

Rural Revitalization and Internet Celebrity Economics

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Abstract: Rural revitalization is the goal to improve the development of rural area, especially in the aspect of economics, and currently a strategy is to use livestreaming as a method to increase the sales of rural products. Past studies provide constructive view of the advantages of this strategy, and point out problems for government or internet celebrities to consider in order to improve this strategy. While this study will concentrate on the weakness regarding people in rural area themselves, identify and provide potential solutions for those problems, including the aspects of education, technology and the whole social structure. In more specific, the lack of education and essential professional skills and knowledge related to business or economics, inability to transport products fastly and conveniently, the disadvantage on technology usage, and the limitations of external environment in rural area, all bring comparative disadvantage to people when they are implement this strategy. Nevertheless, the strength of government and change that can occurred in rural area can both counteract those weaknesses and make this strategy more applicable and effective. This distinct point of view enables rural revitalization uses the method of livestreaming and help of internet celebrities more efficiently, in which directly promote the development of rural.

Keywords: rural revitalization, livestreaming, agricultural product marketing

1. Introduction

The rural area occupied about 66.3% of the global population in 1960, and 97% of the nation's lands on the Earth are rural [1]. This astonishing data shows the importance of rural development in human history. In fact, people are relied on rural areas to survive before the prosperity and development of cities. Urbanization, however, happened in the twentieth century and led rural areas gradually into decline.

One of the areas of impact of urbanization, which is also what this paper will focalize on, is economics. Pursuing a greater revenue and employment opportunity, residents from rural areas migrate to urban areas in a significant number, which causes the brain drain and leads to the disability of developing independently of rural areas. In more detail, rural populations were higher than urban populations in past forty years, but the number of people who lives in urban areas exceeded that in rural areas since 2006, and the difference between the two population keeps increasing [2]. As a result of this large-scale migration, for example, about 30.48 million of the Chinese population that live in rural areas is in poverty, meaning their incomes cannot support their daily requirements of money, which further causes the lack of labor force in agriculture, and reduce

the output of agricultural practice [3]. In conclusion, the economic decline in rural areas will not only lead to the increase of hardness for residents in rural areas but also causes the deficiency of food supply in the world. In this case, rural revitalization is crucial. Chinese government enacts the “Fourteenth Five-Year Plan”, which includes the goal to give priority to the development of agriculture and rural areas and promote rural revitalization [4]. The rural area faces issues such as low exposure, backward transportation, and technology, so it is hard for them to advertise their products to mass customers and market. In this situation, a new group of people —— internet celebrities —— can provide significant helps for people from rural areas.

Internet celebrities are those who rely on advertising themselves on the internet and therefore have a significant impact and exposure on there. For example, lots of internet celebrities will make a contract with those firms, and advertise the products for them; this method is commonly used in China on platforms such as Taobao or Tik-Tok. So, internet celebrities’ promotion is an effective marketing method for businesses or sole traders to gain market and customers. In relation to rural revitalization, this method can help farmers find more potential customers, which seems can improve their profits and sales. This special combination in the market gives rise to lots of debate, several papers analyze the practicability and effectiveness of this method. Problems, however, still rise in this action besides its benefits.

This study will focus on potential drawbacks of the combination of rural revitalization and internet celebrity promotion that is not well known by the general public and past researches and will give suggestions on solutions that might be effective to minimize the negative impacts and maximize the effectiveness of this action.

2. Literature Review

Now, there are several studies investigating the feasibility and validity of taking advantage of internet celebrities’ social impacts on advertising farm products from rural areas. In fact, there are some common aspects and opinions that occurred between studies from different scholars. Although some research may point out possible disadvantages or drawbacks of this strategy, the main attitude of those scholars is positive. Also, many studies put the majority of their attention on the attitude of the government or the improvement and development of internet celebrities. On the other hand, almost none of them point out solutions that may improve the effectiveness of this strategy. In addition to those three main points, those studies also have problems such as describing the phenomenon rather than analyzing it or viewing this situation in a big picture that is unrelated and cannot apply to the stakeholders in this strategy.

This section will mainly summarize and categorize the studies that are related to this topic, and uses the quotes from them to support the statement that they have several common aspects. This allows a clearer concept of what these studies lack about and should be improved, which is tightly related to the core of this research.

To begin with, the most common characteristic, which is also the main focus of this study, is that almost all of those researches put their attention on the advantages of using internet celebrities to promote rural revitalization, so they usually tend to ignore the potential drawbacks of this action. However, balancing between positive and negative sides enables the occurrence of improvements. For instance, some scholars suggest a concept called “internet celebrity village” [5], which can categorize into two types: places that are attractive but lack exposure and advertisement, and those that aren’t attractive but can create merits that fulfill the demand of the general public. They believe that these villages have the potential to further developed by utilizing internet celebrities, which may improve the quality of rural products, the living condition of farmers, and the management system of rural areas. On the other hand, other scholars also agree that the use of livestreaming rearrange the product, labor, consumer and market of agricultural product industry, enabling new

channel and space of development for rural revitalization [6]. On top of that, researchers provide data that there are around 1.15 million farmers selling their products on “Kuaishou” in 2018, which is constantly increased in past four years [7]. They summarize that the internet celebrities enable farmers to make profits at low costs, ensure the transportation of goods between rural and urban areas, and promote farmers to be more engaged in business activities. In addition, scholars also use the successful example of Pinggu and peach to suggest how this rural area relies on the peach industry to achieve rural revitalization independently [8]. Although it is true that this strategy can bring several benefits, identifying potential drawbacks are also important for the improvement and development of this strategy. Those disadvantages may include lack of education, technology and transportation, and will be discussed in this research. In conclusion, those researches all have a positive attitude toward the use of internet celebrities to promote rural revitalization but ignore lots of potential drawbacks of this strategy.

Next, even though some studies did mention the potential drawbacks of this strategy, most of them put more attention on the internet celebrities and government and how they can improve to make this strategy more practicable. However, the core of this strategy should be the farmers, and it is only effective when farmers have sufficient capacity and resources to use the internet, otherwise the improvement of other factors will have no influence. For example, some scholars strive to suggest multiple theories that may strengthen the improvement of farmers [9]. However, this research is highly relevant to the policies and executions of the government, therefore ignoring the factors and variables of farmers’ characteristics that may cause a different result. In another study, researchers raise the argument that internet celebrities may face the challenges such as insufficient fans or lack of post-sales service [10]. Although it is true that those problems will negatively influence the sales and advertisement for rural products, they are not directly related to the farmers but more for internet celebrities to consider. Similar to another study, which also provide several solutions about choosing appropriate internet celebrities and teams [11]. They compare and contrast the strengths and weaknesses of Li Jiaqi and Li Ziqi, who were famous internet celebrities in China in 2019. But the economics and transportation limitations of farmer discourage them from getting contact with a number of celebrities, so those statements aren’t realistic for farmers unless they first improve their personal strengths. The same problem also includes imperfection of strategies, weakness of infrastructures, and problems with talented people and information, which are all standing on the perspective of the government [12]. Those issues are all based on the good performance of farmers, so they should be considered after the fixation of farmers’ problems. In conclusion, internet celebrities are the promotion of rural revitalization, but this combination still requires the efforts and strengths of farmers, including their ability to use the internet, transportation, and their knowledge on marketing on the internet. However, many studies ignore this factor and assume all the farmers can use the internet conveniently and effectively as people from urban areas do, so this paper will demonstrate potential problems of people from rural areas faced when they try to use internet celebrities to achieve revitalization.

And lastly, lots of studies don’t mention the constructive solutions for the problem they point out. This weakness can be categorized into two groups, some of which provide solutions that are broad and empty so that isn’t realistic, and others do not mention or only use one or two sentences to discuss nonconstructive solutions. To be more specific, a constructive and effective solution should be specific and has a complete logical system, which allows people to understand and follow it to achieve the goal. On the contrary, some solutions are talking about those “goals” rather than how to achieve them. Some scholar suggests that government should “speed up the rural layout of 5G infrastructure, and promote the digitization of agricultural development”, but those are formative goals that should be achieved rather than the ways to achieve them [13]. As well as another study, which identifies typical drawbacks of electronics and the internet and how they may not be effective

for rural revitalization, these evaluations are useful to improve the plan and strategy for rural revitalization [14]. However, the author doesn't provide targeted solutions to further clarify the way to solve those problems, so it still requires improvements to be more effective. In more targeted studies, one of which suggests that rural revitalization also faces problems such as low competitive power, threat of sustainable development, and lack of human force in agriculture industry [15]. Another study evaluates the sustainable development of the use of internet celebrity strategy to promote rural revitalization, and points out that this method has several potential drawbacks, emphasizing the problem of immature market systems, which are reasonable and well-analyzed [16]. Nevertheless, both researches fails to provide target solutions for the problems they pointing out. Furthermore, scholars also suggest that farmers are lack of awareness to use electronics and e-commerce to sell their products, and provide effective solution in which to strengthen the promotion of electronics in the rural area [17]. These solutions can still be improved by specifying and organizing it to a integrated system to be more logical. Overall, most studies fail to provide constructive solutions for the potential drawbacks they mentioned in the research. To benefit farmers, enhancing logical and effective solutions to the problem is crucial.

For the reasons and examples aforementioned, existing studies have three defects: unbalanced arguments and ineffective exploration of drawbacks of this method, inadequate distribution of considerations for each group of stakeholders, and lack of constructive and specific solutions. Based on these problems, this essay will focuses on the practicable problems and solutions for people from the rural area which they may encounter in the use of internet celebrities in rural revitalization.

3. Discussion

3.1. Problems

Based on the gaps of past studies and the observable existing issues of this strategy, the demonstration in this research will mainly focus on the problems and potential solutions on different aspects, including soft factors such as people strengths, hard factors such as infrastructure and networks, and problems regarding the macro structure. The solutions will first browse on the national perspective, and then detailing to communities and individuals.

To start with the problems related to the people in rural area, which highly tight with the education aspects, and this paragraph will go through the causes and effects of this problem. There are several internal and external factors leading to and deteriorate this problem. The economic conditions of most rural families are not enough to support the expenses of education for children after they graduate from middle school. China used to attempt to solve the economic inequality's influence in education by providing nine-year compulsory education, but the data shows that there are still 60% of rural students drop out of school after grade 9 due to the economic problem. Furthermore, many parents in rural area decide to work outside their village, which result in about 60 million leftover children in the rural area of China [18]. This phenomenon also causes problem that lots of children don't have guardians and don't continue learning effectively. Unsupported economic situation deeply influences the past and current generation in a negative way since farmers cannot receive good education. Another internal factor is that most students with intelligence and skills usually decide to left their home and go to urban area for more job opportunities, which leads to a large number of brain drain from rural to urban, and further causes lack of entrepreneurs within rural area. From the external perspective, on one hand, local government doesn't have good resources, including both budget and social environment, and thus cannot find good teachers or provide enough economic support for students. In more details, educational worker in school of county in China only earns average of 2500 RMB each month, which is far lower than those in cities. On the other hand, due to the impact of covid-19, most

schools are forced to take online classes, which brings difficulties for the families who don't have electronic devices such as iPad and laptop. The fact shows that only 7.3% of students in Chinese villages have computers, which further enlarges the inequality distribution of education between urban and rural areas [18]. All those factors combined, people in rural area fall in a vicious spiral, where their past, current, and future generation all have low access to better education. Relating to the strategy of rural revitalization and internet celebrity, the problem of education will result in lack of professional marketing knowledge, so they may be less competitive in this industry. Also, the poor economic situation is also an obstruct for them to collaborate with success operation team, which is not helpful for the collaboration between live-streaming corporations and farmers. In conclusion, this problem will cause this strategy unable to support people who really need help.

Second problems are related to the hardware facilities, which can be divided into two kinds: transportation and live-streaming technology. Transportation is highly important in live-streaming industry, and for agricultural, it is extremely crucial, not only because people's daily demand on those products, but also due to the special requirements on food fresh keeping. However, the transportation in rural area isn't as convenient as that in urban city, especially for remote regions. A factor of this problem is that most express service companies are less willing to open outlets in remote rural area, so the distance between each site is very long, and this causes farmers hard to transport the products they sold frequently. Chinese government had already set goals for expanding courier services spots in rural area, but the effects still need improvements [19]. On the other hand, there are less highways in rural area, which will slow down the speed of transportation, and may be unstable during bad weathers [20]. If the government wishes to enlarge the effects of rural revitalization through live-streaming and internet celebrities, it should put more efforts on set new spots and new routes. In current circumstance, less developed transportation has a negative impact on just-in-time delivery, which is especially harmful for agricultural products' quality, and thus reduce the competitiveness and customer loyalty of farmers. Additionally, the risks of unstable transportation may also bring extra cost to farmers. Another problem is regarding to the technology of live-streaming. The main cause of this problem is that rural villages are more scattered, which take difficulties for network companies to cover all the areas, and the signal for each community is also worse than that in urban area. Data shows that in 2021 the rate of internet access in China rural area is only 57.6%, although the number is increasing in past seven years, it is still lower than the expectations of rural revitalization for all people [21]. On the other hand, lack of professional live-streaming team also influences the ineffectiveness of this strategy. Farmers are hard to start a successful live-streaming business, because it requires reputation and special packaging to be different from others, and thus attract more customers. Live-streaming business usually does a bunch of market research on customer's flavor, including anchors, background setups, products and overall styles. So, the lack of those information may discourage farmers from gaining popularity and improve market competitiveness. Although they may offshore the products to professional live-streaming business, lack of economic and contact with people in this industry all make it hard for farmers to find appropriate cooperation with business. In conclusion, the disadvantages of hardware facilities all bring challenges to the strategy of rural revitalization and internet celebrities.

The last problem is regarding the macro social structure of rural area, since it is highly difference from city. The traditional rural social structure has simple individual relationships and less specialization in occupations, so rural areas have especially weak contracting and organizations within its society. Through the economic development and communication between urban and rural area, the social structure of rural starts to combined with new-style city structure, and become a combination of traditional individual relationships with the support from businesses of urban area, so some farmers are currently the employees of urban business, which helps them to improve the professional skills and organization rights. Although this development seemingly provides possible

collaboration opportunities for farmers, and improve their living standards, there are potential problems occurred if rural areas are over-relied on urban companies rather than starting business by themselves. There are two main negative effects of the special rural social structure. For the collaboration with company, especially with live-streaming company, farmers are hard to get contact with the managers of the company, and most farmers are the employees of those company, the contract between those individuals and the business is an obstruct for farmers to contact with better live-streaming teams, which is harmful for them to effectively achieve rural revitalization through collaboration with internet celebrities. On the other hand, over-relied on external organizations will discourage farmers from start up their own business, as they may satisfied with the current paybacks of external organizations, and thus counter to the goal of “independence revitalization”.

3.2. Solutions

This study will suggest several potential solutions in the following paragraph, mainly targeting different problems aforementioned in an order of macro to micro aspects.

To begin with the policies or actions government may provide to solve those problems.

On one hand, it is hard to change the whole social structure of a specific type of area, so if government can effectively implement policies that directly result in more efficient organizations and societies, it can be easier to solve the problem regarding social structures. Previous paragraphs suggest that the concept of contract isn't as strong and clear for rural area as that in urban area; this social structure and culture mean that it is hard for rural area to create their own business and collaborate with professional livestreaming company. Government may encourage the creation and development that owned by people from rural area, in order to let them less rely on the power of urban city. A solution is that government may provide financial supports, such as grants or subsidies, and resources supports for the business that have the potential to success but are obstructed by lack of resources. A disadvantage might be the pressure on government budget to support this solution, but lots of people in rural areas are unable to start up business because they don't have enough money to fill the requirement of start-up costs, so this can be an effective solution. After implement this support, owning business can be more feasible in rural area, meaning people from rural area have more control over their products, enabling them to easily make decisions when they are collaborating with livestreaming business or internet celebrities.

On the other hand, for the problems regarding transportation and technology, including lack of timely express service and the inability of being distinct in a number of livestreaming to attract more consumers. Government may improve the current action of The State Post Bureau (SPB), which is to provide a guideline that used for pilot project for delivery service in rural area across six province in China [19]. If this is working, by the end of 2022, all the rural areas in China are expected to receive delivery service, which is essential for the strategy of livestreaming helps rural revitalization. However, most express service companies are in private sector and owned by individuals who desire maximization of profits, and the stereotype that villagers can't bring profits to them may let them unwilling to expand business to rural area, in the end lead to no improvement in transportation. Government may use financial rewards to motivate companies expand the business to rural area. Also, government can start up business in public sector that aiming to provide express service for rural area, although this solution may result in more budget deficit of the government, it is highly effective and able to focus on achieving this goal only.

Lastly, the main problem in rural area regarding the education might be lack of resources, including finance, human, and capital resources. In the general sense government is providing financial support to rebuild the school household buildings and improve the wages to attract more teachers for coming to rural areas, which is an action keeping for decades and has several impacts

[22]. However, when the situation related to livestreaming and collaborate with internet celebrities, the marketing skills and other knowledge professionally referring to business and economics become essential. So, although more people in rural area receive education below the university, they are unable to further explore more professional knowledge. It is hard to operate universities in every village, but government may encourage the exchange activities that enable university professors to provide short-term education in rural areas, during which share useful knowledge to rural areas. Overall, these are the potential solutions to improve the current strategy of rural revitalization and livestreaming from government's perspective.

Government actions need to be responded by the rural society, so rural areas themselves also required to have some changes or solutions.

Each rural society may adapt their own business culture or leadership styles to maximize the efficiency of production, which can benefit on all three aspects of problems mentioned above. On one hand, it enables people in rural area using their current lifestyle and resources to improve the efficiency, since currently they are adapted to more emotional connection and less legal contract between employees and employers. In more specific, they may start up businesses (with government's help) in a paternalistic or laissez-faire style; the former means that employers and managers will consider their employees as families and make decisions based on the best interests of their employees; and the latter provides freedom and authorities for their staffs. To achieve these styles, people need to consider and select carefully the suitable leaders, and when lots of self-owned business in rural area adapt these styles, they'll create a people culture that values people, which is highly fit with most rural areas' current style of living. Simultaneously, these business have clear structures and legal contracts that are the rules for all business, in which they may work for regulations to increase the working and production efficiency.

On the other hand, specialization of work might improve the hardware problem such as livestreaming technique, especially useful when it is hard to get contact with professional livestreaming business. Specialization means to separate the work into different categories, and each individual or group will only responsible for one category of work, which is a common way to improve the working efficiency and quality. In this scenario, people from rural area can divide all works into different departments, so that someone will responsible for operating the livestreaming, some people will focus on advertising or the production itself; in the end, they'll have a chance to form a business in the unit of village, and improved independently.

Lastly, it is also important to change the mainstream idea in rural area. Failure in education is the result of traditional mindset: because of their lack of employment opportunity in rural area, many people would encourage their children to become labor force earlier rather than continue the high school or university education [23]. Currently there are some projects, such as "Livestreaming classrooms" hold by Chengdu No.7 High school, that allow rural students to get in touch with upper-middle classes education, and results show that there are already 88 participating rural students now been admitted to Tsinghua or Peking University. However, lots of families didn't support their child to join these kinds of projects, which reduce the impact of them. A potential cause might be the lack or miscommunication of information, so provide information and knowledge about the importance of education can change people's mind to some extent, in which push forward the impact of education service. In the end, increase in quality and quantity of education allows people in rural area clearer about how to successfully operate the livestreaming to sell their product and build their business, further improve the possibility of independent rural revitalization.

3.3. Summary

In conclusion, previous passages mainly suggest questions regarding the rural education, transportation and technology, and social structure; briefly provide potential solutions in the perspective of government and rural societies.

First, this study states three gaps that have been ignored in past studies. Unbalanced arguments occurred, and researchers are over focusing on the potential benefits and ignore some of these drawbacks or factors making this strategy ineffective. Also, those studies are considering about the improvement that can happen for internet celebrities or governments, rather than problems that might occur in rural area and on those citizens. Last, they are unable to provide constructive and specific solutions.

There are three problems regarding the rural citizens in this strategy. They aren't able to have professional education service, especially for the university. Although this can be solved by the government support on providing projects to introduce knowledge into villages, many people in rural area themselves are unwilling to be educated due to the high cost and low payback on their perspective. On the other hand, the transportation and technology also negatively impact the practicality of this strategy, since they may not have comparative advantage in a bunch of people who sell the similar products. Government may support the construct of routes and express service, but those technology problems need to be solved based on the education prerequisite. And last, the social structure decide that rural area is hard to have high production efficiency, while government may support the start-up business, and people may adapt to paternalistic or laissez-faire style in business to improve the working efficiency.

4. Conclusion

Based on the strategy of rural revitalization and livestreaming internet celebrity industry in the "14th five-year plan suggestions" as the core, this study analyzes the problems that rural areas will face if they want to expand sales through livestreaming and thus achieve economic development under the current situation. Finally, some potential solutions are proposed. At the same time, this study also summarizes some gaps in the past research on this strategy, and carries out the analysis on this basis. Furthermore, the independent development of rural area is the essential and unavoidable trend in current world. Even though livestreaming industry may add potential benefits for rural areas, the problems also need to be solved. Only in this circumstance, rural area may effectively distribute and use the resources, and own skills and knowledge to achieve the real development.

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