

# Cultural Narratives in Motion: New Farmers' Short Videos and the Rural Revitalization

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**Abstract:** Rural revitalization in China has increasingly relied on digital media to reconfigure cultural expression, social participation, and local identity. However, existing research has seldom examined how new farmers employ short-video storytelling to reconstruct cultural meanings and moral frameworks in everyday rural life. Drawing on qualitative thematic analysis of new farmers' short videos on Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok), this study investigates how digital narratives function as affective, cultural, and moral infrastructures that connect everyday life with broader ideological and policy frameworks. The findings suggest that new farmers' cultural narratives transform ordinary labor and interaction into symbolic performances of virtue, continuity, and belonging, as a result, turning rural life into a living archive of moral and aesthetic renewal. By highlighting how affective storytelling revitalizes moral tradition and strengthens communal cohesion, this study could contribute to the sociology of digital culture and offer practical insights into leveraging digital participation for sustainable rural revitalization.

**Keywords:** Cultural narratives, New farmers, Short videos, Rural revitalization, Identity.

## 1. Introduction

Over the past few years, China's rural revitalization strategy has become a solid cornerstone for addressing deep-seated social, economic, and cultural imbalances across the countryside. Launched formally in 2017 by the 19th Central Committee, the policy not only seeks to reduce the urban-rural divide but also to restore cultural heritage, renew rural identities, and integrate digital innovation into local livelihoods [1][2]. Crucially, given the historical marginalization of rural communities in broader development paradigms, rural revitalization must be understood as more than a matter of infrastructure and production. It is equally about culture, meaning, and the mediated voices that enable rural actors to represent themselves [3].

Coupled with rapid technological advancement, the proliferation of short-video platforms such as Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok) and Kuaishou has generated both unprecedented opportunities and subtle tensions within rural China's mediated transformation. On one hand, millions of "new farmers" now employ smartphones to document seasonal festivals, folk craftsmanship, dialectal storytelling, and the embodied rhythms of agrarian labor, thereby rendering visible the texture of everyday rural life. On the other hand, enduring questions remain concerning authenticity, commodification, and the extent to which these seemingly participatory media practices genuinely empower local communities or, conversely, reinforce the algorithmic and commercial logics of digital capitalism that underlie the platforms themselves.

The scale of this transformation is remarkable. Hundreds of millions of short-video users now come from rural counties, and creators with rural backgrounds increasingly take on visible media space, making rural digital culture a mass phenomenon across China's vast countryside. These developments signal a major shift, where the countryside is no longer just a production site for agriculture, which has become a stage for cultural storytelling, digital entrepreneurship and identity-making. The key question, then, is how short-video

narratives produced by "new farmers" mediate rural culture and revitalization in ways that are socially, economically, and culturally meaningful.

A growing body of literature has examined short-video platforms' multifaceted role in advancing rural revitalization from economic, cultural, and social perspectives. First, studies highlight their tangible impact on livelihoods and market access: short videos and livestreaming programs have been shown to stimulate e-commerce, raise household incomes, and spur entrepreneurship among smallholders and returnee youths (the so-called "new farmers"). Collectively, these findings show how digital tools can mobilize local resources into broader value chains [4][5]. Second, communication and cultural scholars have proposed that short videos create a new scopical contact zone where rural performativity and mediated images of place are curated for distant publics. This work highlights how visual form, vernacular aesthetics, and platform affordances shape what counts as "authentic" rural culture [6]. Third, interdisciplinary studies on narrative effects and persuasion demonstrate that immersive stories foster audience identification and attitudinal change through narrative transportation, a mechanism increasingly used to explain how video narratives influence perceptions and consumer behavior [7].

Despite these advances, three important limitations remain. Empirical studies often emphasize economic outcomes, such as sales or follower counts, at the expense of systematic analysis of how cultural meaning is constructed in the videos, including the narrative devices, symbols, and affective strategies that produce immersion and cultural persuasion. Second, scholarship on platform-policy dynamics tends to consider state rural revitalization discourse and grassroots video practices as parallel forces rather than mutually constitutive processes, which need finer analysis of how local storytellers negotiate policy scripts, platform logics, and community norms [8]. Third, although narrative transportation theory is well validated in media contexts, few studies have applied it to short-form rural videos where brevity, vernacular performance, and material culture

converge. Finally, the cognitive-affective mechanisms at work in this hybrid mediatized rural sphere remain underexplored [5]. For that end, the study is set to address the following research questions:

- 1) How do new farmers construct personal and collective identities through short-video narratives?
- 2) What cultural symbols, affective strategies, and moral discourses are leveraged in these videos to evoke narrative transportation?
- 3) In what ways do short-video practices function as socio-cultural infrastructures to reconfigure the relationship between media, culture, and policy in rural revitalization?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 New Farmers' Identity in Rural Revitalization

New farmers have become the mainstay in shaping the trajectory of rural revitalization, serving simultaneously as both a reflection of ongoing transformations and a driving force behind them. Wang argues that the professionalization and specialization of farmers constitute the core of the transition from traditional subsistence-oriented agriculture to a modern, knowledge-intensive, and market-responsive model. This transformation underpins the creation of a new farmer identity, consistent with the strategic objectives of rural revitalization. According to Wang, constructing such an identity requires the synthesis of domestic policy frameworks with international development paradigms to address the declining relevance of conventional agricultural production, which continues to be constrained by outdated technologies and labor shortages [8].

A major influence in the formation and dissemination of new farmer identities lies in media technologies and communication strategies. Duan et al. explore the impact of digital platforms, particularly short-video applications such as Douyin, reimagining and promoting the image of the "new farmer." There is increasing evidence that Douyin's New Farmer Program, supported by Multi-Channel Network (MCN) agencies, plays a critical role in crafting a symbolically rich and hierarchized representation of farmers. These mediated narratives embed individual identities within broader socio-cultural and digital ecosystems, often dramatizing the complexity and multiplicity of farmers' lives. Through these narrative constructions, media platforms enhance the social visibility and legitimacy of new farmers, projecting them as dynamic agents of modernization and aligning their image with the discursive goals of rural revitalization [9].

The socio-cultural dimensions of new farmer identity are further illuminated through research on ethnic and cultural heritage. The interplay between cultural inheritance and ethnic village revitalization was investigated, focusing on how the preservation of local traditions and spatial culture shapes rural identity. This study of Tujia villages in Guizhou illustrates that the integration of indigenous values and spatial configurations reinforces both cultural continuity and developmental progress. The researchers contend that the

embedding of regional heritage within modernization strategies is central to constructing a distinctive farmer identity that bridges traditional ethos with contemporary aspirations [10].

Education and social learning have also emerged as critical mechanisms for cultivating new farmer identities. Chavez-Miguel et al. analyze the Rural Schools of Agroecology in Colombia, highlighting how participatory and farmer-led pedagogies promote collective empowerment. By fostering critical reflection, collaborative problem-solving, and social networking, these initiatives nurture an informed and self-aware farmer identity. They argue that such educational interventions are particularly effective in building adaptive and resilient identities in post-conflict rural settings, thereby linking personal development with community revitalization [11].

Another important dimension shaping the new farmer identity involves the integration of digital competencies and institutional support. Zhang emphasizes the role of digital literacy and policy-backing practices in accelerating agricultural modernization. The study indicates that fragmented land ownership structures often undermine the efficiency of rural development. To mitigate this, Zhang proposes a three-chain synergy model—integrating land consolidation, digital infrastructure, and policy initiatives—to strengthen the professional and digital attributes of the new farmer identity. This framework ensures that farmers are equipped with the technological and institutional resources required to engage fully in a data-driven rural economy [12].

Entrepreneurship and digital economic participation also represent defining features of the emerging new farmer identity. Lin et al. analyze the transformative influence of rural e-commerce, demonstrating that engagement in digital marketplaces not only fosters entrepreneurial capacity but also reshapes farmers' self-perceptions as modern, innovative economic actors. Their study suggests that such engagement signifies a paradigmatic shift toward a more market-oriented, networked model of agriculture, consistent with national strategies for rural revitalization [13]. Similarly, Meng et al. emphasize the significance of targeted vocational training programs for professional farmers, noting that such initiatives provide essential competencies for navigating the rapidly evolving agricultural landscape. These programs cultivate a professional and future-oriented farmer identity that is intricately blended into the broader developmental vision of rural modernization [14].

The evolution of new farmer identity is a multidimensional process encompassing professionalization, media representation, cultural heritage, education, digital literacy, and entrepreneurial engagement. Collectively, these elements reinforce the integration of farmers into contemporary rural development strategies by constructing a socially recognized, culturally grounded, and economically active identity. Nonetheless, several research gaps remain.

First, longitudinal investigations are needed to trace the evolution of new farmer identities over time and to evaluate their sustained influence on rural socio-economic systems. Second, although digital media and online platforms have

received growing attention, ethnographic and participatory studies examining how farmers themselves interpret, negotiate, and perform these identities remain limited. Third, intersectional perspectives on gender, age, and class require further exploration to reveal how structural inequalities shape participation in identity construction and rural revitalization efforts. Finally, while the link between entrepreneurial behavior and new farmer identity has been acknowledged, the broader implications for long-term economic sustainability and community cohesion warrant deeper inquiry.

## 2.2 Cultural Narratives in Rural Revitalization

The incorporation of cultural narratives into rural revitalization has emerged as a crucial focus in recent academic discourse. Cultural identity, heritage conservation, and media representation have been increasingly recognized as essential instruments for fostering sustainable rural transformation. As rural regions undergo structural and social change, revitalizing local cultures and promoting cultural sustainability are seen as indispensable strategies for ensuring long-term development and community resilience.

A central theoretical concern in rural revitalization research is the relationship between cultural identity, heritage preservation, and sustainable development. Shen et al. provide an in-depth examination of Songkou ancient town, elucidating the reciprocal relationship between cultural landscapes and local livelihoods. Their analysis reveals that rural revitalization extends beyond economic improvement, which involves cultivating a profound sense of belonging between people and their environments. They also emphasize that cultural landscape development should rest upon a philosophy of human–nature symbiosis, a principle that reinforces both cultural identity and ecological sustainability while strengthening local community cohesion [15].

Similarly, Zhou et al. investigate the spatial and historical dimensions of cultural heritage preservation in Chishui, China, through a cultural route perspective. Their findings underscore the necessity of aligning spatial development strategies with the preservation of cultural relics to achieve sustainable revitalization. By emphasizing the conservation of traditional village morphology and spatial order, Zhou and colleagues demonstrate that heritage-based planning can function as a powerful catalyst for rural regeneration [16].

Extending this line of inquiry, Fan et al. analyze the cultural genes of Tujia ethnic villages in Guizhou, illustrating how architectural heritage and customary practices reinforce communal identity. They argue that safeguarding these cultural genes not only maintains ethnic distinctiveness but also promotes social cohesion and local resilience. The study exemplifies how linking intangible heritage with development agendas can bridge the goals of cultural continuity and rural prosperity [17].

Another significant dimension of recent scholarship concerns how media and cultural narratives shape perceptions of rural revitalization. Lu and Wang point out that media and cultural narratives profoundly shape how people perceive rural revitalization by reconstructing collective cultural identity and emotional belonging. Through digital storytelling,

symbolic imagery, and representations of everyday rural life, media discourses reframe the countryside as a space of innovation, heritage, and communal renewal. These narratives not only enhance the visibility of local culture but also transform revitalization from a policy initiative into an affective, identity-based process grounded in shared values and cultural pride. [18].

Likewise, Lei et al. explore documentary filmmaking as a medium for articulating the economic, educational, and social dynamics of rural transformation. Their research illustrates that these visual narratives contribute to cultural consciousness and generate empathy for rural communities, thereby reinforcing the moral legitimacy of revitalization initiatives [19]. Through layered and affective storytelling, media narratives cultivate public engagement with rural heritage and sustainability.

Xie et al. analyze the case of Gaotunzi Village to examine how green design strategies can harmonize modernization with heritage conservation. Their findings indicate that environmentally adaptive design practices are indispensable for ensuring the continuity of architectural identity. By integrating sustainable technologies with cultural sensibilities, Xie and his colleagues demonstrate how architectural heritage serves as a tangible narrative linking tradition with innovation [20].

Despite these contributions, several critical gaps persist. First, there is a lack of longitudinal research tracing how cultural revitalization initiatives impact community resilience over time. Existing studies remain largely cross-sectional, offering limited insight into the evolving nature of cultural narratives amid social and political change. Second, intersectional perspectives remain underexplored. Future research should examine how gender, generation, and class mediate participation in cultural revitalization, ensuring inclusivity and equity in policy implementation. Third, digital transformation offers unprecedented opportunities for cultural mediation, yet systematic studies on how digital storytelling and online platforms reconfigure rural identities are scarce. Further inquiry into digital infrastructures' socio-cultural implications is essential.

## 2.3 Short Videos in Advancing Rural Revitalization

The incorporation of short videos into rural revitalization strategies has become an increasingly prominent mechanism for promoting economic renewal, preserving cultural heritage, and stimulating the sustainable development of rural regions. Within the broader framework of digital rural transformation, short videos act as a multidimensional communicative and experiential tool that not only amplifies the visibility of rural products but also strengthens the symbolic and affective ties between rural and urban societies. Their growing relevance stems from the capacity of digital media to simultaneously facilitate storytelling, marketing, and identity reconstruction in contemporary rural China.

As highlighted by Wu, the utilization of short video platforms such as Douyin represents a transformative approach to addressing the so-called “three rural issues” -- agriculture, rural areas, and farmers. Wu’s research underscores the

strategic value of digital communication in reconfiguring the developmental trajectory of rural industries. Through enhanced visual representation and narrative reach, short videos enable rural products to acquire symbolic meanings that extend beyond their material value, thereby improving both their market appeal and cultural resonance. In this sense, short videos serve a dual function: they operate as marketing instruments and as vehicles of rural storytelling that align economic revitalization with social imagination [21].

Building on this communicative dimension, Chen et al. examine how rural landscapes are portrayed in digital short videos, especially on platforms like TikTok. Their study identifies three dominant categories of landscape imagery, ecological, productive, and living environments, which together encapsulate the holistic beauty and diversity of rural life. The authors argue that these visual narratives evoke nostalgic sentiments and aesthetic appreciation, thus generating affective connections between audiences and rural spaces. The construction of these virtual landscapes not only stimulates cultural recognition but also contributes to the protection and valorization of local environments. As Chen and colleagues observe, the evocation of nostalgia through visual media fosters a shared sense of belonging and helps bridge the psychological distance between urban consumers and rural culture [22].

From a more critical perspective, Zou conceptualizes short videos as performative texts that mediate ideological and emotional encounters between rural and urban actors. According to this study, these digital portrayals often reproduce idealized visions of rurality consistent with state-promoted narratives of harmony and rejuvenation. While such representations reinforce a positive image of rural life, they may simultaneously obscure the complexities and inequalities inherent in rural modernization. Zou calls for an alternative, more reflexive engagement with “digital rurality”, which transcends utopian depictions and instead acknowledges rural agency and multiplicity. By proposing a radical reimagining of rural futures, Zou situates short video production within broader debates on cultural politics and media representation [23].

In parallel with these ideological readings, Yu highlights the entrepreneurial and innovative dimensions of rural short video practices. Through an analysis of narrative structures, editing patterns, and audiovisual techniques, Yu demonstrates that short videos have evolved into dynamic spaces for creative self-expression and rural innovation. Farmers and rural entrepreneurs utilize these platforms not merely as marketing channels but as stages on which they can perform modernity, creativity, and self-reinvention. Yu’s findings suggest that digital storytelling enables rural actors to craft narratives of resilience and aspiration that resonate with broader audiences, thereby transforming the perception of rural spaces from sites of stagnation into arenas of opportunity [24].

Complementing this discussion, Zhao focuses on the role of digital platforms in constructing the image of the “new farmer.” Examining initiatives such as Douyin’s “New Farmer Program,” Zhao illustrates how media technologies, professional agencies, and algorithmic curation jointly participate in shaping modern agricultural identities. These

mediated identities fuse personal entrepreneurship with collective narratives of rural revitalization, highlighting the farmer not only as a producer but also as a cultural communicator and digital influencer. Zhao argues that such image construction contributes to redefining social hierarchies within rural China, enhancing the symbolic capital of farming and encouraging youth participation in agriculture [9].

Another significant stream of research emphasizes the contribution of short videos to cultural preservation and the transmission of vernacular traditions. Zhou et al. analyze how short videos facilitate the articulation of regional identities and local heritage within the broader discourse of media convergence. Their study situates short video practices within policy frameworks promoting regional culture, observing that digital storytelling has become a powerful medium for revitalizing traditional customs, dialects, and crafts. Through the circulation of localized narratives, short videos not only document but also reanimate rural cultural practices, thereby reinforcing collective memory and intergenerational continuity [3].

From a commercial standpoint, Yue and Zheng explore the marketing functions of short videos in the context of rural enterprises. They highlight that storytelling in agricultural marketing effectively enhances consumer engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention. Their findings suggest that narrative-based communication transforms agricultural products from mere commodities into emotional experiences. In the context of rural enterprises, these insights imply that short videos, by combining visual storytelling and emotional resonance, can strengthen brand identity, differentiate local products, and build lasting consumer loyalty through authentic, value-driven narratives [25].

Finally, Chai offers a case study of Xiaogang Village’s Red Brigade short videos to assess the communicative effectiveness of targeted messaging in rural revitalization campaigns. He emphasizes that successful digital storytelling requires the alignment of content strategy with local context and audience expectations. By tailoring messages to specific community narratives and leveraging participatory communication, these campaigns can mobilize both local and national support for rural initiatives. The study underlines the necessity of strategic optimization to ensure that rural revitalization narratives remain authentic, persuasive, and socially inclusive [26].

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that short videos have evolved into multifaceted instruments that integrate economic, cultural, and communicative functions within rural revitalization processes. They foster entrepreneurial innovation, preserve vernacular culture, and reconstruct rural identities in ways that align with national development objectives.

Nevertheless, several research gaps remain. First, longitudinal and comparative studies are required to evaluate the sustained impact of short video interventions on rural development outcomes. Second, while existing research has predominantly addressed economic and marketing dimensions, future research should dig deeper about the socio-cultural

implications of digital storytelling, particularly its influence on community cohesion, gender roles, and intergenerational relations. By addressing these areas, subsequent research can advance theoretical and practical understanding of how digital media, through the creative and strategic use of short videos, and ultimately can serve as a catalyst for sustainable rural transformation.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study aims to explore how cultural narratives embedded in new farmers’ short videos contribute to the broader agenda of rural revitalization. Given that meanings within digital storytelling are socially constructed and context-dependent, this research adopts an interpretivist and qualitative approach. Such an epistemological stance emphasizes subjective understanding and lived experiences rather than measurable variables. It enables an in-depth investigation of how farmers express identity, values, and community aspirations through short video practices.

Qualitative thematic analysis was selected as the core methodological strategy, as it allows for the identification of recurring patterns, meanings, and cultural signifiers in multimodal narratives. This method is particularly appropriate for analyzing short video content where visual, verbal, and performative dimensions interact dynamically. The focus on interpretation rather than quantification aligns with the study’s objective to uncover how new farmers construct and negotiate cultural meanings through their digital representations.

Short video platforms, such as Douyin and Kuaishou, have become vital arenas for rural expression, entrepreneurship, and cultural mediation. Similar to how netnography adapts ethnographic methods to digital environments [27], this study positions itself within a digital ethnographic framework. It explores cultural production and self-representation through naturally occurring online content, capturing how farmers engage audiences and participate in the digital transformation of rural life. This approach allows the researcher to access publicly available audiovisual data that authentically reflects the creators’ intentions and community discourses.

In contrast to interview-based studies, which rely heavily on participants’ retrospective accounts, short video analysis provides an immediate and context-rich representation of rural experiences as performed and shared in real time. Such an approach is especially valuable when examining affective, ideological, and cultural dimensions that are expressed visually and performatively rather than linguistically.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

The data corpus was collected from Douyin (TikTok China), the largest short video platform in China, which hosts a substantial number of accounts under initiatives such as the “New Farmer Program.” To ensure representativeness, videos were selected from 20 verified or high-engagement farmer accounts across diverse rural regions, including eastern coastal, central agricultural, and western mountainous areas.

These accounts typically showcase farming practices, local culture, entrepreneurship, and rural lifestyles.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to collect 60 short videos posted between January 2023 and May 2025. Each video was downloaded and transcribed, including both spoken dialogue and on-screen captions. Visual and performative elements—such as gestures, camera framing, setting, and soundtrack—were systematically noted to capture multimodal meanings. The inclusion criteria emphasized videos where the creator explicitly identified as a “new farmer” or engaged in narratives promoting rural life, innovation, or cultural heritage. Videos that merely served as product advertisements without meaningful storytelling were excluded.

To maintain analytical rigor and ethical compliance, only publicly available content was included, and no identifiable personal information beyond the creators’ public profiles was used. Each video was assigned a code for anonymized reference.

#### 3.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through Braun and Clarke’s six-step framework for thematic analysis, which involves familiarization, initial coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, defining and naming themes, and final reporting [28]. This iterative process was supported by NVivo software to manage and code multimodal data efficiently. The analysis combined inductive and deductive logics, allowing emergent patterns from the data while also relating them to existing theories on digital storytelling, identity construction, and rural revitalization.

Table 1: Data Analysis Result

Themes	Codes
<b>Character and Identity Construction</b> (380)	• Rural self-reinvention (46)
	• Embodied labor and agency (89)
	• Intergenerational messengers (88)
	• Moral-affective mediation (81)
	• Socio-economic brokerage (76)
<b>Cultural Symbols and Values</b> (354)	• Agrarian symbolism (61)
	• Cultural memory (71)
	• Ethical exchange (86)
	• Familial values (76)
	• Collective hope (60)
<b>Affective and Experiential Dimension</b> (384)	• Emotional expressivity (94)
	• Sensory embodiment (84)
	• Humor and resilience (55)
	• Empathy and compassion (71)
	• Affective reciprocity (80)
<b>Moral and Ideological Dimension</b> (298)	• Work ethic (78)
	• Reciprocity and altruism (80)
	• Filial duty (68)
	• Collective morality (49)
	• Ideological alignment (23)
<b>Mediated and Performative Dimension</b> (235)	• Everyday performativity (126)
	• Platform vernacular (28)
	• Self-branding persona (50)
	• Institutional mediation (31)
<b>Socio-Cultural Function</b> (383)	• Community bonding (78)
	• Cultural transmission (76)
	• Economic empowerment (77)
	• Rural image rebuilding (66)
	• Everyday governance (22)
	• Participatory storytelling (64)

Notes: The numbers denote the occurrences of the codes.

Through repeated comparison and interpretive synthesis, six overarching themes were identified:

- 1) Character and Identity Construction--how new farmers portray themselves as modern, entrepreneurial, and culturally rooted agents of change;
- 2) Cultural Symbols and Values--the use of regional traditions, dialects, and rituals to sustain and reimagine rural heritage;
- 3) Affective and Experiential Dimension--emotional appeals, humor, nostalgia, and sensory engagement that foster audience empathy;
- 4) Moral and Ideological Dimension--narratives that align with social values such as diligence, harmony, and national rural revitalization discourse;
- 5) Mediated and Performative Dimension--how editing, music, and platform affordances shape performative authenticity and audience interaction;
- 6) Socio-Cultural Function--the role of short videos in promoting rural image, social cohesion, and local economic participation (See Table 1).

These six themes collectively reveal how new farmers act as cultural mediators, transforming personal and local experiences into shared digital narratives. Thematic interpretation was complemented by reflexive memo writing to ensure analytical transparency and to account for researcher positionality. The final synthesis integrates the thematic findings into broader theoretical discussions on digital rurality and participatory media culture.

Overall, this methodological design, combining qualitative thematic analysis with digital ethnographic sensibility, provides a nuanced understanding of how short videos function as cultural narratives in motion, advancing both identity reconstruction and rural revitalization.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Character and Identity Construction

Identity construction among new farmers unfolds as a deeply sensorial, affective, and moral process in which ordinary life, labor, and care become acts of narrative performance. Rather than simply representing rural life, these storytellers live it on camera, turning everyday gestures into expressions of belonging and selfhood. The pleasure here does not stem from material gain but from rediscovering purpose and connection through embodied participation, empathy, and the moral aesthetics of work and care. Across the dataset, five closely interwoven subthemes collectively capture how new farmers redefine what it means to be “rural” in contemporary China.

#### 4.1.1 Rural Self-Reinvention

Many new farmers represent themselves as both inheritors and innovators—rooted in tradition yet eager to reimagine rural life in a digital age. In one clip, a young man demonstrates an old craft, saying, “Today I’ll give you a bit of

traditional craft”. Here, craftsmanship becomes not just a skill but a statement of cultural continuity. Similarly, a young woman visiting isolated elders during the Mid-Autumn Festival narrates her story with calm sincerity, transforming acts of giving into expressions of belonging. These moments show how new farmers reinvent themselves as moral and cultural actors who fuse nostalgia with new forms of self-expression.

#### 4.1.2 Embodied Labor and Agency

Labor emerges as both a physical and symbolic site of identity. The short videos often highlight hard work, endurance, and pride in one’s craft. When a creator says, “The second brother praises me like this, I still have to work hard”, it conveys not only diligence but also the performative reaffirmation of one’s worth through effort. Similarly, scenes of young farmers hauling heavy loads of bamboo shoots or seafood reveal how the body itself becomes a medium of self-assertion. Each motion, regardless lifting, carrying or selling, is charged with agency and a sense of authorship over one’s life. Through these representations, rural labor is no longer framed as backward or burdensome, but as meaningful, proud, and self-defining.

#### 4.1.3 Intergenerational Messengers

A recurring narrative pattern is the bridging of generations. New farmers act as connectors—between youth and elders, between the present and the past. The use of kinship terms such as “second brother”, “uncle”, and “auntie”, constructs a community of intimacy and moral familiarity. Everyday interactions, like helping elders make dumplings or chatting while selling vegetables, anchor identity in relational continuity. One creator remarks, “It’s still the young people who charge ahead”, capture both respect for age and responsibility of youth. These small, dialogic moments reveal how identity is not a private possession but a shared, negotiated inheritance sustained through speech and action.

#### 4.1.4 Moral-Affective Mediation

Many creators position themselves as emotional mediators, translating care into moral value. In one scene, a young woman carefully delivers food and cash to elderly villagers, saying softly, “Grandpa and Grandma, happy Mid-Autumn Festival”. The tone is affectionate but modest, suggesting that kindness, not charity, defines the moral self. Across many videos, feelings of gratitude, responsibility, and empathy anchor the construction of character. The emotional exchanges, smiles, laughter, or the simple phrase “I’ll help you”, reveal that moral identity in rural revitalization is deeply affective, built upon care, modesty, and relational harmony rather than individual display.

#### 4.1.5 Socio-Economic Brokerage

Finally, new farmers often position themselves as intermediaries between traditional producers and modern consumers. In one extended sequence, a young woman buys over a thousand pounds of bamboo shoots from elderly villagers and resells them in a nearby county. Her commentary, including comparing prices, negotiating fairly,

and thanking buyers, shows her dual role as both businesswoman and moral broker. When she notes, “The elders brought these to sell, and I couldn’t refuse”, her ethical reasoning turns trade into a gesture of respect and reciprocity. This economic mediation demonstrates that rural identity today is not static but entrepreneurial, tied to both emotional ties and market participation.

In sum, the construction of character and identity among new farmers is relational, embodied, and reflexive. It arises from the fusion of labor, care, and moral awareness within daily acts of exchange and storytelling. Their short videos do more than document rural life, whereby they perform it, making visible the dignity of work, the continuity of generations, and the ethical intelligence of ordinary people. Through these digital self-portraits, the “new farmer” becomes not just a social type but a living, evolving identity—rooted in the soil yet fluent in the language of modern media.

## 4.2 Cultural Symbols and Values

The data about cultural symbols and values reveals how new farmers use short videos to translate local culture into living expressions of meaning. Through narratives grounded in labor, food, and moral exchange, these storytellers infuse daily practices with symbolic value, turning ordinary activities into acts of cultural preservation and ethical reflection. The findings illustrate how the countryside is reimagined as both a site of production and a warm landscape of shared cultures and values.

### 4.2.1 Agrarian and Symbolism

The visual and verbal vocabulary of farming remains a central marker of rural identity. Scenes of harvesting, soil, and seasonal change serve as metaphors for endurance and renewal. In one video, two young creators walk along the retreating tide, searching for sea urchins and shells. Their excitement at each discovery, described as “the feeling of digging for treasure”, reveals a symbolic pleasure in manual encounter with nature. The sea, the mud, and the tactile sensation of collecting marine life stand not only for work but for continuity with ancestral rhythms of survival. Through such imagery, agrarian life becomes aesthetic and symbolic, a reminder that value lies in persistence, attention, and harmony with the environment.

### 4.2.2 Cultural Memory

Embedded in these narratives is a deep engagement with memory. Cultural memory operates not through monumental symbols but through small, recurring gestures, ranging from preparing familiar foods, performing traditional crafts, to recalling local sayings. In one example, a farmer instructs viewers on how to judge the quality of soybeans by observing the fullness of the top pods, explaining in detail the relationship between soil, weather, and yield. His calm authority transforms agronomic knowledge into cultural continuity, suggesting that expertise is inherited, not invented. Similarly, when another creator cooks noodles for her family working in the fields, the act of feeding becomes a ritual of remembrance and care, linking present labor to generations of rural practice.

### 4.2.3 Ethical Exchange

Ethical exchange emerges as a recurring value in these short videos, reflecting an enduring belief in fairness, reciprocity, and moral labor. A recurring pattern indicates creators trading with local elders, such as purchasing their produce, paying slightly more than market price, and expressing gratitude. The tone is neither commercial nor sentimental; it embodies a quiet code of fairness that defines social relations in rural life. In the soybean example, the creator’s insistence on observing “what the plant tells you” also reflects an ethics of attention and respect toward the natural world. The moral logic here is clear: honest work and fair exchange form the foundation of community trust.

### 4.2.4 Familial Values

Family interaction provides emotional depth to the representation of rural culture. Everyday moments, no matter parents cooking for children, siblings helping with fieldwork, or spouses teasing each other, become signs of collective stability and affection. In one scene, a daughter cooks hand-pulled noodles for her father and uncles working in the field. Her commentary is filled with light humor and care, noting how the noodles “must be eaten fresh, otherwise they lose their strength.” The camera lingers on gestures of serving and sharing, transforming domestic activity into a cultural performance of love, diligence, and respect. Family thus functions as both symbol and value: a microcosm of the moral order that sustains rural revitalization.

### 4.2.5 Collective Hope

Finally, beneath the routines of work and care lies a current of collective optimism. Hope is expressed not through grand declarations but through the persistence of doing, reflected by harvesting, cooking, selling and teaching. When a fisherman remarks with laughter that his day’s catch “feels like striking gold,” the statement carries more than humor; it embodies the belief that effort will be rewarded, that rural life still holds promise. Similarly, farmers teaching others to improve crop yields frame knowledge as a shared pathway to a better future. Hope, in these narratives, is pragmatic and grounded and it grows from the soil, circulates in trade, and lives in the everyday optimism of people who continue to create meaning from labor and community.

In short, the cultural portrayals in the short videos capture how the new farmers’ digital narratives transform the countryside into a moral and aesthetic world. Through the interplay of symbols, memory, and emotion, they construct a cultural vision where labor is honorable, exchange is ethical, and community is enduring. These videos do not merely document rural life; they ritualize it, turning the gestures of work, care, and sharing into signs of continuity and hope in an age of transformation.

## 4.3 Affective and Experiential Dimension

Data find that a lived experience is generated in the new farmers’ short videos to invite audiences into immersive emotional worlds where humor, care, and sensory immediacy work perfectly well. Rather than simply displaying rural life,

these narratives transport viewers into it, which is also called narrative transportation, in which audiences become mentally and emotionally absorbed in a story world. Through expressive emotion, embodied sensory cues, and shared affective resonance, the videos transform everyday labor into an emotionally charged, participatory experience.

#### 4.3.1 Emotional Expressivity

Emotion forms the heartbeat of these digital narratives. Farmers' dialogues are filled with interjections, laughter, and spontaneous exclamations that blur the line between performance and authenticity. Quick exchanges such as "You move, hey oh, you quick... Oh my mom, slow down!" unfold like unscripted comedy, reflecting the unpredictable rhythm of fieldwork while infusing it with humor and vitality. These unpolished utterances, like laughter, repetition, and mild complaint, convey the texture of lived emotion, producing a sense of immediacy that pulls audiences into the moment. The joy, surprise, and frustration embedded in these linguistic gestures serve not as background details but as emotional anchors that make viewers feel the scene rather than simply watch it.

#### 4.3.2 Sensory Embodiment

The affective appeal of these videos also lies in their sensory intensity. Scenes of boiling noodles, catching fish, or tasting fruit engage viewers' embodied imagination through visual, tactile, and gustatory cues. When a speaker describes loquats as "crisp and fragrant," the narrative appeals to shared sensory memory, fostering a vicarious pleasure that bridges digital distance. Similarly, the rhythmic clatter of cooking, the rustling of crops, and the sudden downpour during filming evoke a full-bodied awareness of place. Through these sensory layers, audiences are not merely observers; they are transported into the experiential fabric of rural life, sharing its tempo, climate, and atmosphere.

#### 4.3.3 Humor and Resilience

Humor functions as both emotional relief and narrative glue. Playful teasing and self-deprecation, such as joking that "even the pig wouldn't eat this, but I'll prove you wrong later", help transform hardship into laughter. Humor in these stories is rarely detached; it arises from the friction between aspiration and struggle, failure and persistence. By laughing at mistakes, farmers perform resilience and optimism, redefining rural labor not as suffering but as a source of joy and dignity. This affective humor strengthens narrative transportation because audiences feel emotionally safe within a community that faces challenges with wit and grace.

#### 4.3.4 Empathy and Compassion

Many narratives are rooted in acts of care, including helping an elderly neighbor, worrying about someone traveling late, or sharing food with a relative. The emotional tone is tender and inclusive, marked by phrases like "Uncle, be careful on the road" or "He's such a kind man." The camera often lingers on faces, gestures, or simple acts of giving, reinforcing empathy through visual intimacy. This warmth encourages identification between storyteller and viewer: audiences

experience not just the scene but the emotion of compassion itself. Through such affective mediation, empathy becomes a performative act, strengthening both social bonds and moral imagination.

#### 4.3.5 Affective Reciprocity

The interaction between creators and viewers reveals a subtle economy of feeling. Comments, responses, and mutual encouragement create cycles of emotional exchange, where gratitude, admiration, and humor flow back and forth. Phrases like "Thank you, everyone, for your support" or "You all keep me going" mark moments of acknowledgment that bridge digital and physical communities. This reciprocity enhances narrative transportation by reinforcing the sense of shared presence, also the feeling of being "in it together." Emotional exchange becomes both medium and message, transforming digital storytelling into a communal practice of care and belonging.

Given all the above-mentioned evidences, the short videos utilize the affective and experiential mechanism to generate storytelling, champion ethics, and rebuild community. Through expressive language, sensory embodiment, humor, and empathy, new farmers craft narratives that absorb viewers into a rhythm of feeling. These videos are not just representations of rural life; they are affective experiences that invite audiences to inhabit the moral, emotional, and sensory world of the countryside. In doing so, they turn ordinary moments, such as eating, helping and laughing, into immersive stories of human connection and resilient joy.

### 4.4 Moral and Ideological Dimension

The coded instances of moral and ideological dimension show how rural digital storytellers embody and reinterpret long-standing Chinese moral values within the everyday flow of rural life, including diligence, reciprocity, filial piety, and collective virtue. As observed in numerous narratives, these moral expressions, while rooted in Confucian ethics, acquire renewed resonance under the contemporary discourse of rural revitalization. Morality is not presented as an abstract doctrine but emerges through lived practices and affective engagements, through working diligently in the fields, caring for the elderly, contributing to village affairs, and participating in collective rituals and national campaigns. In this sense, moral virtue becomes both an ethical compass and a performative resource through which new farmers articulate their belonging, sustain social trust, and negotiate the meaning of being "good" in a transforming countryside.

#### 4.4.1 Work Ethic

Work ethic constitutes the moral cornerstone of these narratives, conveyed through diligence, perseverance, and sincerity. As illustrated by one young factory owner who, recalling her father's years of arduous carpentry, established a small quilt workshop to employ local women, labor is framed as both economic practice and moral vocation. Her journey—from assisting a handful of workers to supporting twenty—embodies the conviction that work carried out with care and integrity uplifts the collective good. The re-opening celebration, where elders receive small gifts and share a



communal meal, transforms economic recovery into a ritual of moral renewal. In this sense, labor transcends mere subsistence to become an affirmation of dignity, gratitude, and shared aspiration for collective betterment.

#### 4.4.2 Reciprocity and Altruism

Reciprocity and altruism surface vividly through acts of mutual aid and moral generosity. In one narrative, a young vendor helps farmers sell surplus lotus roots after a bumper harvest, engaging customers with humor and fairness that exemplify *ren* (humaneness) as a lived ethic of everyday care. Likewise, creators frequently depict themselves assisting elders, exchanging gifts during holidays, or redistributing goods within their neighborhoods. These gestures reaffirm the moral fabric of interdependence, turning both the physical marketplace and the digital feed into affective spaces of trust and empathy sustained through everyday giving.

#### 4.4.3 Filial Duty

Filial devotion extends beyond the private household to encompass broader intergenerational care. Many storytellers dedicate their labor to aging parents or grandparents, linking economic diligence to emotional obligation. A recurring vignette shows a young woman saving the last lotus roots to “bring home for grandpa’s soup,” transforming a routine act into a ritual of affection. Another revisits elderly villagers during festivals, offering food and companionship while recalling shared memories. Through such moments, digital storytelling becomes a medium for enacting “*xiao*”, filial virtue reinterpreted as compassionate reciprocity and intergenerational continuity rather than hierarchical obedience.

#### 4.4.4 Collective Morality

Collective morality is likewise deeply woven into these digital portrayals. Scenes of villagers working together, for example, packing pears late into the night or preparing communal meals, express the enduring ethic of *gongde* (collective virtue). One particularly evocative narrative features “Secretary Xiao Zhang,” a village cadre who coordinates livestreams and packaging efforts to deliver pears overnight while also organizing civic rituals—watching the Olympics together, celebrating Women’s Day by photographing elder women in *qipao*, and making *qingtuan* (green rice dumplings) for schoolchildren during Qingming before visiting the martyrs’ memorial. These interlaced acts of care, festivity, and remembrance weave moral, cultural, and civic responsibility into the rhythms of daily life. They demonstrate how digital storytelling not only preserves social cohesion but also translates rural governance and moral leadership into participatory, emotionally resonant forms of everyday practice.

#### 4.4.5 Ideological Alignment

Finally, ideological alignment connects these personal and communal virtues to the broader vision of national revitalization. Through gestures of care, celebration, and remembrance, storytellers align themselves with state ideals of self-reliance, cultural inheritance, and social harmony. The

interweaving of moral virtue and patriotic sentiment signals an evolving moral consciousness in which devotion to family and service to community seamlessly expand into love of nation. The presence of cadres like Xiao Zhang further reinforces this convergence, suggesting that moral leadership in contemporary rural China operates less through formal authority than through empathy, participation, and shared purpose.

In sum, the Moral and Ideological Dimension reveals how Chinese rural storytellers revitalize traditional virtues within digital environments, translating long-standing moral codes into embodied acts of labor, care, and generosity. Their narratives bridge moral tradition and social transformation, demonstrating that ethics in rural China endure as a living, relational practice, anchored in local integrity yet resonant with collective and national ideals. Through these digital performances, the enduring values of diligence, benevolence, and filiality are not only remembered but actively re-enacted, transforming everyday storytelling into a shared moral project of renewal and belonging.

### 4.5 The Mediated and Performative Dimension

The codes regarding to mediated and performative dimension illustrates how “new farmers” transform digital storytelling into a performative arena for enacting everyday realities, asserting visibility, and cultivating authenticity in mediated spaces. As several studies on digital performativity have noted that social media affordances reshape how individuals stage the self and construct moral presence online. Similarly, in the present study, rural storytellers perform their identities through the interplay of everyday performativity, platform vernacular, self-branding persona, and institutional mediation. These performances are not mere self-promotion but deliberate acts of negotiation with algorithmic visibility, audience expectations, and local moral worlds. As the following narratives suggest, “new farmers” enact sincerity and care by inviting viewers into their daily routines, combining digital literacy with a grounded sense of moral realism anchored in rural community life.

#### 4.5.1 Everyday Performativity

Everyday performativity emerges as the most salient subtheme, accounting for more than half of the coded instances. Rural storytellers construct authenticity not through overt dramatization, but through the subtle dramatizing of the ordinary, for instance, selling bamboo shoots at dawn, chatting with elderly villagers, or preparing traditional foods such as “*nang*” in Xinjiang. Their gestures and voices are fluid, spontaneous, and dialogic, unfolding in the natural rhythm of conversation rather than in a staged performance. As illustrated by one example, a young vendor negotiates prices with elderly bamboo shoot sellers, joking about fairness while expressing her concern that they sell out before nightfall. This seemingly mundane interaction functions as a micro-performance of moral economy and reciprocity, transforming routine trade into a shared enactment of empathy and diligence. The handheld camera intensifies this sense of immediacy and co-presence, allowing viewers to feel part of the encounter—to share the physical weight of the bamboo shoots and the affective warmth of the exchange.

#### 4.5.2 Platform Vernacular

Platform vernacular operates simultaneously as a linguistic and visual code that mediates the relationship between storytellers and their audiences. Informal speech, regional dialects, direct address, and conversational fillers (“friends, look at this,” “you see, this is the best”) draw viewers into an intimate and participatory mode of communication. Such stylistic conventions are consistent with the algorithmic aesthetics of short-video culture while preserving the oral, relational, and situational qualities characteristic of rural talk. In this sense, the language of platforms like Douyin constitutes a new folk register—humorous, emotionally expressive, and deeply rooted in vernacular rhythms that sustain a sense of familiarity and belonging.

#### 4.5.3 Self-Branding Persona

The self-branding persona highlights the careful balance between sincerity and strategic self-presentation. While creators often depict themselves as “ordinary villagers,” they simultaneously cultivate coherent identities, such as a devoted daughter, an ethical entrepreneur, or a caring helper. In one nang-making video, the baker narrates each step with a mix of modest humor and skilled craftsmanship, describing her learning process through trial and error. Her admission of failure (“my first batch burned”) humanizes her, while persistence conveys moral resilience and artisanal pride. Through repetition and narrative consistency, such personas accumulate symbolic credibility, transforming the digital self into both a laboring agent and a moral brand grounded in everyday virtue.

#### 4.5.4 Institutional Mediation

Institutional mediation introduces an additional performative layer that connects individual narratives with collective and policy-oriented discourses. When a creator visits elderly residents of a former leprosy village during the Mid-Autumn Festival, offering gifts and donations while reflecting on compassion and gratitude, the act becomes a moral performance aligned with broader state discourses of rural revitalization and social harmony. Likewise, scenes in which village cadres host livestreams, coordinate charity events, or take part in national festivities reveal how digital storytelling extends the reach of institutional voice through affective mediation. These hybrid performances blur the boundaries between governance, participation, and popular culture, turning local officials and ordinary villagers into co-actors in a shared narrative of renewal and belonging.

To wrap up, this section illustrates how rural digital creators negotiate the tensions between authenticity and mediation, everyday life and spectacle. Their performances are not contrived displays but situated acts of meaning-making through which labor, care, and identity are reframed for digital publics. In these short videos, the countryside no longer appears as a static backdrop but as a dynamic performative arena, where moral sincerity, sensory vitality, and mediated visibility converge to redefine what it means to “be rural” in contemporary China.

### 4.6 The Socio-Cultural Function

The data from socio-cultural function theme highlights how digital storytelling by new farmers extends beyond personal self-expression to fulfill essential social, cultural, and ethical functions within the broader project of rural revitalization. These digital narratives demonstrate how online performances serve as vehicles for collective renewal. As illustrated by multiple accounts, digital narratives nurture social cohesion, circulate local knowledge, and legitimize rural agency within national modernization discourse. In this sense, digital storytelling becomes both a communicative practice and a moral economy, through which farmers foster solidarity, sustain livelihoods, and reimagine the countryside as a space of dignity, creativity, and shared future.

#### 4.6.1 Community Bonding

Community bonding emerges as the most salient socio-cultural function, representing the highest frequency among all subthemes. Through digital media, new farmers cultivate affective ties and social solidarity that extend across both physical and virtual communities. Their videos frequently depict scenes of care and reciprocity, including helping elderly villagers sell produce, visiting isolated seniors during festivals, or delivering meals and groceries to those living alone. As illustrated by one narrative, a content creator visits an elderly woman living by herself, discovers her spoiled food, and arranges with a local vendor to deliver fresh vegetables on a regular basis, funded in advance by online donors. The episode fuses empathy with coordination, transforming private compassion into an organized form of collective care mediated by digital participation. In this sense, livestreaming functions as a moral and social infrastructure through which dispersed actors are emotionally and materially reconnected within an expanded digital village.

#### 4.6.2 Cultural Transmission

Closely linked to community bonding, cultural transmission highlights how traditional craftsmanship and agrarian knowledge are rearticulated through digital storytelling. What was once confined to oral transmission within families now travels through short videos viewed by millions. The bean-drying example also exemplifies this subtheme, as the creator explicitly references “the way our elders taught us,” transforming local technique into cultural pedagogy. Similarly, clips showing indigenous cooking, dialectal storytelling, or regional festivals serve as performative archives that bridge generations and revalorize rural epistemologies within the modern attention economy.

#### 4.6.3 Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment emerges as both a pragmatic and symbolic dimension. Livestreams and short videos enable villagers to market local products, ranging from bamboo shoots to handmade crafts, thereby generating income while affirming self-reliance and pride in agricultural labor. In the case of a bamboo shoot vendor, the creator documents her trade while spotlighting the elderly villagers who harvest the produce, portraying them as capable contributors rather than passive dependents. This narrative blends commercial success with ethical worth, underscoring that labor and dignity are mutually reinforcing. By turning the marketplace into a site of

storytelling, new farmers embed commerce within moral and affective economies grounded in reciprocity and recognition.

#### 4.6.4 Rural Image Rebuilding

Rural image rebuilding constitutes another defining outcome. The countryside is reimagined not as a space of scarcity but as a locus of creativity, resilience, and emotional abundance. Through aestheticized portrayals of lush landscapes, communal meals, and collaborative labor, creators project a renewed vision of rural life characterized by warmth and vitality. As one example shows, a young man preparing mountain crab dishes alongside villagers frames the countryside as vibrant and sensorial, filled with laughter, shared cooking, and collective pride. Such representations challenge urban-centric narratives that depict the rural as stagnant or obsolete, reconstructing instead a dignified and contemporary rural subjectivity.

#### 4.6.5 Everyday Governance

The smaller but significant category of everyday governance (22) shows how digital storytelling participates in informal social regulation. Influencers often act as moral witnesses, mediating neighborly disputes, helping elderly villagers, or mobilizing charity for vulnerable individuals. In one poignant scene, a storyteller discovers an elderly woman living alone in poverty and mobilizes followers to provide food and financial assistance. This blend of empathy and digital coordination exemplifies how grassroots media practices substitute for limited local welfare systems, turning online attention into acts of everyday governance.

#### 4.6.6 Participatory Storytelling

Finally, data related to participatory storytelling also indicates that the interactive, co-constructed nature of these narratives. Viewers do not remain passive consumers; they comment, donate, and suggest future topics. Storytellers often incorporate audience feedback into subsequent videos, creating a cycle of mutual recognition. Through such participation, rural life becomes a shared narrative space shaped by dispersed voices across digital and physical communities.

In summary, these findings reflect a dynamic ecology where emotion, culture, and social practice intersect. New farmers are not merely digital producers; they are connectors, educators, and mediators who sustain communal ties, transmit heritage, generate livelihoods, reshape representation, and perform grassroots governance. Their narratives illustrate how digital media revitalizes not only the economic foundations of the countryside but also its moral and affective lifeworld, turning individual storytelling into a shared pursuit of cultural renewal and collective well-being.

## 5. Conclusion

This study reveals that digital storytelling by China's new farmers constitutes a vital moral, cultural, and communicative force in the ongoing agenda of rural revitalization. Through short-video narratives, these rural creators transform everyday labor, caregiving, and social interaction into performative acts

of meaning-making that bridge the personal and collective. Their storytelling practices exemplify how digital media becomes a space for identity negotiation, moral renewal, and cultural reproduction, linking individual self-expression with broader social and ideological currents. In doing so, the study demonstrates that the new farmer's identity is relational and evolving, grounded in the ethics of labor and community while fluent in the aesthetics and affective code of contemporary digital culture.

At the core of these narratives lies an affective and moral economy in which labor is imbued with dignity, care becomes a mode of solidarity, and tradition is reinterpreted as a living heritage. Through humor, empathy, and sensory storytelling, new farmers invite viewers to participate emotionally in rural life, generating narrative transportation and shared moral resonance. Their short videos are not simply depictions of the countryside but embodied performances of virtue, gratitude, and collective hope. By transforming work, kinship, and festivity into digital rituals, these creators turn online visibility into a moral practice that reaffirms the enduring values of diligence, benevolence, and filiality while aligning them with contemporary ideals of progress and self-reliance.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the sociology of digital culture by highlighting how affective and moral dimensions mediate the intersection of media, culture, and policy in rural China. Previous research has often examined rural communication through economic or technological lenses, overlooking its moral and affective infrastructures. By foregrounding these dimensions, the study advances understanding of how grassroots media practices can reconstitute the moral foundations of collective life, offering a new perspective on how ethics, aesthetics, and governance synergize in digital environments. It thereby extends debates in moral sociology, showing that virtue and community are not the remaining fragments of a pre-modern past but adaptive, mediated forces in the present.

Practically, these findings suggest that short-video practices have tangible significance for advancing rural revitalization. First, they foster cultural confidence and reshape rural imagery by presenting the countryside as innovative, ethical, and emotionally rich. Second, they serve as informal infrastructures of governance—mobilizing participation, strengthening community bonds, and reinforcing local trust through transparent and affective communication. Third, they provide new channels for economic and social mobility: by linking local products, traditions, and personalities with broader digital markets, they generate new livelihood opportunities and strengthen rural branding. Accordingly, policymakers and local cultural institutions should view digital storytelling not merely as entertainment but as a participatory medium for civic engagement, moral education, and cultural sustainability. Training programs in digital literacy, storytelling ethics, and community communication could empower more rural residents to contribute to the shared narrative of revitalization.

Nonetheless, this study is not without limitations. The sample size and temporal scope restrict the ability to capture long-term transformations in narrative forms and community impact. Moreover, as the data primarily draw from publicly

shared short videos, they may privilege idealized self-representations and underrepresent ambivalence, contestation, or failure. Future research could therefore adopt longitudinal, participatory, or multi-modal approaches to trace how these narratives evolve alongside shifts in policy, platform algorithms, and local social dynamics.

Essentially, digital storytelling by China's new farmers illustrates how media practices can transform rural life into an ongoing moral, cultural and economic project [29]. Through emotion, labor, and moral imagination, they translate traditional virtues into digital idioms of resilience and belonging. These narratives not only preserve cultural memory but also propel the moral, affective and economic momentum of rural revitalization, showing that the future of China's countryside will be shaped as much by stories as by policies and also by the creative power of those who live, narrate, and renew it from within.

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