

Rural Digital Governance from the Perspective of Social Capital: Logical Deduction and Practical Value

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Abstract: This study reviews the current research status of social capital and rural digital governance in the academic community, sorts out the historical context of social capital in rural governance, and analyzes its characteristics and political significance in different historical stages. Based on scholars' different definitions of social capital, this article explores the theoretical, practical, and practical logic of social capital's participation in rural governance from three dimensions: trust, network, and norms. Through literature review and theoretical analysis, this article summarizes the key factors and pathways of social capital in rural governance, providing theoretical support for deepening the strategy of rural revitalization. Research has pointed out that social capital is of great significance in promoting the modernization of rural governance systems and governance capabilities, and provides valuable reference and practical basis for achieving the goal of rural revitalization.

Keywords: Social Capital; Rural Governance; Digital Countryside; Trust; Network; Standard.

1. Introduction

With the rapid evolution of information technology, digital governance has gradually become a key way to enhance government governance efficiency and improve the quality of public services. On a global scale, digital governance is reshaping the way society operates and public management at an unprecedented pace. As the world's second-largest economy, China is actively promoting digital transformation, especially in the field of rural governance, where the application of digital governance is becoming increasingly widespread and achieving significant results. In recent years, the central government has successively issued a series of policy documents emphasizing the key role of digital technology in promoting rural revitalization and modern governance. For example, the "14th Five Year Plan for National Informatization" released in 2021 clearly proposes to strengthen the construction of rural informatization infrastructure, promote the application of digital technology in agriculture, rural areas, and farmers, and assist in the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy. In 2022, the "Overall Layout Plan for the Construction of Digital China" further emphasizes the importance of digital governance in improving government efficiency and enhancing social governance capabilities. It proposes to accelerate the construction of "smart villages" and improve the informationization level and public service capacity of rural areas. [1]

Rural areas, as an important component of China's social economy, have long faced problems such as lagging economic development, insufficient public services, and weak social capital. The promotion of digital governance provides new paths and means to solve these problems. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the central and local governments have encouraged social capital to participate in rural revitalization, and social capital going to the countryside has become a new trend. In order to expand effective investment in agriculture and rural areas, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs has issued the "Guidelines for Social Capital Investment in Agriculture and

Rural Areas" for three consecutive years since 2020. At the same time, government departments strongly support the entry of social capital into agriculture and rural areas. For example, in April 2022, the General Office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the Comprehensive Department of the National Rural Revitalization Bureau jointly issued the "Guidelines for Social Capital Investment in Agriculture and Rural Areas (2022)", requiring encouragement of social capital investment in digital rural areas and smart agriculture.[3]

The rural revitalization strategy has put forward a new goal of modernizing the rural governance system and governance capacity. While digital empowerment of rural construction, the urban-rural digital divide is an important challenge facing China's digital rural construction. Social capital, as an important element of empowering digital rural construction, has significant theoretical and practical significance. This article aims to review the current status of research on social capital and rural digital governance in the academic community, and based on the concept of social capital, clarify the theoretical logic, practical logic, and practical logic of social capital's participation in rural digital governance from three dimensions: trust, network, and norms. Through in-depth analysis of the relationship between social capital and rural digital governance, this study aims to provide useful references for promoting the modernization of rural governance system and governance capacity, and ultimately achieving rural revitalization.

2. Theoretical Basis and Ideas

The concept of social capital was first formally proposed by Pierre Bourdieu and developed into an important concept in social sciences by James Coleman. Although there is still no final unified definition of social capital, most scholars generally agree with Robert Pateman's definition. Pateman believes that social capital refers to the characteristics of social organizations, such as trust, consensus, and social networks, which can promote social coordination and cooperation, thereby improving social efficiency.

The following is a research framework for the internal logic of digital rural governance based on social capital theory: Based on the social capital theory as the core framework, this paper takes the trust, network and regulation of social capital as the analytical framework, and reveals the interactive mechanism between "technology empowerment" and "social foundation" in the digital transformation of rural governance.[4]

3. Literature Review

The participation of social capital in the construction of digital rural areas has become a hot topic in the academic community. Researchers have conducted extensive discussions from different fields, perspectives, and levels, and have achieved many results. However, there are still some aspects of current research that require further in-depth exploration. Firstly, although many studies have analyzed the value and potential of social capital in the construction of digital rural areas from a theoretical perspective, there is still insufficient exploration of its logic and development trends in specific practice. Secondly, with the deepening of digital construction, although previous studies have emphasized the importance of social capital in improving agricultural production efficiency and increasing farmers' income, further analysis of its underlying mechanisms is still needed. At present, research mostly focuses on a single sociological or economic perspective of social capital, leading to a certain degree of one sidedness in the results. Therefore, this article attempts to explore the internal mechanism of social capital participation in digital rural construction from the perspectives of trust, network, and norms in social capital theory, in order to better understand the role and effectiveness of social capital in digital rural construction and provide some references for the practice of digital rural construction.[5][6]

4. Theoretical Logic of Social Capital's Participation in Digital Rural Construction

4.1. Trust Dimension

The first important dimension for social capital to participate in digital rural construction is trust. Trust is an important component of social capital, which involves cooperation and interaction between individuals and organizations. Digital governance fully utilizes modern information technology, changes traditional communication methods, and greatly shortens people's communication distance. However, the rapid development of informatization and the relatively closed communication in rural areas have hindered digital governance in rural areas. In the construction of digital rural areas, the trust relationship between different diverse entities is crucial for effective collaborative construction. When mutual trust is established between various parties, they are more willing to cooperate with each other, share resources and knowledge, and make efforts to achieve common goals. Digital platforms and tools can provide mechanisms for information transparency and fair participation, thereby strengthening trust relationships between entities and promoting collaborative construction of digital rural areas. Firstly, trust can promote villagers' participation in rural governance. Trust can narrow the distance between the government and residents. When villagers' trust in the government and other village members

increases, they are more willing to participate and support digital governance activities, such as online voting and participation in online community platforms. Trust helps to improve the compliance of rural villagers with digital governance rules and policies. Secondly, when villagers have a sense of trust in the integrity and fairness of the government, they are more inclined to comply with relevant rules and policies. This can enhance the compliance of digital governance and reduce the occurrence of illegal and inappropriate behavior. In addition, as a new type of governance model, digital governance breaks the traditional governance model, and villagers inevitably have doubts about digital governance. When villagers have a sense of trust in the fairness and transparency of the governance process, they are more likely to accept and recognize the results of governance. This helps to enhance governance effectiveness and reduce the occurrence of resistance and opposition.[7][8]

4.2. Network Dimension

The network dimension refers to the social and information networks between different diverse entities. The social network in rural areas is usually based on family, clan, and neighborhood relationships, with close interpersonal connections and strong collectivist characteristics. The new cyberspace brought about by the development of science and technology such as the Internet and mobile communication networks has added new dimensions to the traditional social network. Social networks are an effective means of information dissemination, helping rural residents acquire digital related knowledge and skills, and understand the benefits of digitalization for the modernization of rural development. The widespread coverage and highly interconnected nature of social networks promote the establishment of stable and lasting social relationships among members. In the construction of digital rural areas, the establishment and development of social networks among various entities can promote resource sharing and information exchange. This type of social network can be a connection between residents, as well as between the government and residents, and between businesses and residents. Through social networks, various entities can more effectively share experiences, acquire knowledge and technology, learn from each other, and support each other.

4.3. Normative Dimension

The norms in social capital include formal norms and informal norms. The most prominent feature of standardization is its restrictive nature. Formal norms mainly refer to a series of norms and guidelines that social capital participation in digital rural construction needs to follow. Formal norms mainly refer to laws and regulations, which have legal binding force. For example, norms such as the system of village autonomy and laws and regulations can guide the implementation of digital governance, clarify the allocation of rights and responsibilities, procedural requirements, and decision-making mechanisms, and improve the efficiency and fairness of governance. In addition, formal regulations play an important role in information disclosure and government responsibility disclosure in rural digital governance. Formal regulations require information disclosure and transparency, and villagers can obtain information legally and reasonably through formal regulations, which can better participate in and supervise digital governance and enhance the transparency and

credibility of governance.

Informal norms affect the willingness of community residents to participate: Informal norms such as moral codes, religious beliefs, village rules and regulations can have an impact on villagers' willingness to participate in rural digital governance. If community residents generally uphold the values of high morality and mutual assistance and cooperation, they are more likely to actively participate in digital governance and provide social support. Shaping social relationships and trust: Informal norms play an important role in shaping social relationships and trust among community residents. The shared moral standards and religious beliefs can increase mutual trust and cooperation among community residents, providing a social capital foundation for the smooth implementation of digital governance.[9]

5. The Realistic Logic of Social Capital Participating in Digital Rural Construction

5.1. Lack of Social Trust

External factors mainly manifest as: the social environment on which the construction of digital rural areas relies is not yet perfect, and there is a significant urban-rural development gap, forming a clear urban-rural data divide. In relatively closed rural areas, villagers lack awareness of digital technology and information networks, leading to challenges in the implementation of digital rural construction. This lack of awareness may trigger resistance among villagers. In this process, the acquisition and transmission of information are mainly in the hands of the government, enterprises, and professional technical personnel. Ordinary villagers have insufficient understanding of relevant information and technology, resulting in information asymmetry, doubts, and distrust, which limits the participation of social capital. The problem of information leakage and abuse has also exacerbated the trust crisis among villagers. In the information age, personal privacy and data security are threatened, and villagers' trust in digital governance is declining. The lack of effective supervision mechanisms and feedback channels can also raise questions about the legitimacy and fairness of digital governance in village names, and reduce the enthusiasm of villagers to participate.[10][11]

Internal reasons: Traditional natural villages frequently interact with each other in common social life, and villagers rely on reciprocity and personal relationships to establish connections. Villagers from different villages have a deep understanding and close ties. However, villagers have a weak sense of public responsibility, and in the process of building digital villages, they often adopt an attitude of neglect and lack of cooperation, which is not conducive to the participation of social capital in the construction of digital villages.

5.2. The Network Connection is not Tight

From the perspective of the internet, the governance structure of social capital participating in digital rural construction is unreasonable. The formal organizations in rural areas mainly refer to village committees and government departments at the township level, which can ensure that villagers participate in governance and express their opinions and demands in accordance with the law. But in rural areas, people tend to rely more on naturally formed social networks to express their desires and needs. The current rural digital

construction is facing problems of incomplete policies, interests, and management structures, which have affected the effective participation of social capital. In terms of policy structure, the top-level design of the government often lacks flexibility, leading to a "one size fits all" phenomenon and failing to fully consider the actual situation in rural areas. Local governments attach great importance to hardware facilities in the construction of digital rural areas, while neglecting the long-term mechanism of guiding social capital through institutions, resulting in insufficient willingness of social capital to participate. The imperfect interest structure makes the distribution of rights and cooperation mechanisms among various stakeholders unclear. In the early stages of digital rural construction, there was a lack of fair benefit distribution mechanisms, making it difficult for social capital to obtain reasonable returns and tending towards short-term behavior, which affected its enthusiasm for sustained investment. The decentralization of management structure and lack of collaboration have led to poor channels of cooperation between social capital and the government. The autonomy and organizational power of village level organizations are weak, and social capital is difficult to effectively integrate into the daily management of rural digital construction. There is a lack of necessary supervision and evaluation mechanisms, which ultimately affects the effectiveness of construction.

Informal social networks and structures refer to social networks and relationships formed based on factors such as social trust, family relationships, and shared experiences. Informal social networks and structures play an important role in the construction of digital rural areas, but there are currently multiple problems that hinder the effective participation of social capital. The phenomenon of disconnection between resident cadres and villagers is significant. Due to differences in ideology, language, and interest demands, resident cadres find it difficult to fully understand and respond to the needs of villagers, and villagers also find it difficult to trust the commitments of resident cadres. This lack of communication limits the potential of social capital in the construction of digital villages. The phenomenon of detachment between enterprise organizations and informal rural structures is equally prominent. Enterprises may face exclusion and distrust from informal rural structures in the construction of digital countryside, which makes it difficult for them to effectively integrate or obtain support, thereby reducing their enthusiasm and effectiveness in participation. The digital literacy and cultural level of villagers are generally not high, and their ability to learn and adapt to information technology is weak, making it difficult for them to keep up with the pace of digital development, which affects their active participation in the updating and transformation of rural governance models. [13-14]

5.3. Lack of Social Norms

At present, the participation of social capital in the construction of digital rural areas is still in the initial stage of development, and the relevant supporting laws and regulations are not yet sound. The informal norms in rural areas also originate from a scattered and disorderly state. The development of social capital in rural areas urgently needs a standardized institutional environment and a harmonious rural order. The lack of sound formal norms is mainly reflected in the absence of clear participation rules and division of responsibilities. In the construction of digital rural

areas, the participation of social capital often involves issues such as responsibility sharing and benefit sharing, but the lack of clear participation rules and division of rights and responsibilities makes it difficult for social capital to effectively participate in specific projects and activities. Lack of clear institutional arrangements may also lead to wastage of resources and low efficiency; Lack of support and incentive mechanisms. Social capital participation in digital rural construction requires corresponding support and incentives to ensure its active participation and sustainable development. However, in the current institutional environment, there is a lack of mechanisms to provide support and incentives, which leads to operational risks and uncertainty in the interests of social capital, affecting its enthusiasm for participation and investment level; The lack of regulatory and supervisory mechanisms is also a problem. The participation of social capital in the construction of digital rural areas requires corresponding supervision and oversight to ensure compliance with relevant regulations and norms, and to safeguard the legality and fairness of the project. However, the current regulatory and supervisory mechanisms are not perfect and cannot effectively supervise the participation of social capital, which can lead to irregular operations and non-standard behavior, affecting the stability and sustainable development of rural construction.

6. The Practical Logic of Social Capital Participating in Digital Rural Construction

The significance of social capital in rural digital governance indicates that high-quality digital rural governance cannot be achieved without the support of social capital. The more effective and balanced the role of rural social capital is, the stronger the sense of belonging and responsibility of villagers, and the higher their enthusiasm for participating in governance, thus continuously improving the effectiveness of rural digital governance. Therefore, social capital is an indispensable and important part of digital rural governance, and cultivating rural social capital can help improve the effectiveness of digital rural governance.

6.1. Establishing Social Trust as a Prerequisite

In digital rural governance, due to the phenomenon of information asymmetry among various entities, there is a lack of trust, and social trust plays a role in eliminating this phenomenon. By establishing an open and transparent information platform, providing accurate and reliable information, reducing information asymmetry, continuously strengthening information transparency and credibility, and thereby enhancing public trust in digital governance. Vigorously building and maintaining the social environment in rural areas, with social capital as an external intervention factor, another important manifestation of enhancing trust is actively promoting the participation and cooperation of community residents: by carrying out community activities and projects, increasing interaction and cooperation among community residents, gradually establishing trust relationships, and achieving the goal of encouraging community residents to participate in digital governance decision-making and implementation processes

6.2. Building a Strong Foundation for Social Networks

The transition of social capital from participation to integration into digital rural construction is both a process and a goal. We should fully leverage the role of social capital to ensure that its participation can produce positive and beneficial effects.

Strengthen cooperation and communication between resident cadres and villagers. Establish closer contact and communication channels, strengthen understanding and trust, and promote cooperation between both parties through holding symposiums, promoting transparent decision-making, and other means. Promote the connection and integration between rural informal structures and enterprise organizations. Actively provide support and guidance to enterprise organizations, encourage them to understand and comply with the informal structure of rural areas, and establish mutually beneficial and win-win cooperative relationships. In addition, government departments should also play a guiding and coordinating role, strengthen policy and regulatory support for social capital participation in digital rural construction, and provide strong guarantees for cooperation among various entities.

The integration and development of informal networks are also crucial in the process of social capital participating in the construction of digital rural areas. Informal networks can provide resources and support. In rural communities, interpersonal relationships between individuals are closely interconnected, and people can share experiences, resources, and information through informal networks. Social capital can obtain necessary elements such as land, capital, and technology through these informal networks, thereby fully participating in the construction of digital rural areas. The informal network in rural communities has formed a mechanism of "social surveillance", where individuals can supervise and constrain each other's behavior through social connections.

6.3. Improving Social Norms is Guaranteed

Firstly, relevant laws, regulations, and policy documents should be formulated to clarify the principles and norms of digital governance, providing legal protection for the participation of social capital. At the same time, establish a fair competition mechanism, standardize the capital access system, approval system, and supervision system, and actively guide and effectively constrain social capital. Secondly, strengthen the promotion and education of digital governance, and enhance the public's awareness and understanding of digital governance. Promote compliance and participation of social capital by publicizing and explaining the content and significance of regulations. Establish community participation mechanisms and platforms: Establish mechanisms and platforms for participating in digital governance, encourage villagers to actively participate in decision-making and implementation, provide channels for complaints and reports, and enhance villagers' awareness of norms and participation. In addition, informal norms such as rural customs, village rules and agreements, although not mandatory, have an endogenous constraining effect on rural villagers and are more like a rural consensus. In the construction of digital rural areas, the participation of social capital may face some obstacles and challenges, such as resistance to new technologies and concepts, and conservative

views in rural communities. By improving informal norms, we can guide and adjust against these obstacles, provide a more positive environment and atmosphere, and make it easier for social capital to play its role in digital rural construction.

7. Conclusion

The construction of digital rural areas is an important part of China's strategy to promote rural revitalization. In recent years, with the support and assistance of national policies, digital rural areas have made great progress. However, due to the urban-rural digital divide, incomplete infrastructure, relatively traditional ideas and culture in rural areas, and insufficient development momentum, the construction of digital rural areas still faces the reality of insufficient and unbalanced development. Therefore, from the perspective of social capital theory, this article combines the three dimensions of trust, network, and norms with the practical logic of social capital participation in digital rural construction, explores countermeasures to optimize rural digital governance, and provides effective reference for achieving rural governance.

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