

# Rural Short Videos' New Farmer Image Construction and Communication Strategy Presentation--the Example of "Winning the Heart"

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**Abstract:** *Based on the penetration and extensive use of media technology in rural areas in order to respond to the promotion and implementation of rural revitalization strategy, short video platforms have supported many video bloggers for three consecutive years especially through Douyin's "New Farmer Program", further speeding up the development of rural short videos, and the image presentation of New Farmers is worthy of attention. Rural short videos' content categories, communication strategies and monetization mechanics are different. By analyzing the image construction and communication strategies of New Farmers in rural storyline short video accounts, we find that with the participation of MCN agencies, short videos with a certain scale of fans have clear overall positioning and vertical classification, highlighting the linkage between personal identity and account matrix, life content taking into account conflict drama, and three-dimensional roles containing multiple symbols. Such rural short videos have positive value undertones and are rich in positive meaning.*

**Keywords:** *Rural short video; New Farmer image; Communication strategy*

## 1. Introduction

Media technology is shaping people's productive life and way of living, and short video development is in full swing, penetrating into various fields in all walks of life, especially boosting the economy of e-commerce and helping agriculture with live streaming, which brings brand new development opportunities. According to the 51st China Statistical Report on Internet Development published in March 2023 by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), as of December 2022, China's Internet penetration rate in rural areas was 61.9%, and the size of rural Internet users reached 308 million, accounting for 28.9% of the overall number of Internet users. To comprehensively promote rural revitalization, technology decentralization and platform tilt have brought more attention to the rural short video field. In 2018 Kuaishou intervened in the rural industry, and in the following year Douyin carried out a plan to support farmers. Relying on "short video +", short video platforms explore the power of helping poor farmers, launched "Happy Rural Leaders" "Farmer & Agriculture & Countryside Fast Growth Plan" "New Farmers Plan" and other rural content creation programs, effectively stimulating rural content creation, improving the quantity and quality of rural short videos. External promotion and internal support go hand in hand. Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed that the comprehensive promotion of rural revitalization plays a fundamental role in the modernization of China, and the New Farmers who seized the short video windfall not only generate income and increase revenue, but also spread the excellent traditional culture of rural areas and help build beautiful villages.

A huge number of rural short videos in the online short video market is characterized by fragmentation, rhythm, and nostalgia, while the unique cultural and economic values make them an important carrier for shaping the image of the countryside and presenting the culture of the countryside. Rural short videos provide an interactive, first-person rural expression, and farmers actively present their self-image rather than being shaped by others, so the study of farmers' media image on the new media has high research value.

The New Farmer image unfolds with the scene and plots, with outstanding video content and communication features, as well as regular, scaled and systematic communication strategy, which means most of them have professional teams to assist the whole process work including planning, filming, editing and operating. Exploring the presentation and construction of rural short videos' New Farmer

image in order to figure out the application of communication strategy during the process of promoting New Farmers' steady development, not only has double significance in content and business, but also will bring more benefits in the national level of culture and society.

## 2. Research orientation and development significance of rural short videos

The term "rural short video" generally refers to short videos based on mobile short video platforms, showing agricultural production and rural customs in the social structure of the rural environment, and basically less than 10 minutes in length.

2018 has seen a great increase in rural short video research, mainly including in-depth reflection from the perspective of critical theory<sup>[1]</sup>, practice and communication from the perspective of new media application<sup>[2]</sup>, value analysis<sup>[3][4]</sup>, and countryside and farmer image construction research<sup>[5]</sup>. A review of the literature shows that rural culture, rural revitalization (farming support model, marketing strategy), value function (rural governance), rural landscape and spatial production have been studied a lot, while rural and "New Farmer" image construction, content production strategy, communication mechanism and effect research, and narrative symbol research are typical of rural short video research.

In terms of content, rural short videos can be divided into a few categories such as recording life, making food, showing labor, performing short dramas, and spreading culture<sup>[6]</sup>. In addition to special food, tourism resources, agricultural products to support rural economic development, the short video has also become a learning tool for New Farmers. More than 820,000 short videos shared technical points of pig farming, and fruit tree grafting-related short videos received more than 3 million likes on Douyin. Statistically 990 million people watched the "Countryside Master Class".

The problems of insufficient cultural depth, lack of works' high quality, and homogenization of works types in the development of rural short videos<sup>[7]</sup> cannot be ignored, but their creators, creative scenes, and creative contents are unique, showing rural scenes and life, spreading rural culture, and enabling monetization of network traffic and economic empowerment. The spread of short videos can help rural residents realize independent entrepreneurship, promote the renewal of rural industries, as well as assist the dissemination and development of rural culture, playing an important role in the process of digital technology helping rural revitalization<sup>[8]</sup>.

## 3. The New Farmer image assisted by short videos

Douyin has set the threshold for the "New Farmer Program" as "New Farmer users with more than 10,000 followers". National policies and the industry regulation have made some of the vulgar Internet celebrities gradually disappear from the public's view. In the meanwhile, the young and highly qualified "New Farmers" who use new media technology with self-media labels have established a new cultural consumption landscape in the short video field. They have been given the social expectation of "making the Chinese countryside more visible" and enhancing the "cultural confidence of Chinese farmers".

Douyin New Farmers feature the image of new rural women in terms of gender, interaction and enthusiasm in terms of sentiment, as well as technology and team behind videos in terms of content production<sup>[9]</sup>. In the eastern and southern regions of China, there are more "New Farmers". The ratio of men and women is generally balanced, while women are more willing to show themselves. New Farmers in their twenties account for a larger proportion, and they mostly use personal photos as their avatars<sup>[10]</sup>.

The academic community has not reached a clear definition of the New Farmer. Combined with past definitions, this study concludes that New Farmers either adopt new technologies to engage in agricultural production, or actively innovate and start businesses based on the rural environment, or share and spread rural life through the new media. Self-shaping rather than other-shaping is the key to image presentation, so New Farmers could firmly grasp the power of discourse to tell rural stories.

By sharing real rural life, the New Farmer bloggers have lightened the boundary between "the front stage" and "the back stage"<sup>[11]</sup>, while good at adopting various symbols including visual and auditory ones, tearing off the labels given by mainstream reports and other people's narratives, and bringing a new image of the new era and new media.

#### 4. "Winning the Heart" case study

##### 4.1. Communication content and image construction

The avatar of "Winning the Heart" is the real-life photo of Tang Bing, a 24-year-old retired New Farmer with 1.510 million followers. The account has marked the MCN. 147 videos have been released since the first video on March 17, 2022, up to July 10, 2023, with the hashtags #New Farmer Project 2023, #New Farmer Project 2022 and #Countryside Guardians.

Unlike "Yanzi from Tujia ethnic group" and "Ingenious Woman Jiumei (the ninth girl of the family)", which directly present the names of New Farmers, the name "Winning the Heart" is somewhat abstract and not that clear, but the profile of the account shows that he returned home in order to accompany and take care of his grandmother ("elderly mother-in-law" in Sichuan dialect). According to his early videos, "Fang Fang" is the name of Tang Bing's grandmother, who at first almost forgot Tang Bing (suspected of suffering from Alzheimer's disease), so he called her by her name "Fang Fang", and then regained familiarity with trust, changing the appellation to "Granny". Many video comments said, they didn't understand such background until watching a large amount of videos. Directly translated from the Chinese, "Winning the Heart" is actually winning Fang's heart or her heart. In Chinese culture, Fangfang or Xiaofang has become a pronoun of a woman. And surprisingly, "Winning the Heart" is like an *entendre*, because the most basic meaning is to recall the memory of the grandmother, care and accompany her.

The video cover of this account has been partitioned up and down since Nov. 11, 2022, with the picture of dishes showing on the bottom and the scenario including main characters from the current content on the top. Such design is more common in the New Farmers' short video accounts that focus on food making and life sharing, such as "Shicun Xiaoyue (Xiaoyue from Shi village)" with about ten million fans and "Yang Peipei" with nearly five million fans. The videos begin with simple statements expressing emotions and sublimating values, and the content starts from daily life, and then turns to cooking and eating, and the main character speaks long and earnestly on the point, with warm emotions. In terms of monetization of network traffic, the web window of the account on Douyin shows seven goodies, including two brands. The account does not yet have its own brand of agricultural products, and because of the identity of the main characters of the video (Tang Bing, Tang Bing's grandmother, Tang Bing's girlfriend He Yuqing), they receive advertising and promotion that can be integrated into real life and match the age group, such as skin care products and cosmetics for women, and shoes for the elderly, usually with links to products or coupon information on the top comment, and scenario-based integration and introduction in the video.

##### 4.2. Communication strategy and image presentation

###### 4.2.1. Account matrix, front stage show; special identity, add highlights

Through the hot search function and comment interactive contents that come with the Douyin platform, the associated accounts "He Yuqing" and "I am Tang Bing", which are the respective video accounts of the two young protagonists of "Winning the Heart" can be easily found. Unlike the scale, regularity, scenario, and third-person perspective of "Winning the Heart", the accounts of "He Yuqing" and "I am Tang Bing" are more lifelike and casual. For example, they use popular special filming effects or editing, tell stories about couples in the first person, and dance to music, which is very interesting.

In Goffman's Social Dramatic Theory, he divides performance into two parts: the front stage, which is the part of the stage that provides the audience with a specific scenario, and the back stage, which is the area where the performer is removed from the stage and the access is restricted to others<sup>[1]</sup>. Technological developments and changes in application habits have brought the back stage forward to the front more and more commonly, with performers grasping the degree of disclosure to better connect with the audience and to satisfy a certain voyeuristic desire. The boundaries between the front and back stage are blurred, and the back stage, which is supposed to be completely real, is transformed into the "middle zone" of Meyrowitz's medium theory, thus making the image of the performer more three-dimensional, diverse, and full of reality.

Thus, "He Yuqing", "I am Tang Bing" and "Winning the Heart" form a matrix of personal IP accounts, the latter being presented in the front stage, the former effectively compensating for the third-person perspective of the latter, making the distance disappear. And the former creates a back stage to show different styles of personal life, not only making the image of the two protagonists more three-dimensional, but also contributing to the high popularity through the interaction of comments among

these accounts, which serves the account of "Winning the Heart" to own a strong ability to realize monetization. The account matrix pulls the performance back stage to the front, extending and integrating each other, creating a "middle area", so whether to record life, how the boundary between the front and back stage is, how much privacy is revealed in the middle area, all depend on the major content creator.

At the same time, Tang Bing's identity as a veteran also brings a lot of positive energy, and he is a special example of New Farmers' image, rich in the unique value of rural short videos. "I am Tang Bing" released a video of him wearing military uniform and saluting to the morning sun with his girlfriend He Yuqing on the National Day, integrating the big love of guarding the country, to the homeland and the small love of protecting the family, to themselves.

#### **4.2.2. Content transformation, match with real life; conflict narrative, plot development**

The early videos of the account are presented only two people, Tang Bing and his grandmother. In line with the name of the account and the content of the profile, his grandmother is an indispensable character, and even the reason why he returned to his hometown and shot a video to share his life, recorded from the renovation of the small yard, developing with their own lives. Tang Bing's girlfriend He Yuqing appears from the 29th video. As a key role, she shows housekeeping wisdom, love and support. The content of the video changes with the real character relationships and emotional lines. The elderly grandmother can not always remember people and things clearly, so conflicts with young people sometimes happen. Then, Tang Bing's resolution is an underlying line of the story development. There is a message saying in the comment section: "Who is like me? I can't stop watching his videos, consistently several days, almost all of them, even waiting for the updates".

As the account develops, the characters in the video all began to wear small microphones. Dialogues and images that are captured in the fleeting nature of everyday life perfectly indicates the existence of a well-designed script. When presenting the conflict, some characters are negative, such as the woman who gossips about He Yuqing due to misunderstanding, the business object who does not pay back the money for a long time, the aunts who manage to take advantage of the free ride, and the classmate who suddenly invites to dinner without contact for years but actually to share the meal money. But no matter how the problem is solved, it eventually sets off the good quality of the New Farmers.

Personality affects the expression of words and the effect of video presentation, "Xiaoyue from Shi village" videos rarely show direct conflicts. Terrible and aggravating things like picking plums to deliver but can not contact the buyer, being discussed by the village people that the city-born girl can not do farm work occasionally happen, but all can be comforted by the male protagonist Ading. Such New Farmers' videos are the key to the real attraction of daily life, with fruitful produce in the fields and the main characters doing farm work, cooking and living, and dealing with big or small problems at home, which allows viewers to feel the original, unexperienced village life, or to relive the experience with nostalgia.

Art comes from reality and the conflict is inevitable, after which the drama is more colorful. The positive image of the New Farmers is highlighted more realistically under the background of others, so the appropriate conflict design and script presentation are reasonable, and that is the reason why the viewers have a general experience of "catching up with the drama".

#### **4.2.3. Fully fleshed-out image, three-dimensional communication; multiple symbols, landing on the value**

When "Winning the Heart" tells the story, it involves characters from life, such as the village matriarch, He Yuqing's best friend, Tang Bing's comrades, and the unexplained background is usually presented by the picture and dialogue indirectly, simplifying the processing of the video towards clear and concise. The audience can easily see what's going on and how it's going.

Sound symbols include dialect, background music, and specific language. The dialects of He Yuqing and his grandmother create a sense of closeness for local viewers and immersion for foreign viewers, and thus the dialects in short rural videos enhance the construction of certain roles' image. Warm songs such as Mao Buyi's "An Ordinary Day" and Yu Kewei's "Naohonghong (Clamor)" are often the soundtrack when picking fruits and in other immersion occasions, shaping a leisurely idyllic life scene, with a tight or slow plot, finally returning to the blandness of three meals a day after the conflict, a good life intention of the people to eat. These New Farmers' accounts are able to use background music to match the style of the video, no matter the quiet and soothing "Xiaoyue from the Shi Village" or the retro and playful "Yang Peipei".

At the same time, the unique call of "Yang Peipei" at the beginning of the "Yang Peipei" video becomes a specific symbol, allowing the audience to feel the dependence and love of Lao Yu and his

children on their mother, Yang Peipei, and the response of Yang Peipei together presenting the distinctive character of the protagonists. Similarly, the video of "Xiaoyue from Shi Village" begins with the iconic voice of Ading calling "Ren Xiaoyue" by name, with a slight change in mood depending on the scene, but with a fixed overall style.

The realistic characters are fully fleshed-out and three-dimensional. The expressions and behaviors in the video are all symbols of character construction, and the symbols of picture color and composition also assist in the presentation of character images.

The values are often distilled from small everyday things, either in the introduction text of each video or spoken by the grandmother, for example "Sometimes it's not the difficulty itself that holds us back, but the way we solve it. A different perspective will lead to a different result". As an elder, the grandmother is able to understand the truth of life and the world, so her role is reasonable. The main characters of "Yang Peipei" and "Shi Village Xiao Yue" are both married couples, who tell stories about their marriages, giving viewers mirror-like references or inspiration. The short videos of rural drama show the warmth as well as testify to the good moral character of the Chinese nation for thousands of years, and apparently the New Farmers are practicing good moral ethics.

## 5. Conclusions

With the assistance of the MCN agency, the videos of the "Winning the Heart" account are full of well scripted plots, appropriately choreographed conflicts, and highly three-dimensional character images, while the associated personal accounts "I am Tang Bing" and "He Yuqing" create the performance middle area through pushing the back stage to the front one, so the video matrix is reasonable, producing a 1+1>2 effect. Professional operation is also reflected in the production of delicate video covers, background music, lines and subtitles.

The vividness of the role image and the way the story is told are particularly important, and the true feelings are revealed in the "drama". The video material is based on the trivial things of life in the countryside, and the accumulation of Tang Bing's better life, such as the repair of the house, the purchase of a car, and the improvement of the vegetable business. The audience grows up together with main characters in video accounts, and gets a sense of reflection and relief like "me in the mirror". Deliberate "chicken soup" that deviates from the content of the video tends to revolt the audience, while proper sublimation can effectively lead the nice life style, good life attitude and noble life character of typical New Farmers.

Reasonable content design and content development originated from life are the key. Appropriate commercial operation and systematic intervention can help the formation of rural short video accounts and the construction of New Farmers' image, and then bring stickiness with fans via the vertical content. We should be wary of overly "industrialized" production of countryside sense, avoiding the overuse of conflict plots and uglification of others to highlight the protagonist, and at the same time, we need to adhere to the guidance of socialist core values, discover a variety of rural cultural issues, and strengthen the dissemination of virtuous spirit like diligence as the main focus, filial piety as the first priority, etc.<sup>[12]</sup>. This study only analyzes one main case of rural drama short videos, so we can expand the research methods and samples like combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to further explore rural short videos and the image of New Farmers in the future.

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