Social Media Research on the Road to Information Poverty Alleviation in Rural Areas of China

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Abstract

General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward at the 19th NPC that the solution to the "three rural issues" is a fundamental issue concerning the national economy and the people's livelihood. The implementation of the strategy of rejuvenating the rural areas is the top priority of all work of CCP. Peasant population occupies 50.32% of the total population in our country. However, the "information gap" remains in front of half of Chinese people. "Information poverty alleviation" has become an important guarantee for peasants in getting rid of poverty and an urgent task in accomplishing "precise poverty alleviation" policy. The rapid development of social media in China profoundly affects people's ways of communication and social participation. This paper focuses on the native context of rural areas and uses some research methods such as questionnaires, case studies and interviews, taking several villages in Shuibuya Town, Badong County, Hubei as an example to explore the diffusion, role and trend of social media in the procedure of rural "information poverty alleviation" , and to response to the following research questions:

- How the social media spread in rural areas;
- How social media reshape the villagers' daily lives;
- Where are the potentials and barriers of "ubiquitous" and "tool-type" social media in rural areas?
- What are the plight of villagers who do not use social media?

Keywords: Social media; Rural areas; Information poverty alleviation; Precision poverty alleviation; Public participation in country

Background

General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward at the 19th NPC that the solution to the "three rural issues" is a fundamental issue concerning the national economy and the people's livelihood. The implementation of the strategy of rejuvenating the rural areas is the top priority of all work of CCP. The "13th Five-Year National Agricultural and Rural Information Development Plan" formulated in 2016, as well as the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for Poverty Alleviation and the No. 1 Document of the Central Committee in 2017 all clearly stated that it is necessary to give full play to the important role of information in poverty alleviation. Making information for poverty alleviation becomes a powerful force in poverty alleviation work, and all social groups are inclusive to narrow the digital divide [1-3].

Social media has surpassed search engines and became the largest source of Internet traffic now, accounting for 46% and 40% respectively [4]. "She hui mei ti" is translated from social media, and some people translate it as "she hui hua mei ti" Regarding social media, it is widely believed that the earliest research was published by the American scholar Antony Mayfield in 2007, an e-book named What is social media [5]. He believes that social media is the general term for a series of online media. These media are characterized by participation, openness, communication, dialogue, community, and connectivity, and empower everyone to create and disseminate content. Professor Peng Lan from Tsinghua University believes that social media has two main characteristics: The first is the combination of content production and socialization. In other words, social relations and content production are mutually integrated. Second, the protagonist on social media platforms is the user, not the website operator [6]. At present, although the definition of social media is not consistent, it has a common connotation. The two major elements of social media are the large number of people and spontaneous communication.

Scholar Tan Tian divides social media into four categories: first, platform type, such as Weibo; second, community type, such as QQ Group, WeChat Group etc.; third, it is a tool type. Users can enjoy services and carry out App appraisal such as DDT. Fourth, ubiquitous, refers to content and services with social attributes that will be embedded in various types of media [7].

As a new form of communication, social media has long surpassed the scope of a media tool and is reflected in various fields. For example: Scholar Liu Jiqun from a political point of view [8] believes that online social media participates in the construction of cyberpolitical culture actively, cultivates the civic temperament of political culture, and leads the development direction of political culture. Scholar Zhang Xiyan from Army Construction [9] discussed the five functions of social media in the US military's military field: information release, interaction, strategic communication, information operations, and crisis communication. Scholar Luo Xianda examines the function of social media in the "3 • 11" Great East Japan Earthquake from the perspective of risk society theory [10]. It can be said that social media has become an indispensable information tool for people's lives. It is not a specialized tool in a certain field, nor is it a patent for people who only serve urban people. It has long been fruitful in the vast rural areas.

China is a large agricultural country. The peasant population accounts for 50.32% of the total population [11]. The rural area is an important practical place for democratic self-government at the grassroots level in China, and it is also a vanguard of many reform policies in China [12]. Although there are obstacles in the development of social media in rural areas, it is not slow due to the huge demand of the farmers. However, the academic community's application and research on rural social media is only limited to hardware [13] or certain specific groups, rather than rural residents. For example, scholar Fan Yingyi used migrant workers as the research object and analyzed their environmental awareness model under the social media environment [14]; Li Zhi and Yang Zi's survey of women migrant workers using social media [15]; Scholar Han Min conducts research on the influence of social media on rural young people's interpersonal communication [16]; As well as Tian Wei from the perspective of promoting agricultural technology, the current status of the use of social media for agricultural technicians is investigated [17]. The survey of rural residents is still very scarce in the academic community.

The survey focused more broadly on the rural areas and its target was neither a special rural group nor a group of rural migrant workers in the city, but the rural residents themselves, which not only aim to understand the part of farmers who used social media, also pays equal attention to groups of farmers who have not yet used social media. It takes Jingjiaping Village in Badong County, Hubei Province as an example to explore the acceptance status of farmers, their motivations and roles to the new thing social media, and the impact of them on their lives.

Research Questions

This article looks at the rural context and uses questionnaires, case studies, interviews, and other research methods to take the villages of Shuibuya Township, Badong County, Hubei Province as an example to explore the role of social media in rural "information alleviation" , trends and bottlenecks; and specifically respond to the following research questions: First, the diffusion path of social media in rural areas; Second, how social media comprehensively reconstruct the daily life of villagers; Third, where are the potential and obstacles for the development of rural "tool type" and "ubiquitous type" social media; What are the difficulties faced by villagers who do not use social media?

Research Methods

This research uses case studies, questionnaires, and interviews. The case selected several villages in Shuibuya Township, Badong County, Hubei Province. In these villages include ethnic minorities, poor people, and relatively rich farmers. The heterogeneity is relatively large so it is Certain representation.

The questionnaire design was divided into two parts, targeting villagers using "social media" and villagers "not using social media"; 93 questionnaires were returned, of which 30.11% were filled by "non-social media" villagers.", and villagers who using social media accounted for 67.89% **(Table 1)**.

Table 1: Demographic statistics.

Project	Parameter	Percentage of observations (persons)	
Gender	Male	51	54.84%
	Female	42	45.16%
Age	16-25	20	21.51%
	26-35	24	25.81%
	36-45	18	19.35%
	45-55	17	18.28%
	56-65	14	15.05%
Annual income	Less than 5,000 yuan (including no income)	48	51.61%
	5000-15000 yuan	21	22.58%
	15000-50000 yuan	16	17.20%
	50000-100000 yuan	6	6.45%
	100000-500000yuan	2	2.15%
Academic status	Primary school and below	15	16.13%
	Junior high school	44	47.31%
	High School	25	26.88%
	College	8	8.60%

	Bachelor degree and above	1	1.08%
Internet usage	Using the Internet	65	69.89%
	Not using the internet	28	30.11%

In addition, to reflect the causal mechanism in research issues better, this paper selected 23 households in Jingjiaping Village to conduct key interviews to affect the causal mechanism in research problems. The aim is to maximize information heterogeneity and the interviews end with information saturation. The members of the team "Badong Summer Practice in Hubei" formed by the School of Architecture of Tsinghua University used the unified "Interview Report Form for Investigation of Rural Internet and Social Media Usage" from July 24, 2017 to August 3, 2017. Conduct semi-structured interviews with villagers and organize interviews. The team members generally communicate with the villagers around the three research issues in the villagers' homes. Each question contains several sub-questions. The interviewee's age, gender, family, and work status are quite different, to ensure better information heterogeneity.

Results

The spread path of social media in the countryside

- "Interpersonal communication" and "consumption of life" are the "proliferation dynamics" of social media among villagers:
- Through the "five-scale" attitude measurement of some items, more than 60% of respondents were "willing to recommend We Chat, QQ and other social media to relatives and friends", 54% of respondents "pay through the Internet shopping" The two reasons are the most important "dissemination power" of social media among the villagers.

Jing jiaping Village was 56 years old. Although her family was poor, her two daughters used their mobile phones to access the Internet. When interviewed, the eldest daughter said, "Shopping through the Internet will be a lot cheaper, shopping will be half cheaper than the market. Online shopping is trustworthy."

Jing Peihua, a 39-year-old interviewee, believes that the Internet will make family relationships more intimate, because the loved ones work outside, mainly using mobile phones to communicate with their lover, video chat and so on. Calling a friend to play cards is also very convenient With WeChat contact. Because of the family atmosphere, the interviewees often chat with their daughters. The daughters also love to tell the interviewees the stories that happen every day at the school. Therefore, there are very few cases in which they use mobile phones to alienate their families. So now having mobile phones will not affect the relationship with family members.

36-year-old Zhang Shiyong uses social media is driven by from surrounding friends and relatives. He said: "In his family,

the wife, the son, and the daughter can all use Internet Only the elderly cannot use it. There are more people using social software in the village and they have learned to use social software by watching others' actions."

The cross-analysis of "sex, age, income, education" and "whether or not to use social media" can lead to the following conclusions:

- The "gender" variable has little effect on proliferation. Among respondents, 70.59% of men use social media, and 69.05% of women use social media. There is no significant difference in the use of social media among men and women.
- "Annual income" is positively related to the degree of proliferation. People with the higher annual income are more likely to use social media. 62.5% of the respondents whose annual income is below 5,000 yuan will still use social media. People with annual income above 50,000 yuan will use 100% of the social media.
- In adults, "age" is negatively related to the spread of "social media"; "education" is positively related to the use of "social media". But among 16-25-year-old respondents, whatever the academic qualifications are, the villagers will use social media.
- Viscosity is high among users after diffusion, and 93.85% of users "the longest use of information media per day" are "mobile phones."

Full-scale reconstruction of daily life of villagers by social media

- The use of the Internet to solve problems or awareness of rights protection has taken root in the countryside. "Using the Internet to seek help" means that in addition to "representing their superiors at higher levels," the villagers believe that is the most effective solution when they encounter difficulties that they cannot solve, or they need to safeguard their rights. It shows that the villagers have already used the Internet to seek for practical solutions.

Liu Xiaoyan, a 31-year-old villager, prefers offline channels to solve difficulties, but she used to send invitations for help because some disputes could not be solved by the government. "If I encounter difficulties in my life, I can solve it by myself. If I can't solve the problem, turn to the older generation who are experienced. By doing so, I can solve them. IF I cannot still deal with them, call and ask acquaintances because there are many doctors at home and there are many ways to obtain knowledge. She once published information on car accidents on Tudou.com and Baidu, because the government could not solve it, so she I posted a message on the Internet.

Deng Guiai, a villager who makes tea business, believes that the network makes information flow faster and he often learn about the dynamics of tea prices on the Internet. He has a QQ group of tea merchants, and the price of tea in the state can be known. Now when he faces things or difficulties that he does not understand in his life, he will first check online.

According to Deng Meimin, an 18-year-old interviewed villager who was still attending school, "Using WeChat is the most frequent thing and often makes circle of friends. He usually sends one or two moving which record their own life content such as what to do every day, good-looking scenery, etc. to his circle of friends every day. He will also like, comment, forward the content of other people's circle of friends when meet the content of their own interest, such as funny content will be forwarded, and he is more like to describe family articles. For those who do not understand things, the interviewee will first ask the classmates, and then check the Internet, often search on Baidu. Sometimes he found that some of the questions on the Internet are inconsistent with their own opinions, but they feel that the most online answers are correct."

- In the "most things done using social software", the top three are "contact with others", "friend chat" and "browse news":
- The villagers have made a major change in "the most important way to obtain news."

According to surveys, among the villagers using social media, "relying on friends" and "website push" have become the main channels for news acquisition, the sum of the two is up to 83.08%, non-internet channels only account for 6.15%:

Zou Shiguo is the original secretary of Jingjiaping Village. He is 60 years old this year. He said in an interview. "The most common thing I do when you use my mobile phone to access the Internet is to read news and use Tencent News. Generally, he sees the news which Tencent push, and he rarely searches. But he is more concerned about local news. In addition to watching news, he uses WeChat. Zou Shiguo said that he would use the WeChat circle of friends to forward news about national policies and national affairs, comment on other people's circle of friends, and publish his own views on current news, but it is not frequent. He believes that the Internet can help villagers get rich and can provide information on getting rich.

The potential and obstacles of "tool type" and "ubiquitous" social media in rural areas

According to academic scholar Tan Tian's four classifications of social media, if the web services which are based on "evaluation", such as online shopping, all have social media attributes. "Evaluation" means "word of mouth", and the main reference for users to select web services and content is through their social attributes [18]. The survey shows that to the villagers, using social media is no longer limited to "platform" social media like Weibo and "community" social media such as QQ group and WeChat group. And the demand for "ubiquitous" social media in "tool type" social media and similar videos such as Taobao and the public comment, as well as in live broadcast websites, has further increased. In the "tool-type" and "ubiquitous" social media currently used by villagers, online shopping and chase drama are the most representative and have become the most promising categories. On the one hand, the potential means that such a service or content is in great demand and is welcomed by the villagers; on the other hand, it also means that meeting such services and demands in rural areas still faces many obstacles.

- Basic services such as express delivery is the bottleneck of the development of the network economy in rural areas.

The villagers are keen on "online shopping" and try to open "shops", but there are issues such as the difficulty of delivery of express delivery:

Deng Guiai has been exposed to computers since the 12th year. In the past two years, he discovered that computers are more and more useful. He said: "The Internet is closely related to life now." he can enjoy the convenience brought by the Internet. Deng Guiai bought a freezer online this year, which is 1,000 yuan cheaper than physical stores. Deng Lunchai, from Wailongba Village, said, "Family members can pay with their mobile phones and they will not have to run errands."

Yan Yanchun, a villager, is 35 years old this year. She has just been doing rural Taobao for a month and can also install training platform (Taobao) software on the computer. She said: "In the past, I often bought things on the Internet. It is not easy to do neither the outside business, nor physical clothing business in the town, so I wanted to open a shop online to expand income."

Although online shopping is convenient, villagers still have some pain points to solve, such as traffic problems. The villager Deng Yuzhi said that: "I usually use Taobao to shop and WeChat, Alipay to pay for living expenses. But logistics cannot reach the village, and the network signal is not smooth enough, I hope these two aspects can be improved."

- 60% of Internet villagers "chasing dramas", but content production rarely targets farmers.In the survey, when Internet villagers used media for entertainment, 64.62% of them chose to watch movies and TV dramas, second only to 67.69% of chatting to friends making. With the rise of the Internet and mobile terminals, TV viewing platforms have gradually shifted from traditional TV media to Internet terminals. This technology revolution has impacted the original TV drama viewing style [19]. The social interaction of online dramas is not only reflected in the users' direct comments, likes and barrage [20], but also indirectly through other "platform" or "community" social media.

Network "drama" and other cultural products in the rural areas "battlefield of public opinion" has not been great importance. The rural population is important in our country and it is also the main position for the spread of spiritual civilization and mainstream values. According to the survey, 60% of the online villagers are keen on "chasing dramas." This is undoubtedly a good starting point for mainstream advanced culture and local Chinese culture to spread in rural areas. However, at present, the number of works reflecting rural reality in TV dramas based on rural social life is small and the quality is uneven [21]. The government and all walks of life should "pay attention to real life, based on the people's groups, and grasp the characteristics of the times" and

urgently create the creation of Chinese rural TV dramas in which the inner core of China's local culture can deeply explore and strengthen interaction between urban and rural cultures.

Difficulties faced by villagers who do not use social media

- "The need for daily life is not needed" and "too complicated to be willing to learn" are two main reasons why villagers do not use social media.

Older and poorer villagers make up most villagers who do not use social media. There are several reasons why they do not use social media. Among them, "does not require in daily life" and "too complicated to be unwilling to learn" are the two main reasons, accounting for 46.43% and 42.86%, respectively. Besides, there are "excessive fees" and "no teaching". In the interview, it was also learned that poor people often have low levels of education, and even "illegally". This is also a major obstacle to the use of social media.

- More than 60% of non-users are willing to learn to use and are potential users.

60.71% villagers who did not use social media said that they would consider using mobile phones and computers to access the Internet in the future. At present, the main entertainment methods of these villagers are completely different from those of villagers using social media. Among them, 89.29% of them choose to "watch TV and listen to the radio" for entertainment.

65-year-old Dengzhong Jun said that in addition to himself and his wife in his family, others all go online. The reason for not being able to learn to use is that he is too old and have poor eyesight, and he wants to learn if his physical conditions permit. He also learns about that there are many villagers using smart phones in the village, mainly young and middle-aged people, and the better the home conditions are, the more they use.

The villager Jin Yuanqing has never been exposed to social media because his family situation in which home school children are in the stage, no home network device, and no one to teach.is indeed more difficult. Her situation is one of the more common conditions among the poor households. The main reason is that economic capacity cannot support the use of new media, and no one teaches at home. At the same time, they also feel that the current life and communication are adaptable and do not feel that they must use new power of the media. In addition, the interviewee was illiterate and increased the difficulty of surfing the Internet.

- Do not think that social media alienates them from friends and relatives, but the biggest difference is on the issue of whether it is willing to buy mobile phones for children.

Using a five-scale scale to test villagers who do not use social media, they found that they did not think that "social media alienated them from their friends and relatives" and most of their relatives had "social media users". Most of the interviewed villagers think that social media promotes offline communication. The most divisive item is "Would you like to buy a mobile phone for your child?"

Qi Yan, 37, believes that social media brings convenience to everyone's communication and helps everyone communicate better, which is not only between herself and her family, but also among villagers. She does not think there will be any negative impact. Liu Xiaoyan, the villager, believes that the network has also changed the relationship of the family to a certain extent. Sometimes they all play with themselves, but the relationship has not alienated.

Tan Wenshun, a villager with a relatively negative view, believes that the Internet and mobile phones still have influence on young people and children. Children will also play phones when they see adults playing mobile phones, and sometimes there are cases of alienating family members.

- Villagers who do not use social media are being marginalized by "virtual communities" and lose important channels for participating in public life and sharing information resources.

Social media is reconstructing rural grassroots democratic political ecology. Research villages already have many "QQ groups" and "WeChat groups", and villagers can use these groups to obtain government policy information and exchange information. Therefore, social media is becoming an inaccessible public participation channel in rural areas. Some villagers who do not use social media have said in interviews that they rarely know about the village's meetings and policies.

According to Deng Yuzhi, a villager using social media, she, her husband, and her daughter all use smart phones to access the Internet. And they have installed social media such as WeChat on mobile phones. There are many villagers using smart phones in Jingjiaping Village. Most of them use social software and rely on WeChat. The village has WeChat group "Jingjiaping village relatives love ", which often publishes recruitment information. However, villagers who do not use social media are difficult to know about information resources such as "recruitment information", even the policy information related to their own interests is very vague. Researcher Liu Wanghui wrote in the interview log:

Jin Yuanqing, a 43-year-old villager, did not use social media because of family difficulties. The most impressive question in the interview was that the head of household thought that his family had reached the poverty household standard, but for unknown reasons, the village committee reported that he did not have his own family in the town's list, and he did not rate poor households, so many poor household's Preferential policies have not been enjoyed, nor have they been assessed. In the village, some unqualified candidates were rated as poor households. When asked about the number of households that are eligible without a poor household, the answer is that about 95% of the households are rated, and the remaining 5% should have been rated but not. However, when asked why the householder was not assessed as a poor householder, the householder did not understand the reason. When encountering this problem, the head of household did not

contact the poverty alleviation cadres in the village. The reason was that they did not know the poverty alleviation cadres in the village. They only knew that there was such a cadre. Although there are many problems in the process of practice, rural grassroots democracy is still one of the most adequate places for grassroots democracy practice in China. Social media is meaningful to open to grassroots democratic government affairs, communicate information fully, opinion expression and opinion integration and it is a booster for grassroots democracy. More and more villagers are using this channel to participate in resource sharing and public affairs, expressing their own attitudes and striving for legitimate rights and interests, and promoting the openness and transparency of the work of village committees and committees.

A large part of the villagers who do not use social media are poor villagers. Their awareness of information and rights awareness are weak, and the policy of "information poverty alleviation" is still on the road, so that their rights are vulnerable to violations. Safeguarding their right to information and satisfying their information needs will become the key bottleneck for "relief of information" through the "last mile"; It is also the completion of the "13th Five-Year National Agriculture and Rural Informatization Development Plan", making information poverty alleviation a powerful force in poverty alleviation work, promoting the inclusive development of all social groups and becoming an important performance of narrowing the digital divide.

Conclusion

The "13th Five-Year National Agricultural and Rural Information Development Plan" formulated in 2016, as well as the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for Poverty Alleviation and the No. 1 Document of the Central Committee in 2017 all clearly stated that it is necessary to give full play to the important role of information in poverty alleviation. Making information for poverty alleviation becomes a powerful force in poverty alleviation work, and all social groups are inclusive to narrow the digital divide [22].

The rapid development of social media in China has profoundly affected all aspects of politics, economy, and daily life from urban to rural areas. However, no matter from the Eastern perspective or the Western perspective [23], the related research has paid much less attention to the country's rural areas than the city. China has its special national conditions, and farmers account for most of the population. If we say that some scholars have had the inherent impression of "information loss" on farmers' access to the Internet [24], it has led to the fact that the academic community believes that it is insufficient to study the use of the Internet in China's rural areas, especially the use of social media. It ignores the rapid growth of farmers' demand for social media-based Internet services in recent years. Since General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed the idea of "precise poverty alleviation" in 2013, "Information for Poverty Alleviation" has become an important part of the rural community. Great achievements have been made.

Through questionnaires, interviews, and case studies, this article conducted a survey on the theme of "Internet, Social Media Usage" in several villages in Shuibuya Town, Badong County, Hubei Province. In the interviews and the results of the questionnaire statistics, many findings exceeded the expectations of the researchers and provided a comprehensive understanding of the use of social media in local villages. Due to the limited research conditions, only partial investigations can be conducted and the situation of all villages in the country cannot be summarized. However, it has the general characteristics of the general villages in the country because it includes the characteristics of remoteness, mixed ethnic groups, and economic masses that belong to the middle reaches. The survey found that social media has greatly expanded the use and awareness of the Internet by villagers and is reconstructing their lives in an all-round way.

It is found that the degree of "proliferation" of social media among villagers is negatively related to age and positively related to income and regardless of gender. The motivation for diffusion is derived from self-requirements and circle recommendations. Users generally have higher viscosity and are willing to "secondary diffusion" the social media to relatives and friends. Although the original motive of using social media is chatting and dating, villagers find many functions such as "acquisition of news", "chasing operas", "shopping fees" and "entertainment games" in the process of using social media.

Basic services such as "Express Delivery" are the bottleneck of the development of the network economy in rural areas. Internet services with social media attributes are more and more popular among the villagers. "Tool-type" and "ubiquitous" social media have potential in the vast rural areas. One of the major obstacles to the current development is that hardware services have not yet met the needs, such as Express delivery and so on. And the role of cultural products such as "television dramas" on the Internet in rural areas has not been valued. Second, software services do not pay enough attention to rural areas. For example, the quality and quantity of television drama content for farmers' audiences are insufficient. This is not only a golden area for Internet companies to invest in rural areas, but also a narrow gap between urban and rural areas for the "government and society" and a good gripper to spread the mainstream culture.

Using the Internet to solve problems and the awareness of rights protection has taken root in the countryside a large part of the villagers will use the Internet to search for information when they encounter difficulties that they cannot solve, or they need to protect their rights. "Using the Internet to seek help" is the most effective way for the respondents to think except the leadership's response. Although only a few villagers have practiced using social media for "network rights protection", it has shown that the villagers already have the awareness of using the Internet to solve difficulties in real life.

There is still much potential for rural network penetration. Villagers who do not use social media are even more neglected groups. They are often older or poor villagers. "Want to learn but no teaching," "low cultural level," "expensive" and

"without equipment" are the main obstacles to their use of the Internet and social media, but more than 60% of them still want to learn to use. This group of villagers does not exclude the Internet and social media. They also believe that the Internet and social media have some help in life. Even in some poverty-stricken households, parents will support their children's use of smart phones. Non-users and users have fundamental differences in the "news access" method. "Watching TV and listening to radio" are their main leisure modes.

Social media is reconstructing rural grassroots democratic political ecology. Research villages already have many "QQ groups" and "WeChat groups", and villagers can use these groups to obtain government policy information and exchange ideas; Therefore, social media is becoming an inaccessible public participation channel in rural areas. Some villagers who do not use social media have said in interviews that they rarely know about the village's meetings, policies, etc. They are objectively marginalized by the new "virtual community." So, safeguarding the information rights of non-users and satisfying their information needs are the key bottleneck for the "last mile" of "information poverty alleviation".

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