

Exploring the Innovation Path of Agricultural Products Live Streaming Mode under the Perspective of Social Capital Theory

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Abstract

Guided by the field theory and social capital theory, this paper takes the special and representative actor of East Buy live streaming as the main research object, and reveals the operation mechanism of the four types of social capital in the field of agricultural products live streaming, such as organization, information, trust and regulatory, which stimulate the effect of distinctions of tastes, replacement of Social Circle, brand emotion and Win-Win Practice, and provides reference for the operation management and development of agricultural products live streaming, and helps the concrete practical action of "Rural Revitalization" strategy in China.

Keywords

Social Capital; Agricultural Products; Live Streaming; Field Theory; East Buy.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the construction of transportation facilities, express logistics and distribution, and network communication facilities in rural areas have gradually improved, providing stable basic and necessary conditions for network information and agricultural product circulation. With the support of national policies such as information poverty alleviation and rural revitalization, platform traffic support provides ample possibilities for live streaming of agricultural products. For a moment, the field of agricultural live streaming became lively, with multiple actors from different social positions such as farmers, officials, internet celebrities, and MCN institutions competing to enter, bringing social resources while putting the sustainable development of agricultural live streaming to the test. East Buy's live streaming room has become a new actor in the field of agricultural live streaming with its unique "knowledge-based delivery". Taking East Buy's live streaming room as an example, this study explores the cutting-edge dynamics and research paradigms of agricultural live streaming research by exploring the mechanism of "social capital" in the field of agricultural live streaming.

2. Literature Review: Studies on the Agricultural Products Live Commerce

2.1. The Dilemma and Countermeasures of Agricultural Live Streaming

Due to the fact that agricultural live streaming is a highly practical and applied field, current research on agricultural live streaming focuses more on the existing problems and solutions in various modes. The essence of the primary mode of agricultural live streaming is that the government, internet celebrities, farmers, live streaming platforms and other actors transform network traffic into online transactions of agricultural products, promote agricultural product sales, and achieve good economic benefits. This mode is precisely the main problem.

Firstly, vulnerable farmers are unable to resist the dual oppression of big capital--live streaming platform and small capital--MCN. The cost of platform subsidies often shifts to

farmers, squeezing the profit space of agricultural products and failing to truly alleviate poverty and assist farmers[1]. Secondly, the existing effective agricultural live streaming programs rely too heavily on one-time high-traffic events such as internet celebrity anchors and government staff bringing goods. They exchange sales volume by playing emotional cards, policy cards, subsidy cards, and low-priced cards. A large number of homogeneous live streaming content and interactive forms for agricultural assistance lack innovation, which can easily cause consumers' aesthetic fatigue [2]. Then, the low level of quality standardization also restricts the development of the entire agricultural live streaming mode. Due to the special nature of agricultural products, quality and taste are important indicators of consumer satisfaction. Lack of meticulous quality control can lead to differences between the products in the live streaming room and the ones actually received, which will cause consumers to lose trust in agricultural products and no longer engage in live online purchasing of agricultural products [3].

The problems with these agricultural live streaming programs ultimately stem from the the unsustainable existing modes. In response to these existing problems, most research has focused on platform governance, content innovation, farmer e-commerce talent cultivation, building agricultural product brands, and improving supply chain and logistics transportation capabilities. Some scholars believe that in order to promote the sustainable development of rural live streaming mode, more abundant and diversified social capital support is needed to build a more stable social network of “consumers rural and farmers”, so as to continuously produce and reproduce social capital [4]. The research of these scholars provides some reference for the theoretical perspective of this article.

2.2. New Actors in the Agricultural Live Streaming Field

After experiencing the transformation from the “double reduction” policy, agricultural high-tech company, New Oriental has launched a live streaming e-commerce business mainly focused on agricultural products--East Buy Live Room. Unlike other low-priced or exaggerated agricultural live streaming rooms that attract attention, East Buy adopts a “knowledge-based live streaming” type, which stands out among many live streaming rooms with goods. Unlike other agricultural live streaming behaviors, East Buy has several characteristics that are different from any agricultural live streaming actors: 1) Highly branding: East Buy focuses on cultivating agricultural product brands and releases several new self operated products every month. 2) Multi platform operation: East Buy avoids relying on a single live streaming platform, actively layouts a multi platform account matrix, and establishes its own APP. 3) New Oriental teachers have transformed into sales anchors, interweaving old and new habitus to form a new way of sales. 4) Unlike live streaming rooms that heavily rely on platform traffic, East Buy insists on “no traffic”, which has also led to poor data performance in the early stage of live streaming. 5) Cooperate with famous express to actively layout their own warehousing and logistics channels.

These characteristics reveal that the agricultural assistance live streaming selected by East Buy is different from the previous agricultural assistance live streaming mode and has become a new actor in the agricultural product live streaming field. Its dissemination mechanism and internal operational logic have high research value.

Previous studies have mostly explored agricultural live streaming from the perspectives of rural governance, media empowerment, and digital labor, but few studies have placed different subjects within the field of agricultural live streaming, analyzing their positions and the capital game and negotiation of various forces. The root causes of a series of problems in agricultural product live streaming can be explored not only through studying a single actor, but also through observing and exploring the positional relationships of multiple actors from a field perspective, as well as the operational mechanisms of social capital owned by all parties in the process of transforming into economic capital.

2.3. Research on “Field” and “Social Capital” Theory

“Fields” is an important sociological concept proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. From an analytical perspective, a field can be defined as a network or configuration of objective relationships that exist between various positions [5]. The large field of social life is composed of many different relatively small fields. In these different fields, the main driving force for interaction between people is social capital [6]. Bourdieu, Nan Lin, Coleman, Putnam, and others have all conducted research on “social capital”, forming a relatively profound and complex theoretical system. James S. Coleman believed that individuals are born with social capital and proposed the theory of social capital from the perspective of social structure. He believed that the forms of social capital include obligations and expectations, information networks, norms and effective punishments, authoritative relationships, multifunctional social organizations, and intentionally created organizations. On the basis of Coleman, Putnam elevated social capital to the collective level and proposed from a political perspective that social capital refers to the characteristics of social organizations, such as trust, norms, and networks, which can improve the effectiveness of society by promoting cooperative behavior. Nan Lin believes that social capital is a social resource mobilized from social networks, which exists within the social structure and can not only provide instrumental resources such as information, economy, and power, but also emotional resources such as trust, obligation, and favor [7].

If the initial interpretation of “social capital” was more focused on the resources that individuals could master and utilize, then based on Bourdieu's initial theory of “social capital”, subsequent research has expanded the scope of explanation of the theory of “social capital” from “focusing on the impact of social capital on individuals to the impact on organizations such as enterprises” [8]. In other words, “social capital” should not be limited to the individual level, but can be extended to the collective or organization. If different organizational structures are abstracted as individual “individuals”, how are the “social capital” of these organizational structures utilized and promoted for their own development? Based on the explanations of various specific types of social capital by the scholars mentioned above, taking East Buy live streaming as an example, this study aims to explore the mechanism and impact of social capital in the competition of agricultural live streaming fields by asking “How does East Buy live streaming use its own social capital to achieve economic capital transformation”.

3. New “habitus” of Broadcasters from the Perspective of Organizational Capital and the Construction of “Taste Class”

Bourdieu believes that “habitus” are a system of temperament tendencies, a system of production practices and appearances [9]. In his view, the in-depth analysis of words and deeds in daily life needs to explore what habitus are formed by actors in different positions and configurations in “fields” through their own capital. Due to different types of capital ownership, there are differences in the proportion of capital ownership structures, and the class habitus they possess are also quite different [10]. In specific fields, actors have subjective initiative, and it is necessary to deeply analyze the social structural characteristics reflected by their internal “habitus”. In the field of agricultural live streaming, the “habitus” of the audience or consumer group and the anchors are also colliding and confirming with each other.

The styles of different anchors are shaped by the influence of their own “habitus”. In front of the camera, this series of life experiences, social rules, and spiritual values deposited within an individual's body are externalized into specific ways of thinking and actions, and the enormous power generated by “habitus” is manifested. The ability of e-commerce live streaming and anchors is not only reflected in their ability to select products, but also in their personal eloquence, tone, and other obvious characteristics that are in front of the stage. Through long-term observation of online live streaming rooms, we have found that traditional agricultural

live streaming rooms often feature simple and dressed farmers themselves as the main body of the screen. The entire live streaming room is filled with slogans such as “hi guys, the products are already at the lowest price” and “buy eight packages and get one for free”. The majority of people who make purchases are accidental buyers, and only then do they engage in random purchasing behavior on the basis of actual needs and affordable prices.

The “debut” of East Buy began with Dong Yuhui's talk of “poetry and distance” and “bilingual teaching” when selling goods in the live streaming room. The behavior of delivering goods in the East Buy live streaming room is different from traditional agricultural product live streaming, and is referred to as a “knowledge oriented live commerce”. The anchors selected by East Buy were transformed from various subject teachers during the New Oriental era. The unique teaching language and intellectual mission of the education enable these special anchors to maintain their old professional “habitus” while serving as anchors.

The new habitus of East Buy anchors seeks consumer groups with well-educated. Habitus demonstrate social “distinctions” through “class taste”. Blumer once proposed the concept of “collective interest”, believing that those who live in common social interactions and have similar experiences will form a common interest [11]. “Dong Yuhui” conducted taste performances and gathered audiences with the same taste, and ultimately completed the construction of a common taste class, thereby delineating the exclusive “middle class elite” consumer group. However, the individuality and initiative of farmers' image are nowhere to be found in both the production and consumption ends. Obviously, this is a collective absence of farmers as the main body in the agricultural assistance carnival.

The significance of organization lies in strengthening the consistency of group behavior, thereby improving the efficiency of action. Intentionally created organizations can not only benefit creators, but also benefit others to a certain extent. Traditional agricultural live streaming can only maintain a portion of the consumer group by continuously increasing activity intensity and stimulating purchasing desire. The mutual benefit mode of the East Buy live streaming lies in the “knowledge premium” of the hosts, which attracts more cohesive and loyal organizational groups. The organizational capital constructed by celebrity anchors such as East Buy through their own charm and appeal has attracted numerous “middle class elites” and “intellectuals” who share the same “interest” to join their fan base.

4. Information Capital Expands Communication Channels and Replaces Social Circle

Information is an important capital of the entire socio-economic system. It is an important factor of social production and can create more value for society and promote economic development [12]. At present, we are in the ubiquitous network society, and the traditional concept of information network capital can no longer cover all people's social life and communication scope. Therefore, we need to rethink how information network capital operates and has an impact in the “cyber” world.

Leading short video platforms, such as TikTok and Kuaishou have brought huge traffic and become the best carrier for agricultural live streaming. However, monopoly phenomena in the Internet industry have hindered the normal information exchange of e-commerce users. The public domain traffic pool of the short video platform is difficult to further transform into private domain traffic, and various information resource portals are still controlled by platform giants. For anchors in the fields of agriculture, rural areas, and farmers, on the one hand, they need to rely on subsidies and preferences for platform traffic; On the other hand, the achievements under this “support” inevitably become “wedding clothes” made for others, while also subject to platform rules and commission limitations. In order to minimize such impacts as much as possible, East Buy has chosen to actively layout internal and external information

network channels, forming an information network capital structure that integrates four networks: “self owned account matrix network”, “fan information interaction network”, “media information resource network”, and “cross industry cooperation and win-win network”, achieving exchange of audience circles.

East Buy mainly broadcasts on the TikTok platform, and simultaneously builds the “self owned account matrix network”. The information network constructed by the account matrix can realize the interaction of different types of audiences, thus enhancing the information liquidity and expanding the scope of communication. According to the differences in product types and business development, East Buy has opened five official accounts on the TikTok platform. Through multiple audience groups with different categories such as agricultural products, books, cultural and tourism products, mutual drainage and anchor sharing are carried out among each other.

The more mature live streaming with goods will generally guarantee the sustainability of the mode by expanding the fan relationship group of the anchor with goods, and establish a direct information network with consumers to carry out the reproduction of social capital. The large number of fans owned by East Buy have exponentially expanded its market reputation through interpersonal and group communication effects. Dong Yuhui, YOYO, Dundun, and other leading anchors have opened personal accounts on multiple social media platforms. In addition to posting updates related to East Buy's live streaming activities, they also moved their private backstage personal lives to the front of social media platforms for performances. Through frequent communication and interaction with the “Fan club,” they created a realistic persona and unleashed the influence of the “fan economy”.

An important form of social capital is the information network that exists within social relationships, enabling access to information and facilitating action [13]. Unlike agricultural live commerce organized by individual farmer, East Buy has fully mobilized the “media resource network” and received high attention from Chinese mainstream media. It uses the enormous power of mass media to further expand its information resource network.

Social media platforms such as TikTok occupy the most attention of public in the digital era. For the audience, the personalized recommendation mechanism with the help of powerful algorithms intensifies the “information cocoon” effect, immersing in content with the same attributes; For content producers, the hierarchical relationships formed by clustering recommendations of algorithms can also easily form hierarchical propagation [14]. Over time, the growth rate of fans will eventually reach a critical value, making it difficult to maintain the previous growth rate. The traditional agricultural live streaming has shown a trend of homogenization in both content and form. At the same time, similar users has been divided among many live streams, and there is an urgent need to break through the inherent circle and expand the scope of information exchange networks. East Buy utilizes the feature of algorithm and achieves “breaking the circle” by inviting well-known movie stars in the promotion period to the live room. The huge network traffic of movie stars can attract more audiences from other circles to pay attention to East Buy live broadcast room, ultimately achieving circle replacement. When the platform algorithm captures this hot topic, it will also increase traffic investment again, and the three parties will work together to promote explosive marketing events, thereby exerting the powerful effect of the “cross industry cooperation information network”.

5. Establishing Emotional Connections for Brand Image under the Protection of Trust Capital

According to Coleman's social capital theory, actors in the field exchange resources, transfer control resources, and achieve their own interests, which can form sustained social relationships, including authority relationships, trust relationships and so on. When this kind

of social relationship is treated as a “resource”, it is manifested as “social capital” [15]. Nan Lin believes that trust is not only a prerequisite and manifestation of social capital, but also an important indicator to measure social capital. Trust is a core element of social capital which is the basis of reciprocity norms and citizen participation networks [16]. It can be seen that the existence of trust relationships is the foundation and prerequisite for the role of social capital. In the field of agricultural live streaming, the brand building of East Buy live streaming provides a form of trust. The trust capital accumulation of East Buy begin from New Oriental period that has 30 years history. The large scale of its enterprise organization and the achievements established in the fields of K12 education and overseas study training have established an authoritative image in the hearts of a generation of people. By strengthening its correlation with the New Oriental brand, the social capital between the two has been connected and transformed.

Secondly, with the East Buy live streaming room as the behavioral subject, the social network relationships within its field also provide trust resources for this behavioral subject. The entrepreneurial story of Yu Minhong, the founder of New Oriental, is widely known. As a member of the two sessions of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Yu Minhong participated in politics and created a diligent and positive personal image; New Oriental also pays attention to selecting and training teacher teams, including Luo Yonghao, Zhou Sicheng, and other internet “attention-grabber” who have previously worked at New Oriental. East Buy provides emotional connections and sources of trust for actors by creating a new live streaming style, thereby promoting consumption and strengthening its’ trust capital.

6. Implementing Universal Reciprocity Rules under the Promotion of Regulatory Capital

Putnam suggests that social capital refers to the social network of relationships and the norms of mutual benefit and trust that arise from it [17]. The norms of universal reciprocity can encourage social trust and cooperation [18], and enhance the productivity of social capital. In the field of agricultural live streaming, government norms, industry norms, and platform norms work together to form and stabilize mutually beneficial rules.

The government regulations provide policy guarantees for East Buy. The live streaming activity practice of East Buy is a response to the agricultural assistance policy of “No. 1 central document”. It has been invited by the Department of Business of Yunnan Province, Shandong Province, Hainan Province and other provinces to carry out the regional live streaming. In these special live events, government provide unified product selection and promotion guidance, and cooperate in the form of commission through a unified profit policy. Local cultural & tourism department and agricultural department work together to drive online sales through cultural tourism, achieving better promotional effectiveness while meeting the common interests of the actors.

Industry norms have broken through the constraints of the East Buy of live streaming field system. East Buy, along with other agricultural product live commerce, is in the “institutional field” of the agricultural product industry, accepting constraints and mobilization according to the instructions of social systems [19]. At present, East Buy has approximately 65 self operated products and has established a factory in Henan province, and created a sustainable business mode through self-built supply chains, which is conducive to extending the profit chain to the upstream, in line with the institutional laws of the agricultural product delivery industry.

The platform standardization has promoted the marketing ecology of east buy's live streaming field. East Buy is a high-quality e-commerce cooperator of TikTok's ecology. Compared with comprehensive shopping websites such as Taobao, TikTok's platform has the advantage of food category. In order to cultivate its own live broadcast brand, the TikTok platform injected strong

support for East Buy through traffic tilt. Under the platform's push streaming and self-owned content creation, East Buy has further built a perfect live streaming ecosystem.

7. Conclusion

After a frenzy in the capital market, the live streaming of agricultural products will eventually become standardized, refined, and differentiated. In addition to the basic guarantee of product and service quality, the content, format, and style of live streaming are also increasingly related to the sustainability of agricultural live streaming. East Buy stands out in the current agricultural live streaming competition with its social capital, which further confirms the important significance of identifying, utilizing, and transforming social capital for efficiency of live streaming.

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