

# Research on the Development Dilemmas and Breakthrough Strategies of Sports Event Tourism in the Digital Economy Era: A Case Study of Kaizhou District

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**Abstract:** To explore the high-quality development paths of district-level sports event tourism in the era of digital economy, this study takes Kaizhou District of Chongqing as the research object, and systematically analyzes the development foundation, process, current situation, core dilemmas, and breakthrough strategies of sports event tourism by integrating its resource endowments and practical development characteristics. The findings show that: Based on local natural and humanistic resources as well as the tourism reception system, sports event tourism in Kaizhou District has gone through three stages, namely initial exploration, rapid development, and quality upgrading. It has formed a complementary and integrated sports event system covering water-based, mountain-based, and folk-custom-based events, along with a government-enterprise-media collaborative operation mechanism. During the period of industrial digital transformation, sports event tourism in Kaizhou District faces dilemmas such as lack of digital experiences, absence of digital marketing, and the weakness of the digital support system. Therefore, this study proposes development strategies including innovating sports event tourism experiences, strengthening digital marketing, and enhancing the digital support system. These strategies provide references for the transformation of sports event tourism in Kaizhou District and similar districts in central and western China.

**Keywords:** Digital Economy; Sports Event Tourism; Kaizhou District; Digital Transformation

## 1. Introduction

As a landmark manifestation of the in-depth integration of sports and tourism, sports event tourism—defined by its high participation and strong experiential appeal—has emerged as a key engine driving the transition of tourism from sightseeing-oriented to experience-oriented models. It also serves as a critical pathway for cultivating new growth engines in the regional economy. Furthermore, sports events, particularly regionally distinctive ones, can effectively transcend geographical limitations, attract inbound tourists from other regions, and boost local tourism consumption<sup>[1]</sup>. Even small communities can leverage event IPs to build a differentiated competitive edge in tourism, in turn realizing the goal of revitalizing tourism via events.

From a policy standpoint, since 2009—when China’s State Council issued Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Tourism, the first document to explicitly advocate “promoting the integrated development of tourism with culture, sports, and other related industries”—the country has rolled out a succession of key policy instruments. Notable among these are Guiding Opinions on Accelerating the Development of the Sports Industry, Opinions on Promoting National Fitness and Sports Consumption to Drive High-Quality Development of the Sports Industry, Outline for Building a Sports-Powerful Nation, and Opinions on Unleashing Sports Consumption Potential to Further Advance High-Quality Development of the Sports Industry. Together, these policies have established institutional safeguards for sports event tourism from a top-level design perspective, propelling it to emerge as one of the fastest-growing and most vibrant segments within China’s tourism sector<sup>[2]</sup>. According to the 2021 China Sports Tourism Industry Development Report, China’s sports tourism market has maintained a steady annual growth rate of 30% to 40%—a rate far exceeding the global average of 15%<sup>[3]</sup>. This stark growth gap serves as a clear indicator of the industry’s substantial development potential in China.

At present, as the new round of industrial revolution advances in depth, digital transformation has

evolved into an inevitable trend, and the digital economy is profoundly reshaping the developmental paradigm of sports event tourism. As digital technologies—including but not limited to big data and artificial intelligence—are integrated into the tourism industry, they not only elevate tourists to a dominant position but also redefine the operational logic of sports event tourism<sup>[4]</sup>. Specifically, digital service platforms facilitate the efficient integration of event resources and tourism components, while immersive technologies contribute to innovating spectator experiences and value co-creation models<sup>[5]</sup>. Nevertheless, from a practical perspective, the digital transformation of sports event tourism remains beset by notable shortcomings: most regions are still confined to superficial linkages, merely pairing event organization with scenic spot “check-ins,” and lack digital integration and innovation<sup>[6]</sup>. From a theoretical perspective, systematic research on the empowerment of the digital economy for sports event tourism development remains relatively scarce, resulting in a mismatch between theoretical supply and practical demand<sup>[7]</sup>.

As a pivotal nodal city in the Three Gorges Reservoir Area, Kaizhou District of Chongqing has, in recent years, dedicated sustained efforts to cultivating event IPs by leveraging its established developmental foundations. Specifically, it has successfully launched a series of signature event IPs, including the Lake-Circuit Marathon, Canoeing Championship, and Dragon Boat Invitational Tournament. This initiative has gradually fostered a developmental framework centered on attracting tourists through events and invigorating tourism via these visitors, thereby effectively enhancing the vitality of the regional tourism market. Consequently, amid the accelerated penetration of the digital economy, the conventional event organization-sightseeing model lacks the capacity to fully harness digital technologies for in-depth resource integration and experience upgrading. There is thus an urgent need to explore pathways for digital technology empowerment, with the aim of driving the transition of sports event tourism from superficial linkage to deep-seated integration.

Accordingly, grounded in the perspective of the digital economy and integrated with the practical development of sports event tourism in Kaizhou District, this study systematically examines its developmental dilemmas and breakthrough strategies during the digital transformation process. Its primary objectives are to provide a theoretical basis and practical pathways for Kaizhou District to optimize the layout of the sports event tourism industry and achieve high-quality development of the regional tourism economy, while also offering actionable references for similar districts across China in advancing the digital transformation of their sports event tourism sectors.

## **2. Basic Conditions for the Development of Sports Event Tourism**

Sports event tourism takes sports events as its core attraction, yet its essential nature remains that of a tourism activity. Resource endowments and reception systems serve as the dual pillars for its sustainable development: high-quality resources provide venue carriers for sports events, while a sound reception system ensures the quality of tourist services and operational efficiency during events. The synergy between these two elements constitutes a critical prerequisite for realizing the leverage effect of sports event tourism<sup>[8]</sup>.

### **2.1 Tourism Resources**

Kaizhou District boasts abundant natural and cultural tourism resources, providing diverse venues for event tourism that cater to various competition needs and tourists' multifaceted experiential demands. As of the end of 2024, the district has 11 A-level tourism resources (a classification standard for China's high-quality tourism attractions).

Among these, Hanfeng Lake stands out as China's largest inland artificial lake, with an east-west span of 12.51 km and a north-south span of 5.86 km. Its water quality has consistently met Class III standards, providing optimal geographical conditions for aquatic events. Longtouzui Forest Park spans 322 hectares, with elevations ranging from 1,200–1,600 meters. Boasting a forest coverage rate of over 95% and moderately undulating terrain, it is well-suited for hosting mountain-based activities including cross-country races and outdoor hiking events.

Additionally, Kaizhou is home to ecological tourism resources such as Xuebaoshan Mountain and Shengshan Botanical Garden, as well as cultural landmarks including the Comrade Liu Bocheng Memorial Hall, Kaizhou Juren Garden, and Kaizhou Museum. These resources serve as complementary elements to sports event tourism, extending the tourism value chain and facilitate the formation of an integrated “sports event +” product structure, where events are synergistically combined with ecological

sightseeing and cultural experiences.

## **2.2 Tourism Reception Conditions**

Situated in northeastern Chongqing, Kaizhou District is a key component of the Chengdu-Chongqing Twin-City Economic Circle and the Wanzhou-Dazhou-Kaizhou (Wan-Da-Kai) Sichuan-Chongqing Coordinated Development Demonstration Zone. A relatively comprehensive tourism reception system has been established within the district, with its framework and functionalities detailed across the dimensions of catering, accommodation, transportation, tourism products, and professional services below.

In the catering sector, it has developed a coordinated service network integrating specialty dining with convenient eateries. By creating distinctive leisure tourism zones like Binhu Food Street and promoting local culinary brands such as Kaizhou Sausage and Kaizhou Mixed Steamed Delicacies, while introducing chain convenience food chains to meet diverse dining needs of sports event visitors. For accommodation, through integrating idle lakeside resources, the district has introduced high-quality hotels, upgraded existing hotels and homestays, and constructed lakeside camping bases and self-drive RV campsites. This forms a vacation accommodation system with appropriate proportions of high, medium, and low-tier options that complement each other, catering to various groups including professional athletes and family tourists. Regarding transportation, Kaizhou District has established a diversified transportation network within an hour's travel radius, featuring railways, airports, and ports, effectively meeting cross-regional tourist distribution demands. In terms of tourism products, the district has developed multiple offerings including lakeside camping, education tours, vacations, and leisure activities. Leveraging the Hanfeng Lake Tourism Resort loop, over 500 nighttime businesses entities and more than 200 cultural tourism enterprises have been cultivated, creating one-stop, diversified tourism consumption scenarios. Kaizhou currently hosts 10 registered travel agencies, 17 travel service outlets, and 5 star-rated hotels, forming a professional service network tailored to the specific needs of sports event tourism.

## **3. Development History and Current Status**

### **3.1 Development History**

The evolution of sports event tourism in Kaizhou District takes local characteristic resources as the core, and has gone through three different stages of initial exploration, rapid development and quality upgrading, gradually realizing the transition from spontaneous exploration to systematic development.

#### **3.1.1 Initial Exploration Stage (2009-2016)**

Inspired by national policies, Kaizhou District began exploring integrated sports-tourism development pathways in 2009. On one front, it focused on developing local folk resources, elevating the traditional "Ascending Heights on the Ninth Day of the First Lunar Month" custom into the Shangjiu Climb Folk Culture Festival. This event featured mass sports competitions alongside song-and-dance performances, attracting participation from local and neighboring residents. On the other hand, it addressed the fishing leisure needs of residents in northeastern Chongqing by hosting urban fishing competitions at Hanfeng Lake, exploring synergistic development between events and scenic areas.

During this stage, sports events in Kaizhou were mainly participated in by local residents and lacked cross-regional appeal to tourists. Nevertheless, this period accumulated valuable local practical experience for the subsequent cultivation of event IPs and digital transformation.

#### **3.1.2 Rapid Development Stage (2017-2020)**

Since 2017, Kaizhou District has centered its efforts on Hanfeng Lake to develop systematic sports events, marking the entry of its sports event tourism into a stage of scale expansion. Meanwhile, the rapid development of short-video social media platforms greatly enhanced the dissemination of Kaizhou's sports events.

In 2017, Kaizhou hosted the Hanfeng Lake International Motorboat Open, attracting over 200 athletes from 23 countries. During the same period, supporting activities such as the Golden Autumn Tourism Season and International Food Expo were held. Driven by both traditional media and online media, Kaizhou's sports events achieved cross-regional online exposure, attracting over 100,000 on-site spectators daily during the competition. Subsequently, Kaizhou further enriched the appeal of motorboat

events by introducing the China Stand-Up Paddleboarding (SUP) Open and combining the two events into a joint showcase. It also organized motorboat experience tours and the Kaizhou Scenery Photography Contest to enhance tourists' experience. In 2018, Kaizhou established the Hanfeng Lake Marathon, attracting nearly 4,000 participants from 7 countries worldwide and 27 provinces in China. Concurrently, it hosted flower-viewing themed tourism activities where multiple scenic spots offered free or discounted admission for participants, marking the deepening integration of sports events with tourism.

Furthermore, Kaizhou District has organized dragon boat races centered around traditional Dragon Boat Festival customs. In 2019, it successfully attracted 15 dragon boat teams from both within and outside the city. Capitalizing on its geographical advantages, Longtouzui Forest Park has successively hosted mountain off-road motorcycle races and Wan-Da-Kai Mountain Off-Road Running Challenge events, further diversifying the district's event portfolio. During this period, the district's event tourism entered a phase of rapid development driven by brand leadership, significantly increase its cross-regional influence.

### ***3.1.3 Quality upgrading stage (after 2021)***

In 2021, Kaizhou's event tourism was incorporated into the municipal tourism industry development strategy. The district's 14th Five-Year Plan for culture and tourism explicitly proposed hosting 1-2 nationally branded cultural events annually, positioning event organization as a pivotal opportunity and window for Kaizhou's cultural and tourism innovation and global outreach.

In practice, brand events and local events have developed in parallel during this stage. For brand events, Kaizhou has continued to introduce influential domestic and international water-based events, successively hosting the Collegiate Canoeing Championship and the National Stand-Up Paddleboarding Championship. For local events, three key measures have been implemented: First, the district has collaborated with neighboring districts and Chengdu Xinglong Lake to host dragon boat races and cross-country running events, thereby expanding the regional coverage of its event ecosystem. Second, it has focused on refining target participant groups. By organizing collegiate dragon boat invitational tournaments and farmers' dragon boat races, Kaizhou has diversified the event audience base, ensuring broader representation across different demographic segments. Third, it has upgraded its self-owned brand events, for instance, the Hanfeng Lake Marathon has been elevated from a half-marathon to a full-marathon format, drawing over 10,000 runners in 2024.

During this stage, Kaizhou's sports event tourism has exhibited characteristics of diversified event types and diverse participant groups, driving consumption growth in multiple industries including catering, accommodation, and transportation.

## ***3.2 Current Development Status***

### ***3.2.1 The Three-dimensional Sports Event System***

After over a decade of development, Kaizhou District has established a three-dimensional event system centered on water sports, supplemented by mountain events, and featuring distinctive folk competitions. Water sports events, anchored by Hanfeng Lake, include professional competitions targeting mid-to-high-end clientele—such as motorboat racing, kayaking, and paddleboarding—alongside mass-participation events like marathons, swimming, and fishing tournaments designed to attract nearby visitors and families. Mountain events, centered around Longtouzui Forest Park and Xuebaoshan Mountain, primarily host the Wan-Da-Kai Mountain Trail Running Challenge and hiking competitions, catering to outdoor enthusiasts. Folk events, anchored by climbing competitions and dragon boat races, incorporate cultural experiences and target cultural enthusiasts and family-oriented visitors.

By integrating sports events with its own tourism resources, Kaizhou has developed year-round sports events across spring, summer, autumn, and winter, forming an event matrix that covers diverse demands. This has facilitated the expansion of the target audience from professional athletes to ordinary tourists, fostering a diversified market structure.

### ***3.2.2 The Tripartite Collaborative Operation Mechanism***

Kaizhou District has established a tripartite operational model involving the government, enterprises, and media. At the governmental level, the Kaizhou District Culture and Tourism Commission undertakes overall coordination functions, primarily responsible for tasks such as applying for event qualifications and coordinating cross-departmental scheduling. These efforts provide fundamental guarantees for the

smooth implementation of sports events.

At the corporate level, local enterprises in Kaizhou, such as Kaiqian Group and Hushan Investment Group, and professional event service enterprises from other regions participate in event operations by undertaking sponsorships and event organization. Meanwhile, tourism-related enterprises—including travel agencies, hotels, and scenic spots—provide supporting services covering catering, accommodation, transportation, sightseeing, shopping, and entertainment for tourists.

On the media front, a digital communication matrix integrating official media, commercial platforms, and personal social media is constructed. Official media outlets like Kaizhou District Media Fusion, Kaizhou Radio and Television Station, and Chongqing Satellite TV focus on full-cycle event coverage while providing official consultations and information. Commercial platforms such as Baidu, iQiyi, and Sohu are responsible for live streaming and promotional campaigns. Meanwhile, social media platforms including WeChat, TikTok, and Xiaohongshu stimulate visitor engagement through trending topic, continuously enhancing the event's influence and the city's reputation.

### 3.2.3 The Threefold Benefits

Tourism has driven remarkable economic, social, and ecological progress in Kaizhou District. From 2017 to 2023, Kaizhou's tourist arrivals increased from 8.03 million to 16.39 million, and its tourism revenue grew from 4.838 billion yuan to 10.372 billion yuan. The average annual growth rates reached 10.73% and 11.51%, respectively—far outpacing the overall economic growth rate of the district. For detailed statistics, refer to Figure 1.

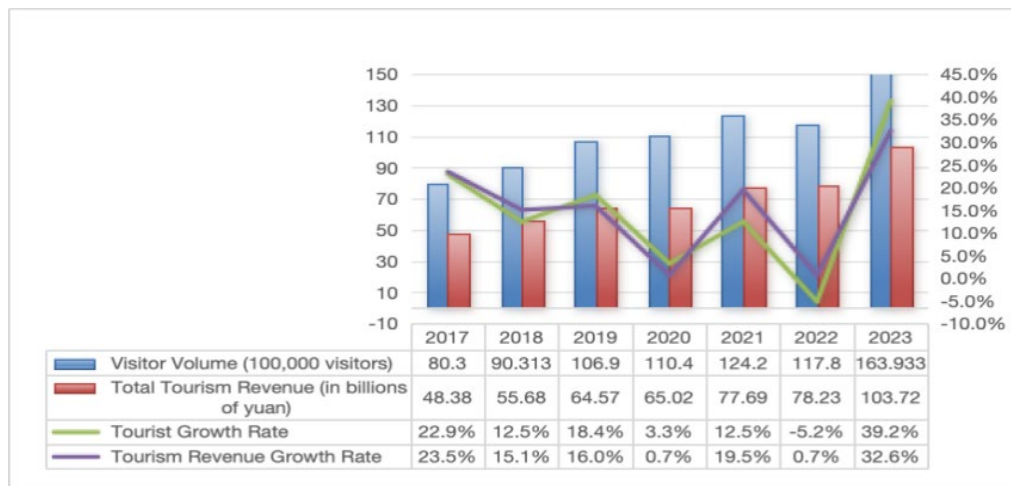


Figure 1: 2017-2023 Kaizhou District Tourist Arrivals and Tourism Revenue

In terms of social impact, the event attracted media coverage at multiple levels including international, national, and local tiers, with social media exposure rapidly increasing during the competition period to cultivate a healthy and positive city image. For its urban aquatic sports development, Kaizhou District has established permanent training bases at Hanfeng Lake for high-level teams, covering three Olympic disciplines—surfing, canoeing, kayaking, and rowing—as well as two non-Olympic events—motorboat racing and paddleboarding. Meanwhile, the Hanfeng Lake Water Sports Club offers training courses, study tours, and winter/summer camps for all age groups, promoting water sports accessibility. The growth of event tourism has accelerated Kaizhou District's sports development. In 2024, the district secured 422 medals or competition titles at the Chongqing municipal level or above, marking a 25.97% increase from the previous year.

In terms of ecological benefits, the Hanfeng Lake Smart Management Platform has been established to integrate water quality and meteorological data, balancing ecological conservation with economic development. Through zoned management strategies, 18 kilometers of ecological shoreline and 46 kilometers of waterfront walkways have been developed along the lake, featuring smart running tracks that provide premium facilities for marathon events. Additionally, Kaizhou District has created a 2.5 million square meter landscape belt, increasing its forest coverage from 50% in 2017 to 56.5% by 2024, significantly enhancing the city's overall ecological standards.

#### **4. Development Dilemma of Sports Event Tourism**

##### ***4.1 Lack of Digital Experience in Sports Event Tourism Products***

The digital economy is driving the upgrading of industrial integration toward data interconnection and scenario coexistence. However, sports event tourism in Kaizhou District remains confined to the simple linkage between event hosting and traditional tourism—digital elements have not been fully integrated into resource development and product innovation, resulting in monotonous product experiences and insufficient value premium.

On one hand, there are gaps in the digitalized experiences of core event products. Most of the brand events introduced by Kaizhou District relying on Hanfeng Lake—such as the International Motorboat Open, canoeing competitions, and stand-up paddleboarding tournaments—are centered on offline spectating, supplemented by sports experiences and scenic spot check-ins. These events have not leveraged digital technologies like 5G and VR/AR to create immersive spectating scenarios, nor have they implemented personalized tourism recommendations for tourists. Additionally, there is poor data connectivity between event activities and tourism resources. For instance, event-related information is disconnected from bookings for hotels and scenic spots around Kaizhou District, failing to form an integrated service loop that combines spectating and tourism. As a result, tourist experiences lack the interactivity and customization characteristic of the digital economy.

On the other hand, local participatory events suffer from a scarcity of digital creativity. Although events like the Shangjiu Climb Folk Culture Festival and the Dragon Boat Festival Races are linked with cultural and tourism activities, their supporting tourism products are still concentrated on traditional formats—such as food festivals and physical exhibitions. There remains a significant deficiency in the development of innovative formats, including digital cultural and creative products and online-offline interactive experiences. This leads to insufficient appeal and competitiveness of the products.

##### ***4.2 Insufficient Precision in Digital Marketing***

In the digital economy era, tourism brand building relies on precision positioning and multi-dimensional communication. However, sports event tourism in Kaizhou District lacks a clear positioning, and its brand communication is deficient in digital innovation—resulting in a vague brand image of sports event tourism and weak market competitiveness.

First, the lack of brand positioning has led to ambiguity in the development direction of sports event tourism. In 2023, Kaizhou put forward the goal of building a National Water-based Leisure Sports Center, but this goal has not yet been elevated to the level of a regional tourism brand for systematic development. Additionally, the development of Kaizhou's sports event tourism lacks demand analysis of core customer groups based on big data. Sports event tourism is mainly carried out through supporting cultural and tourism preferential activities during events, failing to focus on the in-depth needs of tourists, which limits synergistic effects.

Second, insufficient digital adaptation in sports event tourism marketing has weakened brand influence. Although Kaizhou has established a basic digital marketing matrix, the lack of innovative digital marketing initiatives has restricted marketing effectiveness. Initially, the communication channels for all sports events are basically uniform, and lack precision targeting mechanisms based on user data of different audience groups. Subsequently, most content on social media is limited to event news broadcasts, with no systematic development of immersive digital content such as behind-the-scenes event vlogs and digital virtual anchor commentary. Lastly, there is no unified digital portal for event tourism branding. Existing registration platforms, travel booking channels, and brand information are scattered across multiple platforms, resulting in fragmented brand messaging that fails to establish distinctive brand identity.

##### ***4.3 Weakness in the Digital Support System***

In the digital economy era, the high-quality development of sports event tourism relies on the synergy of digital infrastructure, interdisciplinary talents, and professional operating entities. However, Kaizhou District has significant shortcomings in these three core pillars, leaving insufficient support for the digital transformation of sports event tourism and hindering its high-quality development.

First, the shortage of digital interdisciplinary talents cannot meet industrial transformation needs.

Most practitioners in Kaizhou's sports event tourism are limited to traditional event execution or basic tourism services, with a talent structure mismatched to the sector's digital-era development demands. On one hand, there is a shortage of traditional sports tourism interdisciplinary talents. Practitioners have a superficial grasp of the integration logic between events and tourism, still follow traditional tourism's standardized service processes, and lack the ability to provide customized services for event tourists. On the other hand, interdisciplinary talents combining sports tourism and digital technology are severely lacking—specifically, too few professionals are proficient in event data management, digital marketing, and smart services, failing to meet the digital economy's core needs such as data-driven event optimization and technology-enhanced tourism experiences and ultimately creating a shortage of human support for the industry's digital transformation.

Second, the lack of professional digital operating entities leads to weak large-scale operation capabilities. Currently, Kaizhou-based enterprises engaged in sports event tourism operations face notable challenges: small scale, limited resources, and weak digital investment capacity. In terms of operational capabilities, local enterprises cannot independently develop sports event tourism data management platforms, nor have they adopted digital tools like intelligent registration, real-time data analysis, and online customer service. In terms of scale effects, individual small enterprises cannot spread digital transformation costs via large-scale operations, resulting in low digital operation efficiency for sports event tourism. This hinders the formation of a positive cycle of cost reduction and efficiency improvement through digitalization, further impeding the sector's digital transformation.

Third, inadequate adaptive digital infrastructure in event scenarios limits hardware support capabilities. Digital facilities in Kaizhou's core event-hosting areas have not yet been accurately aligned with sports event tourism needs. Hanfeng Lake, the core water-based event venue, has not fully deployed dedicated event digital service systems, hampering its ability to support efficient operation of multiple large-scale events. Additionally, digital linkage mechanisms for intelligent track navigation, real-time athlete trajectory tracking, and emergency rescue in mountain-based events are underdeveloped, creating gaps in safety assurance and experience optimization. Furthermore, the full-chain smart service system for sports event tourism has not yet covered the entire region. This worsens hardware-level support gaps for the digital development of sports event tourism, undermining its ability to leverage digital technology's enabling role.

## **5. Breakthrough Strategies of Sports Event Tourism**

In the digital economy era, the development of sports event tourism hinges on digital technologies to break data barriers, innovate digital scenarios, and enhance product value and tourist experiences.

### ***5.1 Innovate Digital Experiences of Sports Event Tourism***

First, build immersive digital scenarios for core events. For Hanfeng Lake's water sports system, introduce 5G+VR/AR technologies to develop multi-dimensional spectating environments: create a virtual track roaming function to enable tourists to immerse themselves in cultural and tourism resources along event routes via VR devices; establish an athlete data visualization platform to display real-time data and optimize information access during spectating; and use big data analytics to analyze tourist preferences, providing personalized recommendations for catering, accommodation, and other tourism products. These measures realize seamless integration of spectating and tourism, addressing monotonous experiences.

Second, upgrade digital creativity for local participatory events. For folk events, move beyond traditional cultural-tourism supporting models to develop event-themed digital cultural and creative products—such as digital collectibles for climbing blessings, commemorative NFTs for dragon boat races, and digital patterns linked to local resources. Additionally, design online-offline interactive experiences such as implementing a system where online climbing check-in points can be redeemed for offline scenic spot discounts and launching dragon boat race cloud live streams with online voting. These efforts expand public participation.

### ***5.2 Strengthen Digital Precision Marketing for Sports Event Tourism***

First, achieve precise brand positioning via big data. On one hand, clarify niche brand positioning by integrating the national water recreation center development goal with regional tourism branding—establishing the Hanfeng Lake Water Sports Tourism brand with a professional and leisure dual

orientation. On the other hand, build a digital customer demand analysis mechanism by collecting user data through event registration platforms and travel booking channels to dynamically adjust brand communication priorities such as emphasizing digital immersive experiences for young groups and highlighting parent-child events and ecological research for families, and develop a multi-dimensional sports event tourism brand.

Second, construct a comprehensive digital communication matrix. To begin with, realize precise communication by targeting segments such as marathon enthusiasts and cultural explorers with tailored event and tourism content on platforms like TikTok and Xiaohongshu. Following this, enrich digital content with behind-the-scenes event vlogs, digital virtual host commentary, and VR event clips—replacing monotonous news broadcasts to boost engagement. Lastly, establish a unified digital brand portal by developing official mini-programs such as Kaizhou Event Tourism to integrate event registration, travel booking, brand updates, and interactive communities, forming a closed loop for event participation, tourism services, and post-event engagement. This resolves resource fragmentation and information scattering while strengthening Kaizhou's event brand recognition.

### ***5.3 Strengthen the Digital Support System***

The digital transformation of sports event tourism requires focus on three areas—talent development, enterprise cultivation, and infrastructure upgrading—to consolidate hardware and software foundations.

First, cultivate interdisciplinary talents proficient in sports tourism and digital technology. Establish industry-academia collaboration mechanisms by partnering with sports and tourism institutions inside and outside Chongqing to offer specialized courses in digital event tourism operations that cover big data analytics, digital marketing, and smart event management for dual expertise development. Provide digital training for existing staff via online platforms and in-person workshops such as event data management and smart tourism services to enhance their digital capabilities. Introduce talent attraction policies such as subsidies and entrepreneurial support for key roles including digital operations and smart service system development to draw external interdisciplinary professionals.

Second, cultivate specialized digital operation entities. On one hand, introduce high-quality external enterprises by attracting domestic professional event operators via investment promotion to collaborate on developing event tourism data platforms and digital tools and upgrade operational sophistication. On the other hand, support local enterprise upgrading by offering digital transformation subsidies to encourage SMEs to adopt intelligent registration systems and real-time data analytics tools and by promoting event tourism alliances among local businesses to share digital costs and form a cost-reduction and efficiency-enhancement cycle.

Third, optimize digital infrastructure at event venues. Upgrade Hanfeng Lake's water event facilities by deploying dedicated digital service systems that include real-time crowd monitoring, smart spectator navigation screens, and 5G interactive viewing stations to support efficient multi-event operations. Enhance mountain event digital safeguards by establishing intelligent trail navigation and real-time athlete tracking platforms and integrating with emergency response departments to ensure safety. Build a full-chain smart service ecosystem by deploying intelligent parking guidance, online ticket verification, and event recommendation terminals at event sites, scenic entrances, and hotels to achieve end-to-end digital service coverage and address hardware limitations.

## **6. Conclusion**

The development of the digital economy not only empowers the event tourism industry but also acts as a critical driver for its transformation and upgrading. By focusing on Kaizhou's event tourism, this study addresses a theoretical gap in research on the digital development of county-level sports event tourism and expands the application scenarios of digital economy-industry integration theory in small and medium-sized regions.

In practice, the study provides concrete pathways for Kaizhou District to leverage digital technology and fully unlock the potential of its event tourism sector. Furthermore, it offers a reference model for similar counties and districts in the Three Gorges Reservoir Area and central-western China to tackle the dilemma of abundant resources yet inadequate digital integration.

Looking ahead, empirical research could further quantify the implementation effects of digital strategies. Deepening the application of digital technology in event ecosystem governance and cross-



regional event collaboration would facilitate the translation of research findings into practical outcomes, ultimately supporting the high-quality development of regional event tourism.

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