

The Impact of Entertainment Celebrities' Cross-over Participation in Sports Events on Sports Consumption Conversion—A Case Study of Wang Yibo's Participation in GT Championships

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Abstract. Taking Wang Yibo's participation in GT championships as a typical case, this paper studies the impact, functional mechanisms and potential risks of entertainment celebrities crossing over into sports events on sports consumption conversion. The study finds that celebrity cross-over can promote the conversion of five types of sports consumption, namely spectator, physical product, participatory, digital and derivative consumption, through six mechanisms: attention transfer, emotional identification, community mobilization, scene experience, brand linkage and knowledge popularization. Meanwhile, celebrity cross-over also entails six types of potential risks: popularity mismatch, dilution of professionalism, interference of fan circle culture, alienation of value orientation, safety and ethical challenges, and brand risk spillover. A fundamental rhythm mismatch exists between short-term celebrity popularity and the long-cycle development of sports, which can easily lead event organizers to neglect long-term core competence building. This study carries practical significance for scientifically understanding the economic and social effects of celebrity cross-over participation in sports, scientifically utilizing the celebrity effect, promoting the high-quality development of the sports industry, and promoting the sustainable growth of sports consumption.

Keywords: entertainment celebrities, sports consumption, consumption conversion, fan economy, celebrity cross-over

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the booming digital economy and fan economy, expanding and upgrading sports consumption is a key measure to boost domestic demand. Digital technology has injected new impetus into sports consumption, and spectator sports consumption has taken on a new feature of online-offline integration [1]. With the development of the sports industry and the upgrading of consumption structure, a growing number of entertainment celebrities participate in sports events in depth as athletes, investors, promotion ambassadors and other identities. The fan economy exerts a profound influence on sports consumption behavior through emotional identification and

community mobilization [2]. However, while celebrity cross-over brings traffic and consumption increments to events, it also gives rise to problems such as traffic bubbles, diluted professionalism and the intrusion of fan circle culture. Taking Wang Yibo's participation in GT championships as a typical case, this paper systematically analyzes the functional mechanisms and potential risks of entertainment celebrities' cross-over participation in sports events affecting sports consumption conversion.

This paper makes three innovations: ① Existing literature mostly focuses on the superficial form of celebrity endorsement and its impact on purchase intention [3]. This paper takes celebrities' in-depth participation in events as athletes as the research object, supplementing specialized research on entertainment celebrities crossing into the sports field. ② This paper constructs a mechanism model of how celebrity cross-over affects sports consumption conversion, sums up the conversion paths into six mechanisms and five consumption forms, and deepens the understanding of the long-term and psychological mechanisms of consumption conversion [4]. ③ This paper systematically sorts out six types of potential risks, making up for the deficiency of existing studies that value positive effects over risk analysis [5], and forms a complete analytical framework of "mechanism-risk".

The rest of this paper is arranged as follows: the second part introduces literature review and theoretical basis; the third part is case introduction, analyzing the communication changes and market reactions brought by Wang Yibo's participation in GT championships; the fourth part constructs the mechanism model of celebrity cross-over affecting sports consumption conversion; the fifth part analyzes potential risks in the process of consumption conversion; the sixth part presents the research conclusion.

2. Literature review and theoretical basis

2.1. Functional mechanisms of fan economy and sports consumption behavior

Academia generally holds that the fan economy is the core factor driving the growth of sports consumption, and its value lies in forming a commercial closed loop through emotional interaction between brands and fans. First of all, at the level of action paths, the paths through which the fan economy affects sports consumption have been systematically sorted out. Xiang Sijie clarified three paths: the dual incentive and inhibitory effects of opinion leaders, the multi-dimensional penetration of fan community economy, and the value conversion of well-known sports IPs, and pointed out that sports IPs with long life cycles, high recognition and strong agglomeration effect provide a stable carrier for commercial conversion. Secondly, at the level of quantitative verification, the correlation between team identification and consumption behavior has been empirically supported. Through a large-sample meta-analysis, Lee confirmed that word-of-mouth communication, peripheral commodity consumption, on-site viewing and media consumption are all significantly correlated with team identification, and sports scenes and cultural backgrounds play important moderating roles [6].

2.2. Influencing factors and effects of entertainment celebrities' cross-border endorsement

Studies on endorsement effects show that the image fit between celebrities and brands and the credibility of celebrities themselves are the core influencing factors. On the one hand, from the perspective of audience attitude formation mechanism, the systematic matching of celebrities and events can improve audience attitudes. Using classical conditioning theory, Chen confirmed through

experiments that this matching can significantly lift the audience's favorability towards events, and the higher the image fit, the stronger the effect. On the other hand, from the perspective of actual impact on consumption decisions, fit and credibility determine purchase behavior. Based on consumer survey data, Calvo-Porrall found that the two are the most important factors affecting purchase intention and premium payment willingness, providing universal reference for celebrity endorsement strategies of various consumer goods [7].

2.3. Driving factors and paths of sports consumption conversion

Sports consumption conversion results from the synergy between the demand side and the supply side. On the one hand, at the level of psychological drive on the demand side, the satisfaction of basic psychological needs is the internal motivation of consumption. By constructing a mediation model, Hao found that the satisfaction of three needs—autonomy, competence and belonging—can not only directly promote meaningful sports consumption, but also exert an indirect impact through the mediating role of team attachment and self-esteem. On the other hand, at the level of scene conversion on the supply side, scene innovation is the key to traffic monetization. Taking the "Su Chao" league as a case, Zhou Siyu proposed the mode of "ticket linkage + scene innovation", and confirmed that mass sports events can turn traffic into urban consumption momentum through the feedback mechanism of "event drainage — cultural tourism monetization".

2.4. Research review

Existing research results are relatively rich, but there are still shortcomings: first, there is a lack of specialized research on entertainment celebrities crossing into the sports field; second, insufficient attention is paid to the long-term mechanism of consumption conversion, with most focusing on short-term traffic effects; third, the depth of interdisciplinary research needs to be strengthened. Deng Weiquan et al. confirmed through the spatial difference-in-differences model that the policy of "national sports consumption pilot cities" has both direct effects and significant spatial spillover effects [8]; Yan Huajian pointed out that dilemmas such as deep-rooted traditional consumption concepts, lagging development of smart venues, and insufficient integration of event digitization restrict the consumption conversion driven by the digital economy.

3. Case: Wang Yibo's participation in GT Championships and motorsport breaking out of its niche

3.1. Project attributes and consumption characteristics of GT events

GT Championships (Grand Touring Car Championship) are top-level circuit motorsports certified by the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), ranking second only to F1 in the global motorsport system, among which the GT3 category boasts the most prominent commercial value. Launched in 2016 by the Automobile and Motorcycle Sports Administration of China, China GT has now built an annual tour system covering core circuits in Beijing, Shanghai, Zhuhai, Ningbo and other cities, attracting manufacturers such as Audi, Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Porsche as well as more than 30 professional teams, making it one of the largest national GT championships in Asia. However, it has long faced structural dilemmas such as solidified audience circles, single monetization channels and low public awareness.

The niche nature of GT events is determined by three core attributes. First of all, the professional access threshold is relatively high. A single GT3 racing car costs more than 3 million yuan, and the operating cost of a professional team in a single season reaches over 10 million yuan. Professional drivers must complete thousands of hours of professional track training and pass the FIA license assessment. Secondly, events carry relatively high risks. The track speed can reach over 320 kilometers per hour, and the accident rate is significantly higher than that of other sports, which reduces the public's willingness to participate. Finally, the audience group is relatively small. Limited by professional thresholds and consumption costs, it presents a highly concentrated vertical circle characteristic.

Based on the above attributes, China GT has formed a vertical consumption chain featuring high consumption, low frequency, strong experience and narrow audience. First of all, spectator consumption is relatively expensive. The ticket price for ordinary stands is 200–800 yuan per session, and that for boxes is over 5,000 yuan per session. Secondly, team participation involves equipment consumption, covering complete racing cars, spare parts and professional safety protection gear. In addition, training consumption is a necessary investment for enthusiasts to enter the GT field, including racing license exams and track training fees. Finally, derivative peripheral consumption accounts for a very low proportion. The categories are single and the channels are limited to the event site, making it difficult to expand to the mass market.

3.2. Identity basis of Wang Yibo's cross-over into motorsport

Wang Yibo's professional identities cover actors, singers, professional racing drivers and other dimensions. First of all, he has a long-term and stable public image of a "sports idol". He has maintained a sunny, passionate and courageous image for a long time, and is deeply involved in extreme sports such as skateboarding and skiing. He was awarded the title of "China Skateboarding Promotion Ambassador" by the General Administration of Sport of China. Secondly, he has obtained many professional recognitions in the sports field. In 2019, he won the championship of Group D and the runner-up of the overall standings in the ZIC category of the Asian Road Motorcycle Championship. Finally, his fan group has strong conversion potential. Fans are characterized by youth, feminization, high activity and strong consumption power, and are highly organized, providing organizational guarantee for event breakthrough communication and consumption conversion. Baidu Index data further confirms this judgment: his daily search index has long stabilized at a high level of about 10,000 points, and there are search peaks two to three times the daily average at key nodes such as competition participation; the population portrait shows that women account for 83.5% of his attention group (TGI is 187.34), significantly higher than the national average of 44.57%, and the age structure is concentrated in the 30–49 age group with strong consumption capacity, reflecting the strong driving effect of the celebrity effect on event communication and consumption conversion [9].

In terms of growth path, Wang Yibo officially got involved in motorcycle sports in 2017, became a professional driver of the Wanlida Yamaha Team in 2019 after systematic training, and has since won 2 championships and 1 runner-up, with his professional identity officially certified by the Automobile and Motorcycle Sports Administration of China and the Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme. In 2024, he officially crossed over to GT events, joined the UNO Racing Team, completed the technical transformation from two wheels to four wheels, and passed the national Class B racing license assessment.

Different from the superficial cooperation of traditional celebrities only through endorsement and attendance, Wang Yibo participates in the whole process of training, competition and promotion in

depth as a professional driver. On the one hand, the identity of a "real driver" enhances the credibility and attractiveness of the event. He has broken the public stereotype of celebrities participating in sports as "amateur play", and his real performance on the track has triggered strong emotional resonance: according to the official data of 2025 China GT, the fourth round in Shanghai where he participated drew 40,000 on-site spectators and 37,307,181 live broadcast views, both hitting record highs. On the other hand, his professional understanding lowers the public's cognitive threshold. Wang Yibo can truly and in-depth convey motorsport culture to fans, building a bridge for the popularization of motorsport. In addition, his professional achievements have received dual certification from the government and the industry. The Automobile and Motorcycle Sports Administration of China publicly commented that he "has made important contributions to the promotion of Chinese motorsport". This influence based on professional identity is more lasting and transformative than traditional endorsements.

3.3. Communication changes brought by Wang Yibo's participation

In terms of media coverage, the communication of traditional GT events has long relied on automotive and sports vertical media, with single channels and solidified circles. First of all, the communication pattern of events has been restructured after Wang Yibo's participation. Central mainstream media such as Xinhua News Agency, *People's Daily* and CCTV Sports, together with social platforms such as Weibo, Douyin, Xiaohongshu and Bilibili, form a full-domain three-dimensional communication matrix. Secondly, the communication content is no longer limited to competitive results, but extends to daily training, racing technical analysis, motorsport culture popularization and sports spirit communication, turning GT events from niche cultural activities into public cultural events.

In terms of social platform data, the official data of each round of 2025 China GT released by the 51GT3 Racing Database (see Table 1) shows that Wang Yibo's participation directly determines the social communication popularity of the event: the fourth round of Shanghai final with his full participation recorded a total of 15,943,667 views across all platforms, while the third round of Zhuhai without his participation only had 456,429 views, and the view volume of participating rounds is about 34.9 times that of non-participating rounds. In terms of total interaction volume across all platforms, the fourth round reached 246,018, about 24.1 times that of the third round (10,193). Although Wang Yibo failed to appear in the second round of Shanghai due to racing failure, the views still remained above 1.03 million, much higher than that of Zhuhai station, proving that celebrity cross-over has a significant positive driving effect on event communication. Social popularity has enabled GT events to break through the vertical circle of motorsport fans and expand to mass consumer groups.

Table 1. Comparison of official social media data of each round of 2025 China GT

Event Round	Wang Yibo's Participation	Total Views Across All Platforms	Total Interactions Across All Platforms
Pre-season Warm-up (Ningbo)	Participated	5,796,362	109,137
Round 1 (Shanghai)	Participated	10,300,944	419,961

Table 1. (continued)

Round 2 (Shanghai)	Participated but did not finish (DNF due to racing failure)	1,032,064	81,566
Round 3 (Zhuhai)	Did not participate	456,429	10,193
Round 4 (Shanghai, Final)	Participated	15,943,667	246,018

In terms of live broadcast and broadcast attention, the combined number of viewers of the qualifying live broadcast of the 2024 season opener on Weibo and Douyin exceeded 4 million; as Wang Yibo's GT debut, the 2024 Zhuhai opener made the Zhuhai Circuit full again after four years. In addition to official channels, UGC content such as event highlights and training tidbits produced by fans spread widely, forming a secondary amplification of the communication effect. The comparison of live broadcast and on-site audience data of each round is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of live broadcast and on-site audience data of each round of 2025 China GT

Event Round	Wang Yibo's Participation	Number of On-site Spectators	Official Platform Live Views	Third-party Platform Live Views
Pre-season Warm-up (Ningbo)	Participated	8,000	1,588,054	12,797,800
Round 1 (Shanghai)	Participated	20,000	3,923,660	8,779,935
Round 2 (Zhuhai)	Did not participate	—	649,380	1,988,099
Round 3 (Zhuhai)	Did not participate	—	203,000	2,319,074
Round 4 (Shanghai, Final)	Participated	40,000	28,737,608	8,532,573

3.4. Activation of consumer market and reconstruction of industry ecology

In terms of the peripheral market, the optimization of audience structure and demand upgrading have driven the overall growth of racing-related consumption. First of all, consumption of professional equipment and models has increased significantly. Products such as Wang Yibo's same-style racing suits, helmets and gloves sold out quickly, and many international equipment brands took the opportunity to enter the Chinese mass market. The same-style GT racing model he drove became a hit, and manufacturers rushed to increase production. Secondly, experience-based consumption has grown explosively. The passenger flow of karting venues and racing experience centers across the country has increased notably. Finally, cultural tourism consumption in the event host cities has been significantly boosted. During the event, hotel bookings around the venues increased, and inquiries about youth karting training surged, forming a complete consumption ecology where event drainage drives cultural tourism monetization.

In terms of industry feedback, the traffic effect and commercial value increment have triggered strategic adjustments of all parties in the industry. First of all, event organizers pay more attention to

entertaining and popular communication. They have optimized broadcast technology and on-site viewing experience, and launched low-threshold activities such as track experience days and "Village GT" leagues. Secondly, the commercial attractiveness of events has increased significantly. Wang Yibo's team has successively won cross-field brand sponsorships such as EVISU, Castrol and Red Bull. Xiaomi became the title sponsor for the 2026 season. The sponsor structure has expanded from vertical brands to mass consumer brands, and the sponsorship form has shifted to content marketing and fan interaction. Finally, team operations have begun to attach importance to the balance between commercial value and competitive value. While introducing star drivers, they strengthen professional training and strive for a win-win situation. The active adjustments of all parties in the industry have promoted the transformation of GT events from "professional competition-oriented" to "mass culture-oriented".

4. Mechanism analysis of entertainment celebrities' cross-over participation in sports events affecting sports consumption conversion

The sports consumption conversion triggered by entertainment celebrities' cross-over shows multi-dimensional and multi-level characteristics, which can be summarized into five forms: first, spectator consumption, including event tickets, official paid broadcasts and tourism consumption in host cities; second, physical product consumption, covering sports equipment, event peripherals, celebrity same-style products and endorsed goods; third, participatory consumption, manifested as sports experience, skill training and qualification acquisition when consumers transform from spectators to participants; fourth, digital consumption, including emerging forms such as sports simulation equipment, e-sports sports games and digital collections; fifth, derivative consumption, which refers to the coordinated development of catering, accommodation, transportation and shopping in host cities driven by event traffic, forming an economic multiplier effect. The realization of the above five types of consumption relies on the following six mechanisms.

4.1. Attention transfer mechanism

In the digital age of information overload, attention has become a scarce commercial resource. With a huge fan base and traffic appeal, celebrities can divert public attention from the entertainment field to sports events in a short time: on the one hand, it is the direct conversion of celebrity traffic. Fans take the initiative to learn about events, watch live broadcasts and buy tickets out of concern for idols; on the other hand, it is the amplification effect of platform algorithms. Social platforms push event content related to celebrities to fan groups and potential audiences with similar portraits, achieving exponential expansion of communication and laying a traffic foundation for consumption conversion.

4.2. Emotional identification mechanism

Fans' emotional attachment to celebrities will migrate to events and sports projects themselves, forming a sense of identity and consumption willingness: first, interest identification, where fans internalize celebrities' personal hobbies into their own interests and generate relevant consumption motives; second, value identification, where the positive persona shaped by celebrities resonates with the values advocated by sports spirit. When the personal traits of celebrities are highly consistent with the spiritual core of the project, the conversion effect of the emotional identification mechanism is more significant.

4.3. Community mobilization mechanism

Mature fan communities have perfect organizational structure and collective action ability [10], which can turn scattered individual consumption willingness into large-scale consumption behavior: first, collective viewing, where fan organizations uniformly coordinate ticket purchase, accommodation and support materials, directly driving related consumption; second, content production mobilization, where fans spontaneously produce UGC content such as popular science articles and secondary creation videos, lowering the cognitive threshold of ordinary audiences; third, identity transformation, where fans gradually take on the dual identities of celebrity fans and sports enthusiasts, and consumption behavior shifts from short-term support to long-term interest, realizing the sustainability of consumption.

4.4. Scene experience mechanism

On-site viewing has a strong immersive experience attribute: first, sensory immersion, where multi-sensory stimulation significantly improves consumers' favorability and memory depth of events; second, social attribute, where the event site provides offline social scenes and enhances community belonging by making friends with like-minded people; third, derivative experience, where low-threshold scenes such as karting reduce the access cost of experiential consumption and cultivate potential users for in-depth consumption.

4.5. Brand linkage mechanism

Celebrity cross-over breaks the original brand boundary of events: first, optimization of sponsor structure, extending from sports vertical brands to mass consumer brands such as 3C technology and clothing, enriching monetization channels and consumption choices; second, cross-brand co-branding cooperation, where co-branded products form double endorsement with the help of celebrity influence and event IP, enhancing market attractiveness; third, reduced consumption threshold, where people-friendly products such as cultural and creative peripherals allow consumers to express support at a lower cost, realizing the transformation from niche high-end consumption to mass consumption.

4.6. Knowledge popularization mechanism

Celebrities play a bridging role between professional sports culture and public cognition: first, popularization of professional knowledge, where fans gradually master professional terms, event rules and technical details while watching games, and their appreciation ability and sense of participation increase accordingly; second, dissemination of event culture, where celebrity participation drives the public to pay attention to the historical culture and spiritual connotation of sports projects, elevating events from competitive activities to a lifestyle with cultural connotation.

5. Risks of consumption conversion in entertainment celebrities' cross-over participation in sports events

5.1. Rhythm mismatch between short-term celebrity popularity and long-term project development

Celebrity popularity is highly cyclical, volatile and uncontrollable, while the cultivation of the sports industry has a long-cycle attribute, and there is an essential contradiction between the two. Over-reliance on celebrity traffic may make event organizers satisfied with short-term data growth and ignore their own operational capacity, content construction and cultural cultivation; once celebrities withdraw, attention may drop rapidly. The dozens of times difference in communication data between participating and non-participating rounds in the case just confirms the fragility and unsustainability of such popularity.

5.2. Dilution of competitive sports professionalism by entertainment

When celebrities become the core focus of communication, the attention of the media and the public is prone to structural imbalance. Reports are largely concentrated on entertainment content such as celebrity trends and dressing tidbits, while insufficient attention is paid to professional content such as competitive processes and technical analysis, leading to the marginalization of the professional discourse power of events. Traffic concentration will also squeeze the exposure space of other professional athletes, which may damage the talent incentive mechanism and fair competition ecology in the long run.

5.3. Potential interference of fan circle culture on event order

There are significant differences in the operating logic between fan subculture and traditional sports culture: at the communication level, fan groups may interfere with the public opinion ecology through comment control and data brushing, and raise unreasonable questions about penalties or attack competitors; at the on-site level, excessive support may affect the viewing experience of other audiences and interfere with event order; at the consumption level, irrational consumption and comparative consumption are prone to breed among fan groups, deviating from the essence of sports consumption and exerting a negative influence on teenagers' consumption concepts [11].

5.4. Alienation of sports spirit from competition-oriented to traffic-oriented

When traffic becomes the core goal of event operation, event organizers may adjust rules, schedules and even competitive standards to cater to the needs of fans; capital and traffic may even collude to customize exposure sessions for celebrities, turning events into "fan meetings" for individual celebrities, deviating from the essential attributes of sports events and eroding the independence and spiritual core of sports culture.

5.5. Safety and ethical challenges of high-risk projects

For high-risk projects such as motorsport and extreme sports, the safety risks of celebrity cross-over are particularly prominent. On the one hand, celebrities' own personal safety risks are higher than professional athletes. They have limited training time and insufficient event experience, facing higher safety hazards in a high-intensity competitive environment. On the other hand, celebrity

behavior has a strong demonstration effect. Fans, especially teenagers, may rashly imitate high-risk sports without professional guidance and safety guarantees. In addition, if event organizers excessively pursue traffic and weaken safety publicity, it will further amplify safety risks.

5.6. Spillover of celebrity personal risks to event brands

Celebrity personal image carries strong uncertainty. Once negative news or public opinion crises occur, risks may be quickly transmitted to deeply bound events, damaging long-accumulated brand assets in a short period of time; over-reliance on a single celebrity will also weaken the independence of event brands, which is not conducive to long-term brand building and value improvement.

6. Conclusion

Scientifically guiding entertainment celebrities to participate in sports events across borders is conducive to releasing the vitality of the fan economy and promoting the expansion and upgrading of sports consumption. Taking Wang Yibo's participation in GT championships as a typical case, the case data of this paper proves that in-depth participation of celebrities can significantly improve event attention and commercial value, providing a realistic path for niche sports projects to break out of their circles. On this basis, this paper constructs a theoretical framework of how celebrity cross-over affects sports consumption conversion, summarizes the conversion into five forms of spectator, physical product, participatory, digital and derivative consumption, and extracts six mechanisms of attention transfer, emotional identification, community mobilization, scene experience, brand linkage and knowledge popularization, which cooperate with each other to form a complete chain from traffic introduction to consumption conversion. This paper also analyzes potential risks from six dimensions, indicating that celebrity cross-over is a "double-edged sword", which may produce negative effects such as popularity mismatch, professional dilution, order interference, value alienation, safety hazards and brand spillover while bringing traffic dividends.

To promote the benign conversion of consumption, event organizers should focus on three aspects: ① Build a long-term cooperation mechanism between celebrities and events, and pay attention to the content construction and core competitiveness cultivation of events themselves while leveraging celebrity traffic, so as to reduce dependence on a single celebrity. ② Balance the entertainment and professionalism of events, increase the dissemination of competitive content, professional knowledge and sports culture, and avoid excessive entertainment diluting sports spirit. ③ Establish a guidance and standardization mechanism for fan behavior, clarify viewing etiquette and behavioral boundaries, and promote the benign integration of fan culture and sports culture. It should be pointed out that as a single-case study, the generalizability of the conclusions of this paper remains to be verified. In the future, multi-case comparison and large-sample empirical research can be carried out to explore the heterogeneity laws under different situations.

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