

## Small-town Youths Buck the Trend in New Media

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**Abstract.** With the success of Lu Xianren's catwalk at Paris Fashion week, the group of small-town youths he represents has gained national attention. The popularity of mobile phones and the internet has driven the development of new media platforms in the information age. Small-town youth established a series of entrepreneurial initiatives through live stream, pushing the economic development of local villages and towns, which was driven and supported by the Chinese government, its policies, and companies. The paper investigates how small-town youth converted their employment problem during the pandemic and accomplished a comeback in new media platforms by analyzing cases of successful entrepreneurship on social media platforms and analyzing a large number of literature. This paper may provide inspiration to youth groups that are unstable and bewildered because of the pandemic, giving them hope and motivation for the future. At the same time, it will ideally stimulate the economic growth of cities below the third tier for the community.

**Keywords:** Small-town youth; new media; social identity; video survival.

### 1. Introduction

A video of a Paris Fashion Week performance went viral a while back, not only because of the dynamic music and the rhythmic movements of the models but also because the young man standing in the C position was a small-town youth called "village supermodel" by Chinese Netizens – Lu Kaigang (Lu Xianren). Lu Xianren grew up with his grandparents in a remote mountain village in Guangxi. He dropped out of junior high school to work in industries and as a shop assistant. The monotony of life draped a black shadow over his life, but he never gave up his dream of becoming a supermodel, using his spare time to practice walking on stage and studying expressions and poses. With the rise of segmented social media platforms, Lu Xianren seized the opportunity to upload his videos online, hoping to be seen by more people. In 2019, the iconic video of Lu Xianren covered in a blanket and wandering in his own yard attracted a lot of attention from internet users and even a lot of appreciation from overseas netizens, which launched Lu Xianren's career. He has genuinely made his way from the countryside to Paris. Social media platforms and modernization benefit young people in small towns. The cultural and mobility characteristics of young people in small towns have drawn attention. Short videos on social media platforms have seen amazing progress due to small-town youth. Recently, there are many researchers looking at small-town youth through videos on new media platforms like Tiktok and Kuaishou [1]. According to the 49th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development, issued by the China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC), the proportion of Internet users aged from 20 to 39 was 37.2% [2]. And the latest data about Kuaishou indicates that the number of registered users has topped 700 million, with an average daily activity of 100 million people. The reality of small-town youth life is not as rich in spiritual and cultural experiences as their peers in first- and second-tier cities, and the poverty of offline life and the colorfulness of online life has produced a huge gap [3]. New media, as represented by live streaming and short videos, are the main platforms for small-town youth cultural consumption and production, providing them with a space for self-expression. However, the digital divide is widening behind the growth in short-form grassroots culture. The world has changed dramatically as a result of the advancement of internet technology. Small-town culture has developed and acquired more prominence as media technology has advanced, but this culture, which has emerged from folklore without the direction and regulation of mainstream awareness, is still not flawless. Some of the short

videos are about “teenage mothers”, “14 years old having a son in early love”, and “the youngest mother of two on the internet” [4]. The desire for clicks, combined with a complete disdain for social responsibility, can amplify the negative impact on young people. The purpose of this paper is to identify and compensate for a lack of research on small-town groups by categorizing and analyzing previous studies. It could be critical to lead the group’s future growth in a positive direction.

## 2. Definition of “Small-town Youth”

The phrase “small-town youth” originally arose in cyberspace, which is not a scholarly notion or a specific group. The technical term “small-town youth” is a rapidly growing one that conveys significant discourses saturated with and strengthening imagination, nonetheless. The concept itself has proven difficult to describe [5]. Different researchers frequently create corresponding definitions based on their research goals and classify them based on regional norms. They are not stylish and lack personality; thus, they are frequently overlooked by the predominant media. They appear to reside on islands or in the mountains far from cities, and yet they combine to form a silent sea. They are the most ordinary among China’s youths [6]. Because of the pandemic, the employment situation for young people aged 20 to 35 is serious. ‘The collective worker-subject of the socialist past has been transformed into ‘the individualized worker within a highly volatile labor market’ [7]. With the fast growth of social media platforms such as Tiktok, Bilibili, and Pinduoduo, many young people from small towns below the third-tier cities are capitalizing on mobile and internet development and aggressively promoting themselves or seeking business prospects, and gradually emerging in specific fields such as short videos.

The image of small-town youth presented by live streaming and short video platforms is not ironclad, but rather reflects a variety of types and features. The majority of small-town youth portray themselves as leisurely people who enjoy life and are content with their status. The short videos and live broadcasts capture much of their daily leisure life, including selfies, beauty, children, and pets that showcase their lives, as well as street performances, square dances, and walking pairs outdoors, and scenes of leisure time, such as weekends when they go on picnics around the area, self-drive trips, gatherings with friends, participate in group sports, watch movies, sing, and go out on trips. Although these users are numerous, the number of followers is quite small. In contrast, there is a tiny group of users who are more representative of the small-town youth, with a relatively low level of education and working in more manual jobs. The majority of these young people have a positive mental attitude and give an image of hardworking, idealistic employees, and are thus admired by the same youthful fan base.

## 3. Small-town Youth in the Short Video

### 3.1 “Dianxi Xiaoge” in Western Yunnan

Yunnan is a tropical province rich in resources and with various ethnic minorities residing in the region, and the local food structure is diverse and unique. In a small town, Dianxi Xiaoge utilizes the short video content operation strategy, using a unique style to expose cooking methods and recipes of ethnic minority food that are not commonly seen in daily life, as well as to highlight rare tropical ingredients. He focuses on local cuisine culture and promotes the style of ethnic minorities.

The short video of Dianxi Xiaoge frequently includes relatives such as grandparents, mother and father, uncles and nephews, and so on, particularly at the end of the video when the family sits down to dine together, which emphasizes the warmth of the family’s happiness and the strong family unity. The family environment corresponds to the Chinese audience’s family-oriented ideals.

The sea of roses in Yunnan has become a famous tourist attraction in the summer, and Dianxi Xiaoge has capitalized on this by creating a rose cake with rose petals as the pilling. In the run-up to Mid-Autumn, the company has launched the Cloud Leg Mooncake, a savory mooncake rather than a

sweet mooncake. The dishes are seasonal and fashionable, lending a new and stylish flavor to the video material.

This sort of food blogger captures food via important events in their life or daily observations that they find intriguing. They feel that making and sharing these films enhances their life by adding interest and presence. According to the content analysis of these sorts of short videos and interviews with the posters, these small-town youths live a more realistic and pleasant existence. Some of them have good family backgrounds, and their parents are able to contribute to their start-ups on new media platforms; some are civil servants in small cities with their own education, and the government provides them with a platform to make their mark in new media platforms; some have a skill or a small business that they promote through the new media platform. The documentary television program News Probe was on, featuring two young people who, as reported, “chose the unusual path” to make their living in their hometowns instead of going out [to the larger urban centers] to work, as most of their peers were doing. By sharing their everyday lives in their hometowns on online platforms, they both become online celebrities with large numbers of followers. Yukang Shang was one of the “stay-behind youth” who, according to this report, had “escaped from the big city to hometown”. This featured a young man, self-taught online and supported by the local government, who became a promising poultry entrepreneur [8].

As there are relatively few offline cultural and entertainment facilities in small cities, the circle and radius of life are relatively small, and life itself is relatively dull. They are more active in recording and displaying the clips they find meaning through live streaming and short videos.

Food self-publishing is essentially a tutorial for cooking education and manufacturing, employing three to five minutes of video performance to export the spiritual culture: a happy attitude toward life and a calm lifestyle. Thus, content sublimation is realized, as is the production of products, content, spirit, fans, and other consumer demands for network users.

### 3.2 Ding Zhen

When the short video titled “Ding Zhen’s World” by ShakeYin’s “Smiling Collector-Bo” was posted at the end of 2020, it attracted widespread interest on the internet, and a Tibetan small-town youngster named Ding Zhen blasted into the scene. Ding Zhen’s popularity converted traffic from the short video into visitors in his hometown of Litang, creating an opportunity of developing tourism alongside the net popularity economy.

Ding Zhen is shown as a Litang IP online, invoking the resonance of situations from internet users’ life. Ding Zhen’s little museum, Tsangyang Gyatso, infects readers with a romanticized scenario that allows visitors to spread this wonderful love to Litang through poetry and storytelling.

With the first video, Ding Zhen and his pony gained popularity, promoting the local community to use familiar symbols such as “horses” and “love” to bring them closer to the public while secretly injecting fresh symbolic meaning. The “horse” represents the transportation and migration culture of the Tibetan Plateau ecology. The history of horse racing in Litang dates back over a century, implying that the historical thickness of the cultural connection broadens the symbolic meaning and derives the wild beauty of natural resistance and coexistence. Tsangyang Gyatso, the symbol of “love”, underlines the simplicity and high concentration of love in Litang, and the section of National Highway 318 heading to Lhasa, Litang, was named the Avenue of the Immortal Crane after Tsangyang Gyatso.

The “Litang Dingzhen” IP obtains participatory expression and emotional recognition of consumers through short videos, which is essentially a social relationship, i.e. relationship of attention, consumption, and appreciation established between individuals [9]. Just as short video comments can empower social connections and social relationship resources in the countryside, which embeds resources into relationships. When and only when the value of content production is enabled by these “relationships”, the value of content may be raised through media empowerment.

The phenomenon of “Ding Zhen” is a classic example of short video IP in the age of self-media, which profoundly reflects the media’s relationship between the countryside and youth. It is an IP

symbol produced via the integration of local daily life experiences and based on local everyday living activities. This sign has increasingly become a consumption symbol for local products under the control of foreign regional imagination, local cultural capital involvement, and market consumption, realizing the process of marketization for online IP generation to offline traffic realization.

### 3.3 Jiaolong He

In April 2021, Jiaolong He was elevated from deputy county head of Zhaosu County in Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture to deputy director of the Prefecture's Bureau of Culture and Tourism after her short video of horse riding in the snow became accidentally popular. Her e-commerce team has expanded from a three-person to over 20 employees, most of whom are small-town youth. While the live-streaming results continue to rise, the e-commerce matrix behind her is gradually taking shape. In a way, her team has become a growth point for Ili's industrial economy, and officials have a longer-term plan and layout in mind. Her account on new media platforms was formally incorporated into the state-owned Ili Tourism Development and Investment Company Limited, with the team building and operation handed over to the company.

The Covid-19 epidemic has had a significant impact on the tourism business in Ili Prefecture, and many agricultural goods are no longer being marketed. Jiaolong He, the deputy mayor of Zhaosu County, was handed this "totally unknown responsibility" when the Ili Prefecture Party Committee administration advocated the "county leader + head live streaming + agricultural products model" to carry out e-commerce marketing operations.

Jiaolong He remains on the front lines, creating movies and giving live broadcasts. Her team used to perform four or five live broadcasts every month, but she started doing at least 12 every month last year. Her team first highlighted Yili's specialties. But by last year's "Double Eleven," the items had extended to include all of Xinjiang's specialties, including sultanas, grey dates, sea buckthorn, milk, naan, camel milk powder, and lavender products. Many companies outside of Yili also approached Jiaolong He's team, which also needs to bring goods and needs exposure.

The revitalization of rural areas and the fight against poverty are critical challenges in today's development. To strengthen the combination of the digital economy and rural poverty alleviation, the "governor + influencer" method of bringing commodities to market, which is conducive to enhancing the visibility of high-quality agricultural products, would create a new mode of live e-commerce to aid in poverty alleviation. As a result, a huge number of county governors joined the ranks of local agricultural products with goods, becoming one of the key forces in assisting with the circulation of quality agricultural products.

The most essential reason for the live broadcast to boost consumer consumption of agricultural products is the government's high legitimacy and customers' faith in weblebrities to deliver their products. This has resulted in massive and episodic consumer expenditure on the governor's and weblebrity's support, owing primarily to the celebrity effect of the governor and weblebrity. The pandemic has fueled a desire for "governor live," with more than 100 governors from throughout the country taking to platforms like Kuaishou, Taobao, and Pinduoduo to support and promote local quality agricultural goods.

## 4. Discussion

The development of short videos generates traffic, and the popularity of short videos generates commercial wealth. Streaming has progressively become a "profession," spawning a slew of negative side effects. Small-town youth is gradually like "metropolis people" [10]. Out of a desire for riches and fame, young people in small towns have been interested in the practice of becoming internet superstars. On social media, a scene was filmed of a group of people piling up to broadcast live on the main street in a city. The video depicts many sorts of anchors using camera equipment while performing on the street, including some harsh activities. This unique landscape is a result of the short-video explosion. Short videos have provided a platform for small-town youths to perform and

career opportunities to become vegetarian celebrities, and hot traffic has transformed into affluent income. Small-town youths employ numerous methods to generate material on the site, and some even give up their academics in the hopes of becoming online stars. However, there are numerous aspects that contribute to the success of short videos, such as the capacity to develop content, financial support, chance considerations, and so on. With exposure largely belonging to head creators and platform algorithm pushing making it easier for survivor variations to be exposed to young, it is actually challenging to grab more people's attention and uncover their own abilities in an era when everyone can produce videos. In this context, the expectations of small-town youth for short videos should be linked with their actual placement and discover the qualities of excellent works, so that they can discover additional options while increasing their self-worth. There is nothing wrong with youth expressing themselves, but when it comes to whether they have the ability to keep going or not, they need to concentrate on improving themselves outside of creativity. To prevent the further widening of the digital divide, resulting in a widening gap between small-town youth and mainstream consciousness, leading to serious social problems such as the growing digital divide, to fully satisfy the spiritual and cultural aspirations of small-town youth. To actively guide the expression of small-town youth's spiritual aspiration so that they conform to the direction of mainstream culture, and to promote the benign development of small-town youth.

## 5. Conclusion

The government, institutions, and small-town youth must work together to create an equal and interactive discourse space in which multiple subjects can participate. When social hotspots occur, all subjects participate in promoting hotspots, extending and building topics around core issues, developing a co-creative and shared dialogue and collaborative communication strategy, providing a standardized platform for small-town youth in the absence of resources in small-town, and allowing more small-town youth to realize their value in new media.

For starters, the scenario encourages small-town youth organizing and mobilization in small communities. Young people in small towns are always on the move; their movements are difficult to comprehend, and their demands are difficult to hear. The huge rise in the number of small-town kids returning home for work and entrepreneurship following the pandemic represents an important opportunity to offer them leadership and assistance.

Second, additional learning platforms for young people in small communities are being developed. Students at vocational schools are characteristic of small-town youth. They have undergone vocational education and frequently have skills on their hands, and those who have been taught via vocational education excel in hands-on skills. Vocational education might enable young people who have returned to their hometowns following the pandemic "re-invent and enhance" their life aspirations.

Third, the government increase policy and financial support to small towns in order to improve the environment for youth entrepreneurship and employment. The young people of small towns are the driving factor behind rural revitalization. According to the director of Bilibili's Public Policy Research Institute, Gu suggests that policies for regional development should be continuously increased, local conditions should be adapted to introduce or set up large-scale enterprises, and the tertiary industry should be vigorously developed among other things to continue to broaden employment channels and provide more employment opportunities for small-town youths. The government should also continue to increase career options and working conditions for young people in rural communities.

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