super League,'" and "Guizhou Village FA" were employed to align with the international community's predominant terminology for the "Village Super League."

This study employed Python programming to systematically collect and preprocess user-generated content from Weibo and Twitter. Data acquisition involved scraping raw textual data relevant to the research theme via platform APIs and web crawlers, with duplicate removal conducted concurrently during collection to ensure sample uniqueness and validity. Subsequently, language filtering was applied to Twitter data to retain only English-language texts, thereby minimizing interference from non-target corpora at the source. During text cleansing, Python's re module and the NLTK natural language processing library were comprehensively employed to standardize raw data. Redundant information irrelevant to textual analysis was systematically removed, including user mention symbols, external links, emoticons, special Unicode characters, and non-semantic punctuation. This enhanced text readability and analytical consistency. Following these procedures, a structurally standardized and semantically coherent text corpus was ultimately formed, providing a reliable data foundation for subsequent text analysis, discourse practice, and discourse sentiment analysis.

# Data analysis

# Topic Modelling

To conduct a comparative analysis of discourse practices across Weibo and Twitter platforms, we employed topic modelling. This methodology enables the labeling of textual words and accurate identification of semantic structures [20]. It is frequently utilized to identify themes and agendas within vast social media text datasets [22,23]. In essence, topic modelling enables rapid response and

organization of textual expressions within vast text datasets. This study employs the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) model for thematic identification within textual content. By analyzing co-occurrence relationships of vocabulary across different contexts, the model automatically categorizes keywords within the corpus into several themes, using representative terms under each theme as semantic indicators [24]. Taking into account both the concordance curve and perplexity scores, the study determined four themes for both Weibo and Twitter platforms based on a comprehensive evaluation of concordance and perplexity metrics. Fifteen keywords were extracted for each theme to support thematic interpretation.

## Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis, as a common text analysis method, aims to distinguish the emotional polarity of text content by discerning the emotional orientation embedded within the text. This study employs sentiment analysis methods based on large language models to determine the sentiment polarity of texts from Weibo and Twitter platforms. Specifically, the DeepSeek-V3 large language model is utilized to assign sentiment scores to textual content. The model generates continuous sentiment scores between 0 and 1 for each text based on contextual information, reflecting the overall emotional orientation of the text, with neutral sentiment represented as 0.5.

Building upon this, text sentiment is discretized based on score intervals and categorized into three sentiment levels: positive, neutral, and negative. This approach preserves the continuous nature of sentiment intensity while ensuring interpretable results,providing a unified assessment standard for subsequent cross-platform sentiment distribution comparisons and statistical analysis.

## Result

# Text Analysis

Discussions on the "Village Super League" across Chinese and international social media platforms revealed seven distinct topic types (Table 1). Among these, Weibo centered on promotional content, which demonstrated strong engagement metrics. For instance, the topic "This 'Village Super League' Is Quite Different" garnered 145,961 likes, 1,069 reposts, and 955 comments, clearly outlining the connections between the "Village Super League" and rural life, ethnic culture, and corporate branding. This exemplifies the promotional and operational model for rural sporting events, where "the tournament serves as a catalyst for industrial revitalization." Furthermore, entertainment-focused topics such as "Guizhou Village Super League welcomes its first international star, Kaka" and "717 Foodie Festival" also garnered significant attention. These entertainment topics not only demonstrated the viral dissemination characteristics centered around media events but also served to convey the core spirit of rural sports returning to the essence of life.

Table 1
Comparison of "Village Super League" Discourse Across Chinese and International Social Media Platforms

| Category | Weibo | | Twitter | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Broadcast | 13501 | 58.23% | 47 | 19.11% |
| Entertainment | 9323 | 40.21% | 23 | 9.35% |
| Political | 123 | 0.53% | 15 | 6.10% |
| Comparative | 103 | 0.44% | 19 | 7.72% |
| Social Phenomenon | 62 | 0.27% | 116 | 47.15% |
| Technology | 60 | 0.26% | 8 | 3.25% |
| Culture & Education | 15 | 0.06% | 18 | 7.32% |

Twitter's focus on the Village Super League differs from Weibo's, with social phenomenon-driven topics dominating at 47.15% of the sample. These topics are often labelled with phrases such as "Village Super League," "China Style," and "Football Picks," succinctly presenting the Village Super League as a phenomenon-level event. This not only benefits the development of mass sports but also provides reference points for rural sports events in other countries or regions. Readers can thus gain a preliminary sense of the open, fair, and inclusive image embodied by the Village Super League through these topics.

# Discourse Practice Analysis

Based on the degree of overlap in the bubble chart, we determined the number of themes to be four, as shown in Fig. 3. The Weibo platform’s thematic construction of the “Village Super League” is deeply embedded within China’s domestic developmental context, displaying multi-dimensional thematic characteristics (Table 2). The dominant theme, “Local Culture and Tournament Influence” (56.62%), frames the event as an authentic grassroots sporting practice that integrates football with the cultural traditions of China’s diverse ethnic communities, constituting its core identity and source of distinctiveness. This fusion of rural culture and modern sport transforms everyday village life into highly visible public cultural spectacles, enhancing social cohesion and elevating the tournament from a local activity to a nationally significant cultural phenomenon. Additionally, 12.89% of users focused on the “integration of culture, sports, tourism, and commerce,” highlighting the event’s alignment with national fitness initiatives and rural revitalization policies through its low-threshold participation and festive atmosphere. Themes of “diverse participation and corporate branding” further reveal the involvement of farmers, teachers, celebrities, and sponsors, while “event virality and media diffusion” (12.64%) underscores the role of multi-channel dissemination in expanding the event’s reach from local communities to broader public spheres.

Table 2
Overview of Themes and Keywords Across Domestic and International Social Media Platforms

| Platform | ID | Thematic Summary | Characteristic Keywords | Proportion of Tweets |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Twitter | 1 | Competition content, athletic performance | football, Guizhou, team, Rongjiang, league, match, village, country, national, rural, players, province, teams, event, matches | 39.79% |
| | 2 | Spectacularised Communication, Local Narratives | village, superb, fun, Guizhou, barbecue, amazing, popular, Zibo, life, Spain, love, games, Harbin, market, snow | 23.19% |
| | 3 | Local Festivals, National Image | village, Chinese, cunba, Guizhou's, league, China, super, national, country, football, Rongjiang, events, party, global, atmosphere | 16.77% |
| | 4 | Event Media Communication | event, top, forces, travel, style, buzzwords, cunba, ethnic, attention, news, special, soccer, finals, season, quality | 19.65% |
| Weibo | 1 | Cultural, Sports, Tourism and Commercial Integration | Tourism, Guizhou, Culture, Development, Village Ba, Visitors, Cities, Events, Cultural Tourism, Economy, Revitalisation, Lifestyle, Consumption, Growth, Services | 12.89% |
| | 2 | Events Breaking Through, Media Diffusion | Village Super League, Weibo, Daily News, Video, Live Streaming, News, Tianyan, Official Weibo, Super Topic, Finals, Qualifiers, League, China Unicom, Season, Super | 12.64% |
| | 3 | Diverse Participation, Corporate Brands | Kaka, Weibo, Video, Xuefeng, Football, Green Fruit, Chery, Joy, Charity, Support, Passion, Mabian, Attention, Lu Han, Fan Zhiyi | 17.84% |
| | 4 | Local Culture, Tournament Influence | Village Super League, Guizhou, Rongjiang, Rural Areas, Football Teams, Hong Kong, Players, Ethnic Groups, Cuisine, Atmosphere, Celebrities, Culture, Friendly Matches, Feverish, Villagers | 56.62% |

In contrast, Twitter discourse situates the Village Super League within a global grassroots sports framework rather than national policy narratives. Dominant themes include “competition content and athletic performance,” “spectacle-driven dissemination and local narratives” (23.19%), “local celebrations and national image” (16.77%), and “event media communication” (19.65%). Twitter users frequently employ descriptors such as “grassroots football” and “passionate sporting event” to emphasize mass participation and de-commercialized enjoyment, often combining sporting content with culturally symbolic elements such as food, festivals, and regional imagery. Through this framing, the Village Super League is presented as both locally grounded and globally intelligible, enhancing its transnational visibility and shareability through stylized, playful, and comparative narrative strategies.

# Discourse Sentiment Analysis

Emotional expression represents the logical refinement of textual analysis and discourse practice analysis. The scope of the framing effect encompasses multiple dimensions, including narrative, public perception, behavioral response, and emotional inclination. Kahneman's research on the framing effect indicates that individuals exhibit positive or negative expression tendencies when evaluating identical information due to differing frames. The overall emotional distribution is presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Emotional Distribution Overview for Weibo and Twitter

| | Positive(%) | Neutral(%) | Negative(%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Weibo | 27205(95.8%) | 639(2.2%) | 550(1.9%) |
| Twitter | 1269(69%) | 227(15%) | 291(15.8%) |

# Analysis of Sentimental Expression in Discourse on the Weibo Platform

Among user-generated content regarding the "Village Super League" on Weibo, positive sentiment emerged as the dominant emotional orientation (95.81%), with negative sentiment accounting for a relatively minor proportion (2.09%). Specifically, content themes under positive sentiment primarily centered on football (12,146 mentions), rural areas (6,764 mentions), stadiums (6,070 mentions), culture (5,031 mentions), and tourism (4,237 mentions). This reveals how the "Village Super League" events foster cohesion and symbiosis with rural communities, presenting a unique portrait of rural sports shaped by players' wholehearted dedication on the pitch. It also reflects the media discourse construction of the "Village Super League" in stimulating users' emotional resonance, reinforcing their symbolic identification with local landscapes. For instance, the ordinary Weibo user account "@□□□□-□□□" tweeted, "Master Liu Bowen once said, 'A thousand rivers flow through Jiangnan, while ten thousand mountains rise in Yunnan and Guizhou. Look five hundred years hence, and Yunnan and Guizhou shall surpass Jiangnan.'" Time has passed, and over 600 years after the sage's passing, Guizhou has undergone transformative change. Every county now connects to expressways, every household has been lifted out of poverty, and Village Basketball and the Village Super League have gained nationwide popularity. Mount Fanjing, Xiaoqikong, and Huangguoshu welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors daily. Guizhou's mystique, vibrancy, revolutionary heritage, and grandeur weave a new-era legend. What makes Guizhou precious? Precious for its verdant mountains and clear waters, precious for its unadorned romance," directly conveying positive sentiment. Negative sentiment, however, centers on the tournament's viral reach and media amplification, accounting for 33% of discussions. This encompasses issues like overburdened accommodation and transport, excessive commercialization of the event, and the proliferation of misinformation during coverage. A typical example is a user's post stating, "Guizhou's

'Village Super League,' 'Village BA,' and 'Drum-Hiding Festival' top internet celebrity 'Miao Saint' arrested for fraud." Claiming to have 'attained enlightenment through cultivation,' he deceived followers by fabricating and spreading feudal superstitions under the guise of curing illnesses, averting disasters, and dispelling plagues." This reflects the core concern underlying such negative sentiment. Such sentiments indirectly reveal that while the 'Village Super League' has demonstrated dissemination efficacy, aggregated traffic economics, and enhanced event visibility and reputation, it has to some extent neglected oversight of the dissemination process. This oversight gap has enabled certain individuals to exploit regulatory loopholes for the propagation of negative information.

# Analysis of Sentimental Expression in Twitter Discourse

Among user-generated content about the "Village Super League" on Twitter, positive sentiment accounted for 69.08%, while negative sentiment constituted 15.54%. The core themes of emotional orientation showed significant divergence from those on Weibo. Specifically, positive sentiment centered on themes such as atmosphere (80 mentions). This reveals the grassroots sporting character of the "Village Super League," its cross-cultural sporting resonance, and the international audience's recognition of the authentic value of folk sports. It reflects how the "Village Super League" breaks down regional cultural barriers, "establishing a narrative system centered on the masses and bound by emotion, transforming rural culture from being 'displayed' to being 'experienced.'". For instance, a BBC News social media post noted, "Recently, the village football tournament in Rongjiang County, Guizhou, China, has gained immense popularity online. The tournament features 20 teams, each representing a village, with players ranging from 15 to 40 years old and coming from diverse professions such as fish vendors, excavator drivers, and teachers. Alongside the thrilling football matches, the event features performances of ethnic minority songs and dances during breaks. The electrifying atmosphere of the games has drawn large crowds of fans who have travelled from afar to witness the matches live." Twenty teams, organized by village, comprise players ranging from fish vendors and excavator operators to teachers, aged between 15 and 40. Beyond the thrilling football displays, the breaks feature performances of ethnic minority songs and dances. The fervent atmosphere of the matches has drawn numerous fans from distant places to witness the action in person. This tweet garnered 2,180 saves and 325 retweets, vividly illustrating the positive sentiment expressed. Negative sentiment themes centered around keywords such as "Association" (40 mentions), "Zibo" (26 mentions), and "Party" (21 mentions), addressing concerns including insufficient cultural interpretation, fragmented event information, and sustainability worries. These encompassed inadequate cultural integration within the tournament, doubts about the sustainable production of "rustic" culture, and skepticism regarding the event's long-term viability. A typical example is an overseas user's tweet stating, "This is only about the internal economy; to address the entire economic plan, Guizhou's Cunchao is not enough." External demand will continue to be sluggish, and internally, industries will intensify their cutthroat competition. I am not optimistic about the overall future economic development." This tweet encapsulates the core pessimistic sentiment.

## Discussion

# Text Analysis of Weibo and Twitter

This study analyzed textual patterns on Weibo and Twitter during the 2023–2024 Village Super League, revealing prominent topics among social media users. Findings indicate Weibo centered on promotional narratives, while Twitter prioritized discussions of social phenomena. Both platforms, however, featured match footage and spectator interactions as core content.

Media events constituted the primary discussion topics on Weibo, such as "Guizhou Village Super League welcomes its first international star, Kaka" and the "717 Foodie Festival." The construction of such media events amplified the Village Super League's influence. Similar media events also prompted user groups to increase their attention towards Guizhou's cultural and tourism industries. This study corroborates prior scholarly findings that the mediatization process elevates sporting events beyond their physical venues, transforming them into significant forces for global attention, narrative structures, and brand dissemination [25]. This phenomenon may be attributed to users' psychological investment in media events, as these occurrences evoke emotional resonance, enhance social identification, and offer opportunities for participatory engagement.

The discovery that Twitter narratives center around social phenomena appears reasonable. Given the platform's user base comprises primarily overseas general users, media practitioners, and specialized media organizations [26,27]. Consequently, its narrative stance on the "Village Super League" topic predominantly adopts an observer or interpreter perspective. When discussing this phenomenon-level event, such topics frequently appear under terms like "VillageSuperLeague," "Chinastyle," and "footballpicks." Our findings corroborate the conclusions of research by Almahraj, which indicates that when non-native media report on sporting events in other countries, they predominantly employ a discourse communication approach centered on narrative, descriptive, and explanatory content, despite involving factors such as national image and sociocultural elements [28]. These findings offer fresh perspectives on textual narrative paradigms for regional sporting events within the global digital sphere, thereby deepening our understanding of discursive practices and affective patterns in mediatized sporting events.

# Discourse Practices on Weibo and Twitter

Our research reveals that the Weibo platform leverages sporting events to showcase local ethnic cultures, encompassing Dong Pipa songs, Miao Lusheng dances, and distinctive cuisines from Southeast Guizhou, among others. Notably, entertainment celebrities have increasingly become significant actors within social media discussions. While aggregating extensive online communities, the "Village Super League" has also facilitated participation from Hong Kong celebrity football teams represented by figures such as Alan Tam and Lau Ka-ying, fostering cross-circle interactions. The fan bases attracted by these entertainment stars have joined social media platforms, contributing to the construction of discourse themes surrounding the "Village Super League." Our research corroborates

findings from Yang, confirming that celebrity participation in sporting events constitutes the most popular discussion topic among users [29].

Twitter's thematic presentation exhibits significant divergence from Weibo, particularly in the cognitive positioning and interpretative dimensions of the "Village Super League." Through depoliticized and decommercialized discourses, Twitter frames the event as a globally accessible grassroots sporting spectacle, enabling its transcendence from a local competition to a world-class grassroots sports model within cross-cultural contexts. The thematic divergence between Twitter and Weibo demonstrates how distinct institutional environments and audience structures across social media platforms profoundly shape the discursive construction of sporting events. This renders the "Village Super League" more readily integrated into global comparative frameworks for understanding grassroots sports within the Twitter context. Our research also partially corroborates prior findings that the availability and institutional design of digital and social media platforms reshape how sporting event information is produced, circulated, and interpreted [30].

Such variations in discourse dissemination can be explained through the interplay of platform mechanisms, user psychology, and cultural contexts. On the one hand, from the perspective of platform advantages and algorithmic logic, platforms like Weibo amplify an event's visibility and participatory potential through topic recommendations, trending lists, and interactive features. These technologies enable the redefinition of sporting events as shareable and recreational cultural symbols, rather than mere athletic performances [30]. On the other hand, from a user psychology perspective, media events provide a collective stage for emotional resonance and identity formation. For localized events such as the "Rural Super League," audiences participate in meaning-making through actions like posting tweets and comments, fostering a sense of collective belonging and regional pride [31].

# Sentiment Analysis of Discourse on Weibo and Twitter

This study reveals the emotional attitudes of Weibo and Twitter users towards the 2023–2024 Village Super League. Both platforms' users generally held positive views of the competition. Chinese audiences demonstrated high recognition and enthusiasm for the Village Super League. They eagerly anticipate the inaugural "World Cup" of the Village Super League in 2028, enabling grassroots football teams worldwide to experience the sport's charm and enjoyment. For Twitter platform users, this cross-cultural dissemination lowers cognitive barriers, enabling users to understand and evaluate events with an equal, non-confrontational attitude, generating positive sentiment. The emotional resonance with the "Village Super League" on Weibo and Twitter stands in stark contrast to other nations' discomfort and resistance towards spontaneous, unofficial sporting events [32]. However, it is noteworthy that negative sentiment also emerged in the discourse of Weibo and Twitter users, warranting attention. This negative sentiment primarily concerned the event's excessive commercialization, the proliferation of misinformation during dissemination, insufficient cultural integration within the event's setting, and skepticism regarding its long-term viability.

On Weibo, significantly dominant positive sentiment prevails, with the "Village Super League" predominantly constructed within the domestic context as a vital cultural symbol for uniting rural sentiments, invigorating local identity, and embodying national development narratives. While Twitter also features predominantly positive sentiment, neutral and negative sentiments hold a markedly higher proportion. Overseas audiences, influenced by cultural distance and differing media contexts, exhibit more critical and utilitarian emotional attitudes towards the "Village Super League." Specifically, the highly positive sentiment on Weibo stems not merely from the competitive nature of the event itself but is deeply embedded within the broader discursive framework of rural revitalization, cultural confidence, and the integrated development of sports, culture, tourism, and commerce. On Weibo, the Village Super League serves as a significant symbolic resource showcasing grassroots social vitality, grassroots sporting creativity, and regional development achievements. While the Village Super League has stimulated local economic and cultural development and dissemination, its origins in China's domestic policies promoting the integration of sports, culture, tourism, and commerce, alongside rural revitalization initiatives, have led participants to experience a sense of self-indulgence. Chinese audiences express profound endorsement and fervent enthusiasm for the Village Super League, eagerly anticipating the inaugural "World Cup" tournament in 2028. This event will invite grassroots football teams worldwide to experience the sport's charm and joy [33]. Evidently, the Village Super League has integrated what was originally a spontaneous, localized sporting activity into a legitimate mainstream narrative framework, thereby achieving voluntary recognition at the value level.

By contrast, emotional resonance on Twitter is built upon shared recognition of its participatory, entertaining, and community-governed nature. In a sense, cultural practices and regional development narratives in developing nations, authoritarian states, and emerging economies are prone to both self-affirming, carnivalesque representations within local discourses and simplistic reduction to developmental models or ideological vehicles within international contexts, thus falling into the trap of one-dimensional interpretation. For phenomena like the "Village Super League"—which embody both grassroots vitality and policy embeddedness—academia and media must adopt a neutral critical perspective. This requires moving beyond dichotomous cognitive pitfalls to focus on its core: the potential for community self-governance and the vitality of local culture inherent in grassroots sports. It should not be reduced to a policy-driven carnival spectacle or a singular symbol of development. It is evident that media narratives, through the persistent reproduction of shared symbols, values, and emotional experiences, prompt individuals to transcend real-world interactions and form psychological identification with a community. This perspective is rooted in Benedict Anderson's seminal work Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. Anderson posits that media constructs homogeneous, abstract temporal frameworks and shared symbols, enabling previously unconnected individuals to forge collective bonds and lay the foundations for community. Subsequent scholars further expanded upon this, indicating that the symbolic reproduction and shared meaning within cross-media narratives constitute the core mechanism for activating collective emotional identification and completing the psychological construction of a community [34].

# Limitations

This study has certain limitations. Firstly, the social media data utilized here is sourced exclusively from Weibo and Twitter, failing to encompass other platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin. Secondly, the linguistic scope was restricted to English-language tweets, potentially overlooking valuable perspectives from social media users in non-English-speaking countries. Future research may consider expanding both data sources and linguistic coverage to include additional social media platforms and non-English texts, thereby capturing the diverse viewpoints of cross-cultural users more comprehensively.

# Future Directions

Future research could incorporate additional social media platforms and multilingual data to capture a broader cross-cultural discourse environment. Methodologically, combining computational analysis with qualitative approaches may offer deeper insights into narrative production and emotional meaning-making. Longitudinal studies are also needed to examine how platform narratives and affective patterns evolve over time.

## Declarations

# Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

# Additional information

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to S.Z.

# Funding

The study was no financial support.

# Author Contribution

S.Z. conceived and designed the study, collected and analyzed the data, and wrote the manuscript.

# Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to sensitivity, but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Data are located in controlled access data storage at School of Journalism and Communication, Shanghai University of Sport, Shanghai, China.

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# Figures

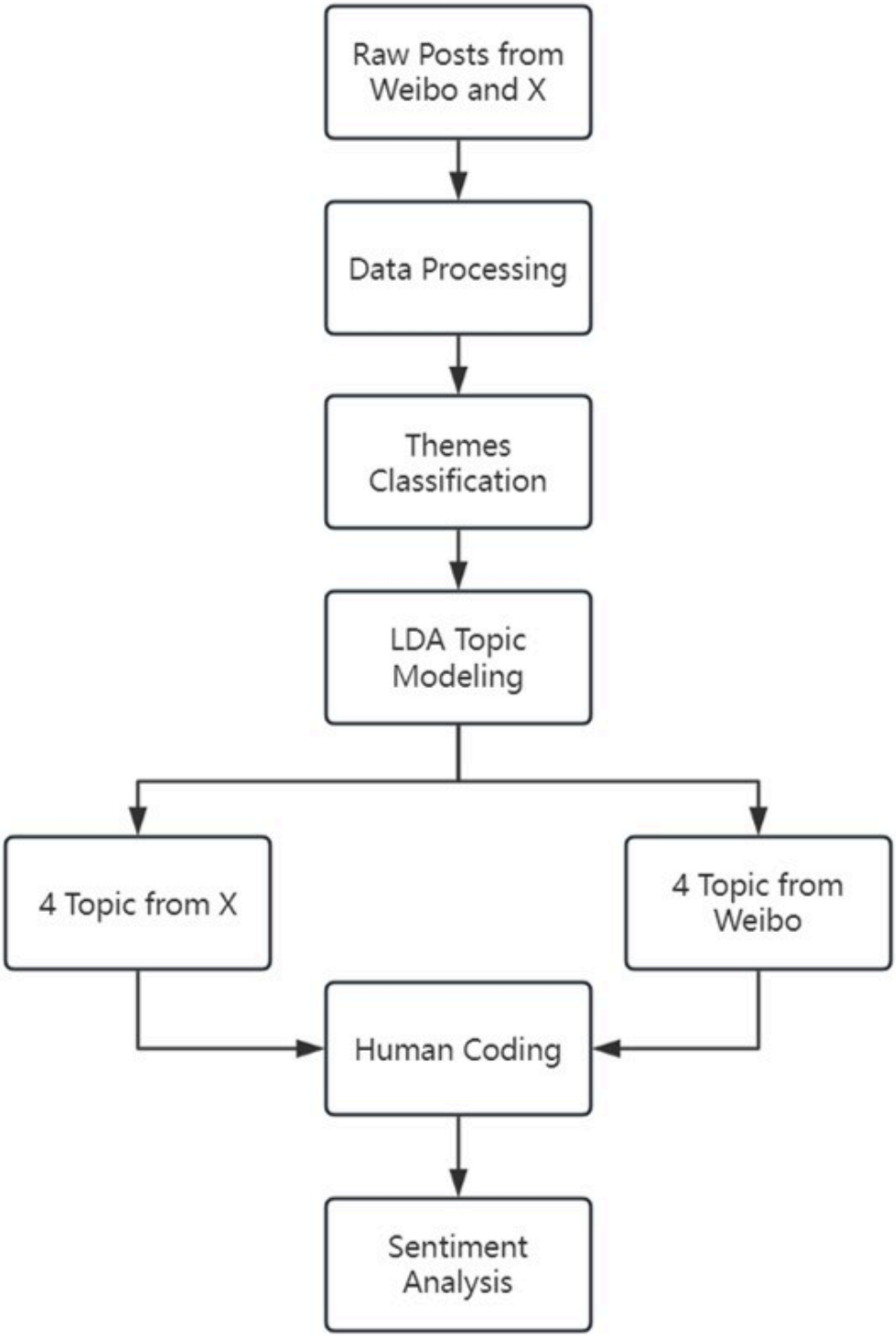


**Figure 1**

The flow of data processing

Left side Weibo platform, right side Twitter platform

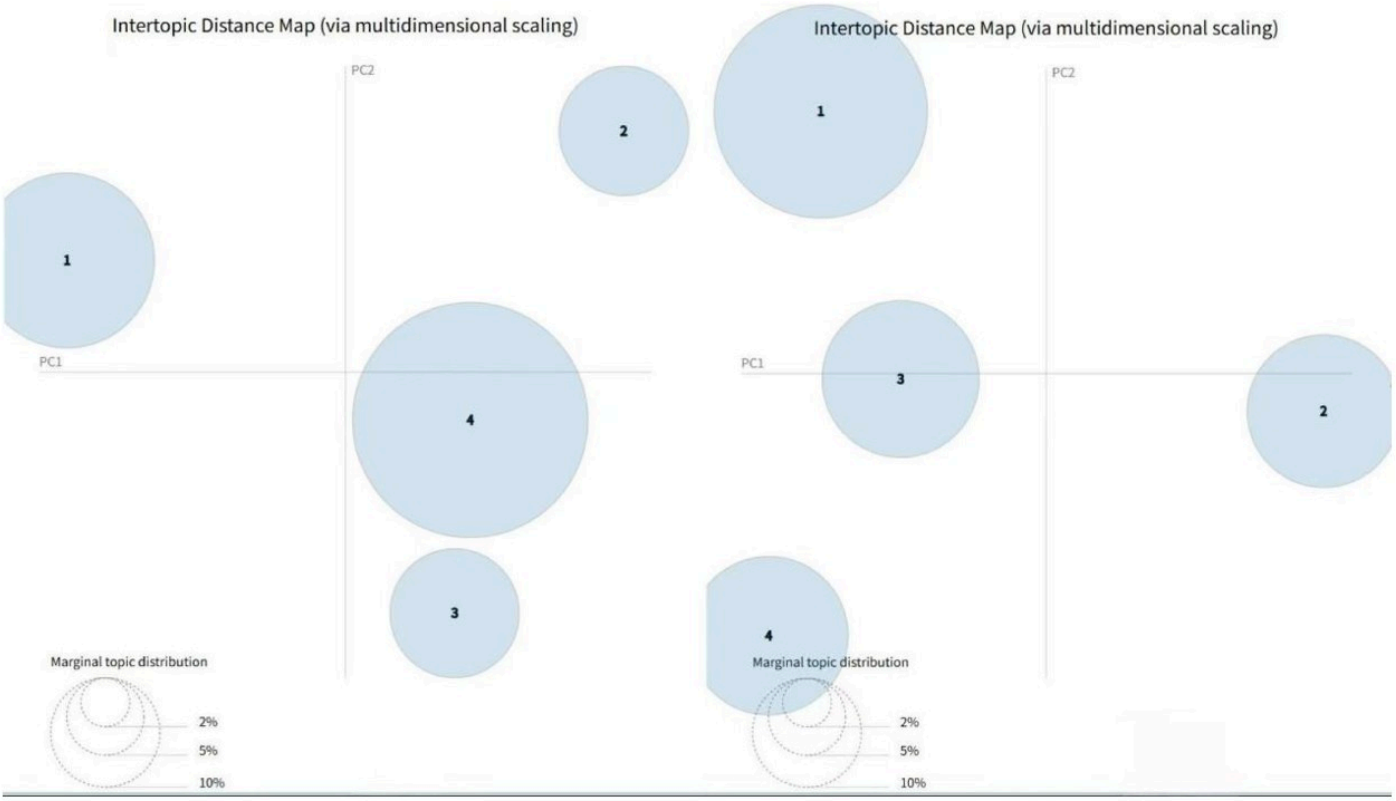


**Figure 2**

Weibo special theme bubble picture