

Social media in China's poverty alleviation (2015–2025): methods and limitations

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Abstract. This study looks into how much social media has helped with getting rid of poverty in China from 2015 to 2025, it checks both the ways it has an effect and the things that make it hard to use. The author bases this article on government statistics and references from cnki/google scholar/researchgate peer-review journals, and the policy effect studies also come from areas such as Xinjiang, Shaanxi, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, this paper uses a research method combining a mixed-methods analysis approach for income quantity and policy effects. The results show that the income of the participants on social media platforms has increased significantly, and the income of the craftsmen from the city of Guangzhou is 38% higher when they have high digital literacy, while the longitudinal research of Chengdu handicraft producers shows that only 55% still have income growth after 3 years. Digital Matthew Effect is identified by the study as a key mechanism in perpetuating inequality where participants who started out with better resources end up gaining more. Policy recommendations comprise of specific digital literacy training, enlarging digital infrastructure to narrow down the urban-rural divide, and forming lasting support systems past initial training. It is observed through the research that social media can be utilized to defeat poverty, but it is done only through a long-term effort of setting up an infrastructure, branding and support systems.

Keywords: social media, poverty alleviation, China, digital literacy, sustainability

1. Introduction

China's Poverty Alleviation Campaign from 2015 to 2025 is one of the most grand social development programs in the history of mankind. It is unparalleled in terms of scope, comprehensive planning and cross-sector cooperation. In this decade long push, the Chinese government used a large amount of resources such as money, policies, and people to help end extreme poverty. They wanted to get more than 100 million rural people out of being poor and fix why there is so much difference in how rich people are. During this nationwide effort, social media became a more important resource than it had been before; from a supplemental way of communication it evolved into a multi-purpose platform that connects marginalized groups to markets, information, and other support networks. Through this study, it can observe that to some extent, help is provided through social media, such as spreading information to make it convenient for commodity sales; And the researchers still can not find the reasons for the unsatisfactory results such as

surfing the Internet or using computers. People do not know whether the content on these platforms is true and accurate.

The research question that guides this study is how much did social media contribute to poverty alleviation in China between 2015 and 2025, and what was the method and limitation used in China's poverty alleviation through social media. This question is really, really important—if the author does not know this information, then it will not be able to learn from digital places that can help poor people become rich in life and also know the kind of things that will need to happen in the future. In the world, a lot of the people are trying to use the digital thing on the computer and other stuffs to make themselves better for their country—it is nice to find out how digital devices can help people have money or wealth for their life. Through the analysis of the impact of social media, this research hopes to identify models that can be replicated for using digital tools to empower the disadvantaged and vulnerable. It will also bring to light pitfalls that need to be addressed by policymakers and practitioners to prevent an inequitable outcome. In addition to that, as China moves from poverty alleviation to rural revitalization, this paper can get insights about the efficiency of social media so that resources can be optimized and the digital initiatives complement poverty reduction actions instead of creating new inequality.

This study will adopt a mixed method to conduct a comprehensive study on the role of social media in poverty alleviation. In terms of quantity, the income growth data of rural household in certain provinces will be analyzed quantitatively, the comparison will be made among areas that have a higher social media penetration rate and those with less access, in order to find out the correlation between the use of platforms and economic results. It involves looking into things like how much money families make at home, the number of people who have jobs, and how much money little shops earn in towns that are using social media to do fun things like showing off what they are selling or telling people about their farms. Qualitatively: This study will conduct in-depth case studies in different regions such as mountains in Yunnan, minorities in Guizhou, and remote villages in Gansu to understand excellent social media adoption experience situations. In these case studies it will see how local government and non-profit organizations and entrepreneurs use different social media platform like Douyin (Tiktok), WeChat and Kuaishou to do poverty alleviation project, and also some user face some challenge, for example their digital literacy is low or there is no good internet.

Data sources for the study are diverse and interdisciplinary to guarantee a solid empirical basis. Government statistical data, national bureau of statistic rural poverty monitoring report, provincial poverty alleviation bulletin will also provide the level data on poverty rate, income trend, infrastructure construction. Academic peer-reviewed literature from China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and Google Scholar can provide theoretical framework and comparative researches about digital poverty alleviation from other studies. Industry report from China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) will provide data about the internet penetration, social media use and the digital divide indicators. In addition to this, the case studies of region will consist of primary data which is gathered by conducting semi-structured interview of the local government officer, social media influencers taking a part in the alleviation programs and the rural person who have taken a part in the social media-based initiatives. To do this triangulation between numerical and qualitative data will help the research give a 360 view of the social media that takes people out of poverty in China, keeping both numbers and on the ground voices.

2. Literature review

The article is a review about how the social media helps with taking care of the poverty in China from 2015-2025, and it will be studied in the countryside area as well as the city. Synthesizing findings among the

different groups such as farmers, urban craftsmen, migrant workers, service workers, ethnic minority vendors and so on. Identifying both consensus findings and areas of scholarly debate.

2.1. How social media helps with poverty alleviation

2.1.1. Bridging information gaps

Social media platforms have transformed how information is spread and economic transactions occur, by forming direct, non-mediated pathways from makers to users, thus leaving out and making outdated lots of the old intermediaries that used to control getting to markets and moving around information. A lot of academic researchers have given us a strong reason to think that digital technology is a great way to improve social capital, which is a big idea about creating strong social networks, making people trust each other, and helping everyone take part in society. And this kind of technological empowerment of social capital exerts a big and good effect on poverty-relief work among many important things like raising the money at home, making it easier to get good schools and helping people in trouble be healthier [1]. A large scale, long-term survey study, which analyzed information gathered from a whopping 37,816 households scattered throughout 25 provinces in China from 2014 to 2018, came up with one especially telling result—among all the parts that make up social capital, it was social trust that had the most significant and noticeable effect on successfully lowering the number of poor people, more so than social network and social participation acting by themselves.

In the specific case of Guangzhou, a large city in Southern China, an interesting case of the economic impact of digital engagement is given by migrant craftsman. People who have a greater amount of digital literacy, which here includes skills like being good at editing videos to promote products and offering excellent online customer service to talk to people who might want to buy things, are able to use social media sites as very strong tools for selling. And as a result, these digitally skilled craftspeople earn an amazing 38% more than those less digitally literate and less likely to use these online channels to their full potential. Also, an analysis of the sales data shows that there is a distinct geographical aspect to their success; 62% of all the sales made by these migrant craftsmen through social media came from cross-provincial orders. This statistic indicates the social media can remove the ordinary bounds between geographic boundaries and also points out how social media allows craftsmen to have access to customers many times as many as are within a given local geographical limits of markets that might be present otherwise as is seen in the case of social media allowing craftsman reach many different customer bases [2]. But even so, there are significant obstacles that keep these useful digital habits from being adopted much more widely. A major issue that came up was that the migrant craftsmen were not very good at using computers and the internet. In particular, 45% of the people who were asked about it in the study said they could not do important things like making short videos that you edit—this is something you need to make fun videos about your crafts and sell them on websites where lots of people use computers to talk to each other, which stops them from being able to get money from these really helpful computer things.

Table 1. Income growth and digital skills effects in social media poverty alleviation

Region	Group	Key Finding	Sample Size	Source
Guangzhou	Migrant Craftsmen	38% higher income with digital literacy; 62% cross-provincial orders	320 craftsmen surveyed	[2]
Chengdu	Handicraft Makers	90% saw +60% income in Year 1; only 55% sustained by Year 3	80 makers (3-year study)	[3]

Table 1. Continued

Shanghai	Domestic Helpers	68% use social media to find clients; avoid 20-30% intermediary fees	220 helpers surveyed	[4]
Shanghai	Delivery Riders	25% increase in monthly orders; 18% reduction in idle time	230 riders surveyed	[4]
Urumqi	Uyghur Vendors	42% higher sales with bilingual content; income ¥3,500→¥6,800	300 vendors surveyed	[5]
Maigeti, Xinjiang	Farmers (Gov't videos)	60.2% videos on agriculture; 27.3% on cultural products	88 Douyin videos analyzed	[6]
Yanchang, Shaanxi	Apple Farmers	84% of main labor > 51 years old; low digital skills barrier	Policy report analysis	[7]

Note: Sources: Compiled from annotated bibliography references.

The empirical findings from various regions, including income growth and digital skill effects, are summarized in Table 1.

To sum up, bridging the information indeed provides the impoverished generations with a variety of accessible pathways for them in China mainland, which can be demonstrated through Social media made a significant but uneven contribution to poverty alleviation in China (2015–2025). At a macro level, it strengthened social capital, especially social trust, which had the strongest effect on reducing poverty [1]. At a micro level, migrant craftsmen in Guangzhou used social media to access wider markets, with 62% of sales cross-provincial and incomes rising by 38% [2]. This shows how social media reduced intermediaries and expanded economic opportunities. However, limitations remain: large-scale surveys may not prove causality, and 45% of craftsmen lack digital skills, restricting broader impact.

2.1.2. The role of digital finance and social capital

Digital financial inclusion is important to poverty alleviation. Over 11,000 rural households studied, digital finance cuts both absolute poverty (very little money) and relative poverty (much poorer than most). It makes it easier for people to borrow money, it provides information that is helpful, it helps people make more friends, and it encourages people to start their own small business. Interestingly enough, the elderly and people with low education have reaped the greatest benefits from digital finance to escape extreme poverty [8].

A comparative study between China and Kenya shows that social media-integrated mobile money in China is more equal in driving poverty reduction, lowering the urban poverty rate by 15%, and the rural poverty rate by 12%. Key Difference is in "social-commerce synergy". In China, this synergy combines social media functions with mobile payments to drastically cut transaction costs at 40% compared to isolated mobile money systems [9].

Social networks can reduce the relative poverty of a family by improving household income, standard of living, and social security. The analysis of 6,093 households shows that a 1% increase in social network strength is related to a 0.568% reduction in the probability of living in poverty. The effect is stronger for males and less educated household heads [10].

In a word, social media also contributed significantly to poverty alleviation in China (2015–2025), particularly through its integration with digital finance. Evidence shows digital financial inclusion reduced both absolute and relative poverty by improving access to credit, information, and entrepreneurship [8]. The "social-commerce synergy" in China—combining social media with mobile payments—lowered transaction

costs by 40% and reduced urban and rural poverty rates by 15% and 12% respectively [9]. Additionally, stronger social networks reduced poverty probability [10]. However, most findings rely on survey-based methods, limiting causal certainty, and impacts vary across demographic groups.

2.1.3. Reducing poverty alleviation costs

Social media greatly reduced the per-household cost of poverty alleviation outreach as compared to traditional methods. Analysis of 37,816 households in 25 provinces showed considerable cost savings. Cities are poorer than the countryside, as cities' people use more digital technology and have better social capital [1].

Table 2. Digital technology and social capital effects on poverty reduction

Study Focus	Key Finding	Sample/Data	Source
Digital Technology & Social Capital	Digital tech improves social networks, trust, participation → reduces poverty	37,816 families, 25 provinces (2014-2018)	[1]
Digital Finance	Reduces absolute & relative poverty via loans, info, social connections	11,000+ rural households (2017)	[8]
Social Networks & Entrepreneurship	1% ↑ social network = 0.568% ↓ poverty probability	6,093 households (2020)	[10]
Multidimensional Poverty	24.94% rural households in poverty; low education (42.06%), poor health (37.65%)	6,411 rural households (2018)	[11]
Mobile Money (China vs Kenya)	China: 15% ↓ urban, 12% ↓ rural poverty; 40% lower transaction costs	40,000 households China; 1,500 Kenya	[9]
Digital Financial Inclusion	35.63% farmers use digital finance; reduces vulnerability via risk management	1,900 rural households	[12]

Note: Sources: Compiled from annotated bibliography references.

As shown in Table 2, as a whole, social media made a significant and cost-efficient contribution to poverty alleviation in China (2015–2025), primarily by lowering outreach costs and enhancing digital finance and social capital mechanisms. Large-scale studies (e.g., 37,816 households across 25 provinces) show that digital technologies improved trust, networks, and participation, all linked to poverty reduction [1]. Integrated with digital finance, social media reduced poverty through credit access, entrepreneurship, and lower transaction costs (up to 40%), with measurable declines in urban and rural poverty [9]. However, the evidence relies heavily on survey data, limiting causal certainty, and disparities remain between digitally connected and less-connected populations.

2.2. Challenges and limitations

2.2.1. Low adoption among vulnerable groups

Adoption rates remain low for the elderly, those who are less educated, and people who have no prior experience using the internet. In Yanchang County, Shaanxi, 84% of the main agricultural labor force is over 51 years old and doesn't know how to use social media, thus unable to enjoy the benefits of digital poverty alleviation [7]. Similarly, the same challenges are faced by urban service workers, 72% of delivery riders work more than 12 hours a day which leaves little to no time to create content [4].

The evidence highlights a key limitation in assessing how much social media contributed to poverty alleviation in China (2015–2025). While digital platforms created new opportunities, their impact was uneven due to low adoption rates among vulnerable groups. In rural areas like Yanchang County, 84% of older agricultural workers lack digital skills, excluding them from benefits [7]. Similarly, urban delivery workers face time constraints, with 72% working over 12 hours daily, limiting participation [4]. These findings, largely based on case studies and surveys, suggest that despite measurable benefits, social media-driven poverty alleviation is constrained by structural barriers in access, skills, and time.

2.2.2. Content homogeneity and sustainability challenges

Social Media Poverty Alleviation is highly concentrated, both geographically and sectorally. This therefore poses questions regarding the sustainability of social media's role in poverty alleviation efforts. For instance, in a content analysis study which examined some 88 government-published Douyin videos in Maigeti County, it was found that the published content concentrated heavily upon industrial poverty alleviation (60.2% of videos), and cultural content (27.3% of videos), with little diversity [6].

Meanwhile, a key 80-year longitudinal study of Chengdu handicraft makers in 2020-2023 showed that 90% saw income growth (avg. +60%) through social media in year one, but only 55% did so by the third year, with 35% back at pre-social media income. Brand building: 40% of sustainable growers have their own brands, supply chain support. Makers who had post-training follow-up were 3 times more likely to maintain their growth than makers who only had a single training [3].

The findings suggest that while social media contributed significantly in the short term to poverty alleviation in China (2015–2025), its impact is uneven. Sustainability concerns have also been raised. The content analysis of government Douyin campaigns shows limited sectoral diversity, with over 60% focused on industrial promotion alone [6]. This indicates a narrow development model. Longitudinal evidence from Chengdu craftsmen shows strong initial income gains (+60%), but declining effects over time, with many reverting to pre-digital income levels [3]. These studies—based on content analysis and longitudinal tracking—highlight key limitations: lack of diversification, weak long-term support, and dependence on continuous training and branding capacity.

2.2.3. Paradoxes in social media communication

Indonesia came to light after research some very big contradictions involving social media in being used to help poorer people become less poor. Analysis of 196 posts inside a Facebook group that is run by the government and focuses on efforts related to poverty showed a very different kind of emphasis: only 30 percent of those posts talked directly about the big problems with money and jobs and social support that people have because they are poor, but 70 percent of them mostly talked about new things that are being built for the public or improved, like roads, buildings, and places where people can do activities. At the same time, 60 families were surveyed, and among those found to be living in poverty, it was discovered that 65 percent of them could access Facebook, which is indicative of a certain degree of digital accessibility. However, there is a significant gap with regard to knowledge and participation, because just 31 percent of this group stated that they were aware of the government's poverty alleviation Facebook group's existence.

Two main paradoxes were then formulated from this. The first thing would be the kind of "democratic elitist" paradox, where the democratic side of it is supposed to give people all kinds of info at their fingertips and the freedom to take part. But in practice, what it means is that while lots of us might want to do those things, or know that some kind of special people will, in the real world, not just anyone can do that for the most part. And lots of people were going for that. The second is the "functional-artificial" paradox, which refers to the contradiction between the actual functional purpose of such social media platforms, namely to alleviate poverty by spreading information and supporting the community with targeted information and

support for poverty alleviation, and the way they are actually used. The content may not actually help the poor, but rather may be used for superficial or tangential content. Together, these paradoxes show that social media platforms made for fighting poverty may actually worsen it, because people who aren't poor often use these digital tools more and get more help from them [13].

The Indonesian case provides a comparative limitation when evaluating how much social media contributed to poverty alleviation in China (2015–2025). While access to platforms may be relatively high, awareness and meaningful participation remain low, revealing that digital inclusion does not guarantee effective outcomes. Content analysis and survey data [13] highlight two key constraints: a "democratic-elitist" paradox, where benefits are captured by more capable users, and a "functional-artificial" paradox, where content fails to address real poverty needs. Applied to China, this suggests that despite measurable benefits, social media poverty alleviation may be limited by unequal participation and misaligned content, reducing its overall effectiveness.

2.3. Research relevance and deficiencies

Social media promotes poverty alleviation in China by bridging the information gap, thereby strengthening digital inclusive finance and social capital, and ultimately reducing the overall cost of poverty alleviation. However, these mechanisms of action are constrained by low adoption rates among vulnerable groups, content homogenization and sustainability crises, and structural paradoxes in dissemination. These issues reinforce each other, limiting the fairness and effectiveness of poverty alleviation. Despite these positive effects, the effectiveness of social media in poverty alleviation is still constrained by multiple interrelated challenges that collectively weaken its positive impact across various dimensions. Firstly, low adoption rates among the elderly, low-educated groups, and time-constrained urban migrant workers directly weaken the information bridging effect, hindering marginalized groups from accessing social capital and digital financial services, forming a self-reinforcing digital divide: the groups most in need of assistance are the hardest to engage. Secondly, content homogenization and insufficient sustainability further limit long-term effectiveness. Without branding, supply chains, and continuous training, short-term income increases are often difficult to maintain. This unsustainability can weaken the stability of social capital formation, limit the continuous use of digital finance, and erode the cost advantage of digital models. Thirdly, dissemination paradoxes distort the original goal of information transmission. Instead of empowering the poor, platforms may exacerbate inequality, weaken social trust, and reduce the inclusivity of digital finance. As a result, dissemination failures simultaneously undermine social capital and information effectiveness. In summary, these challenges are not isolated: low adoption rates exacerbate content homogeneity and unsustainability; unsustainable models further widen the digital divide; and dissemination paradoxes amplify exclusionary effects.

Moreover, there are still some deficiencies in existing research. In the great part of the most cases are mainly about short-term results which are around 6-12months, fail to address a vital query if those benefits hold for long. Longitudinal Chengdu study [3] conducted is an important step in addressing this particular gap, but it remains focused on urban handicraft makers which limits the generalizability of their findings. In addition, urban service workers and ethnic minorities are historically overlooked in the literature. It was not until Huang and Zhang [4], Abliz and Li [5] that they were studied in more detail. In addition, same to Kim and Chen [9], the results of the cross—cultural comparison reveal that different efficiencies for the different types of interventions with regards to creating a social media platform's ecosystems and integrating financial services.

3. Discussion

In the discussion part of the paper, it looks closely to see how much of an impact Social Media had during the years 2015-2025 in fighting with poverty in China by looking closely at what sort of an impact was made as well as what type, what were the limitations that Social Media faced and other things that were impacted. 3. Looking at why/how social media is influential, using PEEL (Point, evidence, Explain, evaluate, Link) method. Microanalyse and evaluate as one.

3.1. The mechanisms of social media-driven poverty alleviation

3.1.1. *Enhancing market access and income generation*

Social media platforms are emerging as game-changing means for enhancing the market exposure of the less privileged, digital literacy becomes an important intervening variable that directly influences the amount of income. This kind of phenomenon occurs quite a bit in different urban places all over China, where certain groups of people have taken advantage of different degrees of knowing how to use digital stuff to get money-making chances.

In Guangzhou, there is a very clear difference in earnings for migrant craftsmen who know and do not know how to use the Internet. Those who have higher digital literacy skills earn 38% more than those who have lower digital literacy skills. The biggest part of this gap is that the good craftsmen can reach out to more people since they are digital, and they have a lot of buyers outside their own province. They are buying from them (62%) of what they get. It means that digital literacy provides these craftsmen with a way to go past the limits of where they are right now so that more people can buy things from them from far away places. This lets these craftsmen make more money.

Also in Shanghai, domestic helpers are using social media sites to avoid intermediaries, which has resulted in big cost savings. They can use these digital tools to find clients themselves without having to pay a middleman, who usually takes 20-30% of their earnings. This direct client acquisition not only raises their take-home pay, but also gives them more control over their employment relationships and pricing. Meanwhile, delivery riders in the city have also been making use of Douyin, one of the more popular short video platforms, to share information like which areas are high demand, what time it is the busiest, and the best routes to take. This practice has resulted in a 25% increase in their monthly orders [4] where digital literacy can be defined as being able to engage in productive information exchanges on social media and resulted in increased productivity and earnings for the group.

In Urumqi, the ethnic minority vendors took advantage of bilingual contents creation on the social media, which allows them to serve a wider audience. These providers have grown the scope of their reach by putting up stuff in both their own language and Chinese, which ended in 42 percent more monthly sales [5]. This kind of strategy can not only solve the language obstacles but also establish a more solid connection with the customers who have different languages so that they will have stronger market competitiveness to promote the sales growth.

As shown in Table 3, all together, these cases show how important it is that people can use the internet to change their lives for the better. The power of social media to make things easier and more open is really useful, but it will not work without knowing how to use the internet. Hence, the digital illiterate in these groups still have some ways to be encouraged to become part of this economy and to reduce income disparities in the marketplaces where digital marketplaces are being used today.

Table 3. Social media impact on urban low-income workers

Group	Platform Used	Key Outcome	Main Barrier
Domestic Helpers (Shanghai)	WeChat, Xiaohongshu	68% find clients directly; avoid 20-30% fees	35% report online scams; trust issues
Delivery Riders (Shanghai)	Douyin	25% ↑ orders; 18% ↓ idle time	72% work > 12hrs/day; no time for content
Migrant Craftsmen (Guangzhou)	Xiaohongshu, Douyin	38% higher income with digital skills	45% can not edit short videos
Uyghur Vendors (Urumqi)	Douyin (bilingual)	42% ↑ sales; income ¥3,500→¥6,800	Only 18% can create bilingual videos

Note: Sources: Li and Wang [2]; Huang and Zhang [4]; Abliz and Li [5].

Income improvements happen because of 2 important parts. First, it removes traditional middlemen, capturing more of the value. Secondly, it can increase the geography range, local producer will get connected to national as well as cross-provincial market. Kim and Chen's [9] social-commerce synergy shows that China's integrated platforms do better at fighting poverty, compared to mobile money that only does the payment part, because they mix selling stuff (like sharing news and adding new users) with paying for stuff (buying things and keeping your cash safe), so you save 40% of what it would cost.

Income growth numbers may be impressive, but considerable obstacles prevent wide-ranging advantages. Guangzhou—45% of craftsmen can not edit short videos; Shanghai—72% of riders work more than 12 hours a day, and they have no time to make content; Urumqi—only 18% of vendors can independently create bilingual videos. These skill and time constraints point to the benefits of social media being unequally distributed to people with pre-existing advantages in digital literacy and flexible work conditions. These results show the need for special digital literacy training programs that take into consideration how much free time the people taking part have and how good they already are at using computers. as Li and Wang [2] put it, platforms have policies and regulations for small creators as well which is equally important to unleashing poverty alleviating power of social media.

3.1.2. *The role of social capital and digital finance*

Social capital and digital financial inclusion are working along with social media in order to cut poverty with better information accessibility, trust networks and startup activity. Studies of 6,093 households show that every 1% growth in social network strength means a 0.568% drop in the possibility of being in poverty, and this is more true for households that are less educated [10]. Digital finance greatly reduces both absolute and relative poverty by allowing people to get loans more easily and start small businesses [8]. About 24.94% of the rural households still live in multidimensional poverty, with low adult education (42.06%), poor health (37.65%), and chronic diseases (29.90%) as main reasons [11].

Social capital is channeled through 2 channels—improved access to info and informal financing of entrepreneurship [10]. Liu et al. [1] found that social trust has a greater effect than social networks or participation separately, which implies that the quality of the connections matter more than the quantity. Multidimensional poverty data from Wang et al. [11] shows that poverty alleviation needs to tackle health, education, as well as income.

However, the paradoxes identified by Wahyunengseh et al. [13] reminds us of the distinction between access and engagement; among the 60 families with Facebook access (65%), only 31% were aware of

available poverty alleviation resources. Social prestige can even have opposite effects, making poverty worse instead of better in some cases [11]. This means that it is important for reducing poverty to not only focus on the ability to access the social media or digital finance, but to create a sense of trust and make sure that the individuals who have been marginalized from society know that they are aware of the resources available to help them (Evaluation: Sustainability, Inequality).

3.2. Key challenges and structural limitations

3.2.1. The sustainability challenge

As shown in Table 4, the short-term income gains from social media poverty alleviation are unsustainable without strong and sustained support mechanisms. A vivid case of the difficulty can be found in a rigorous and prolonged following research that ran for three years between 2020 and 2023. The researchers closely observed the 80 skilled workers, who were making items in Chengdu, China. The place had a lot of social networking platforms which had been actively pushed by local companies so that the poor makers could earn money. The results show a very clear pattern of initial success but then a slow fall: although 90% of people had a lot of income growth in their first year of using social media sales ways, and on average the extra money went up by 60%, most did not keep going up for long. In the third year of the study, 55% of handicraft makers were able to keep their earnings growing, which is not good, because 35% of handicraft makers lost all the money they earned from social media and went back to earning the same amount of money they made before.

A key factor that made the constant victory different from the fall was the availability of assistance beyond the teaching for starting. Through their research, Wang and Zhao [3] found that craftsmen who received structured follow-up after training (including weekly guidance activities on platform algorithm update, content optimization skills, customer management skills and market trend tracking) were three times more likely to earn income by continuing. This difference shows how limited one-time help is; It has brought some skills to the participants, but it has not solved the persistent problems in the social media business environment, such as the ever-changing platform policy, the fierce market competition that leads to the rapid change of user preferences due to outdated technology, and so on. Without continuous capacity building and adaptive support, the short-term benefits of social media exposure may be eroded; Therefore, poverty reduction programs must put more emphasis on long-term systematic support rather than immediate transactional assistance. Therefore, it can be inferred that social media has been successfully used as a means to increase the economic opportunities of the whole community; However, due to the lack of support provided by relevant groups in enhancing their own strength or cultivating skills to adapt to changes in a dynamic environment, this welfare has inherent weaknesses.

Table 4. Sustainability factors in social media poverty alleviation (Chengdu 3-year study)

Time Period	% with Income Growth	Average Growth Rate	Key Sustainability Factor
Year 1 (2020)	90%	+60%	Platform novelty & subsidies
Year 2 (2021)	~70%	+40% (declining)	Brand building begins
Year 3 (2023)	55%	Varied	40% of sustainers have personal brands
Post-training follow-up	3x more likely to sustain	N/A	Monthly platform guidance

Note: Source: Wang and Zhao [3].

Explanation: Sustained success has declined because the excitement of the new platform is fading; As sellers join the market, competitors increase; The change of algorithm makes it more difficult to find the established account. Brand building has proved to be the key factor-four out of ten people who keep growing have formed recognizable personal brands, which will help customers choose them when new algorithms change.

Evaluation: Use short-term data sets to directly challenge optimists' evaluation of social media poverty alleviation. The finding that post-training follow-ups increase sustainability 3x indicates that one-time training programs are inadequate. the 35 percent that returned back to pre-social media income levels. This is huge policy failure and short-term evaluation would completely miss this.

Link: These findings show the importance of continuing support over a long period past the first training; it also needs mentorship, making a brand, and helping with things to give stuff to people. As Wang and Zhao [3] suggest, sustainability means using digital tools plus industrial help—branding, supply chains, and selling in the market.

3.2.2. Regional and demographic disparities

The impact of social media on poverty alleviation efforts has had an unequal impact on different regions and social groups. Its effects are distributed unevenly in different geographic areas and demographic cohorts. For example, in Yanchang County, Shaanxi, 84% of the full-time agricultural workforce is aged 51 or above and possesses only a primary school level education [7]. Such circumstances effectively restrict the ability of the labor force to make effective use of social media and its role as a tool of poverty alleviation is therefore limited.

Similar inequality related circumstances have also been shown by research in ethnic minority areas and concerning ethnic minority vendors. In one study by Abliz and Li [5], it was shown that although Uyghur vendors in Urumqi managed to benefit from a 42% increase in sales, they were driven especially through the advantage gained from producing bilingual content. However, only 18% of those Uyghur vendors were able to produce the content of those bilingual videos additional external support. Urban rural differences are also an important factor to consider since urban residents often benefit from better access to digital connectivity, better levels of social capital and connections and lower poverty levels than rural residents Liu et al. [1].

These differences are a product of the digital Matthew Effect. Demographic cohorts that are younger in age, possess a higher level of education, are closer to markets, or who enjoy fluency in advantageous languages, are more likely to benefit from digital technology. On the other hand, those cohorts who are already facing some form of disadvantage, are more likely to be further left behind. Wang et al. [11] have also researched this and show that 42.06% of rural multidimensional poverty is linked to low levels of adult education. This shows that the structural barriers are much deeper and suggest that it is unlikely that social media alone can solve the problem entirely.

3.3. Policy implications and recommendations

3.3.1. Targeted training programs

More and more different types of research show us how important it is to use correct training for situations and things that it need people to learn and remember. Methods that match some aspects of important demographic and linguistic data work quite well. As Li's training plan for different sexes shows (see the early draft of this article for reference) [2], it can stimulate participants' greater interest and improve their memory by highlighting differences; Because of its uniqueness as a specific group education form, it is easier to integrate into teaching activities than other modes such as lectures or tutorials. School-age training programs are designed for different cognitive development stages according to the individual learning ability, existing

knowledge base and motivation factors of children of different ages; These types of training programs constantly show obvious advantages over the unified method in stimulating more interest and mastery. Also, the development of language-specific content creation skills that was part of the research by Abliz and Li [5] has become very important, because it makes sure that training materials are both easy for people to understand when they speak the language and interesting to them because they relate to the culture they come from, which leads to better understanding and later using those skills in the real world. Together, these context-specific approaches produce clearly better training results by most measures.

The critical function of continuing support mechanisms beyond the original design and delivery of the training is now obvious. One especially convincing piece of evidence is that of Wang & Zhao [3], who found that the sustainability of the skills and knowledge acquired via training was improved by three times when systematic post-training follow-ups were carried out. And this big improvement when it comes to being sustainable can be seen right away when you compare it to always having to do the first kind of training all over again if you do not have this kind of continual support going on. The inference is unmistakable: a properly executed, relevant, context-sensitive starting education may provide an important starting point, yet without some form of organized follow-up assistance such as tutoring, refresher workshops, access to resources, problem-solving seminars, etc., there is an enormous increase in the chance that the new knowledge and skills will be remembered, put to use, and therefore result in permanent behavior transformation or enhanced performance. Thus, resulting in better returns on investment on the effort spent on training people, as they can give lasting and concrete benefits which won't disappear the way fleeting gains will if help is continuously lacking.

3.3.2. Platform policy reform

Li and Wang [2] offered a particular advice: asking people to carry out specific platform policies especially for the little ones. they claim that the way that online places run, rules around stuff that people can see and money sellers pay, often stop new and small firms from doing well. They claim that these systemic biases are very important in causing something called the Digital Matthew Effect. This is when already big or successful companies get even more stuff and benefits, but new or small companies have a hard time getting noticed and growing, so there is a bigger difference between different kinds of users on the platforms and additional useful platform models that come from the country study of Kim and Chen [9]. Their research shows that those platforms which are successful at integrating the social interaction features and the commercial transaction features, those tend to result in a better outcome for poverty reduction. This finding indicates that there is an actual policy implication, regulatory frameworks and supportive measures need to be designed to actively promote and enable this integration of social and commerce features on online platforms. in such a way, policy makers could create an even more inclusive online environment to provide an even greater help to these small-scale creators to relieve the overall poverty.

3.3.3. Infrastructure and digital inclusion

First of all, it has been found that during the period from 2013 to 2018, the number of poor people in China's urban areas decreased significantly. It needs faster internet and opportunities to play with new digital toys, but it also needs better places for people to cooperate with each other to use digital things. For example, when people trust and help each other in the neighborhood, or many people cooperate on large-scale projects.

Support: The truly outstanding assistance provided by the state in helping people get rid of poverty through the establishment of a comprehensive digital economy has also received full attention. The idea is that need technology to help people, make society better and give real and lasting help to the urban poor.

3.4. Deep reflection based on a critical perspective

3.4.1. *Critical reflection on positive effects*

In reality, income improvement in impoverished areas often relies on multiple factors, which include industrial support, policy subsidies, improved transportation infrastructure, and wider market conditions. Therefore, it is better to view social media as being a tool for empowerment—not as the fundamental driving force underpinning poverty alleviation. It can serve a very useful role and amplify the existing effects and widen market channels. Yet at the same time, it must be recognized that it is not an endogenous force. force in its own right.

At the same time, expanding market access does not necessarily guarantee a stable, increasing income for agricultural workers. Many farmers depend on short videos and live streaming to reap short-term traffic, Yet the fact that the incoming orders remains scattered, that product premiums remain relatively low, and that product promotion is highly homogenous, the long-term benefits of this remain often quite limited. In the same way, online social capital is not always the same as real social capital. Since many online connections are tenuous, with most being traffic connections, it is very challenging to develop these into forms of longer-term assistance or supply chain resources.

The popularization of digital finance also does not necessarily translate into genuine financial inclusion. Low-income groups are prone to accessing online loans and excessive credit, and this in turn amplifies financial vulnerability. In that sense, it is not a true course of poverty reduction in any meaningful way.

Lastly, social media-based poverty alleviation itself has been shown to demonstrate a Matthew effect of its own. Groups with better basic conditions, higher digital literacy, and closer proximity to the market tend to benefit more, and conversely, those more remote and deeply impoverished groups, elderly groups, and low-literacy groups struggle to benefit and may even fall further out of the digital system, meaning that it may actually intensify the existing wealth disparity.

3.4.2. *In-depth reflection on the existing dilemmas and the root causes of contradictions*

The impact of social media on poverty alleviation faces challenges such as insufficient sustainability and regional and demographic disparities. The essence of these issues may lie in the reliance of social media-based poverty alleviation on external traffic, platform algorithms, and market fluctuations, lacking an endogenous mechanism. When the platform's traffic dividend fades and the hype subsides, the income growth chain for farmers breaks directly. Poverty alleviation projects rely on platforms rather than being rooted in local industries, making them inherently unsustainable. Regional disparities and disparities in age and education are not simply conditional differences, but structural issues caused by factors such as the imbalance in the distribution of digital infrastructure between urban and rural areas, uneven supply of public services in digital literacy, and the inclination of platform resources towards advantageous regions. Behind these individual-level disparities lie systems and distribution logic. Issues such as information overload, false propaganda, after-sales disputes over agricultural products, platform commission squeezing farmers' profits, personal information leakage, and algorithm-induced irrational business operations are also key shortcomings that constrain the effectiveness of poverty alleviation.

3.4.3. *Reflecting on the limitations of countermeasures*

Critically reflect on issues such as idealized countermeasures, difficulties in implementation, and addressing symptoms rather than root causes. Firstly, purely operational training only addresses symptoms and does not address the root cause. Farmers lack not only live streaming skills but also supply chain, branding, after-sales service, and risk resistance capabilities. General training cannot adapt to the endowments of different regions and tends to become a mere formality. Secondly, relying on platforms to consciously reform their inclusive mechanisms is unrealistic. With commercial profit as their core, platforms naturally favor high-quality entities

with high traffic. The grassroots poor groups do not belong to high-value users, and it is difficult to achieve inclusive preference solely through platform self-discipline. Government regulation is needed to provide a safety net. Finally, building only network hardware does not equate to digital inclusivity. Many regions have access to the internet but lack services, guidance, and simple digital tools suitable for the elderly and low-educated groups.

3.5. Research summary

Generally speaking, although social media provided positive help for poverty alleviation in many provinces of Mainland China in 2015-2025; It is not certain that these effects will have a lasting impact on narrowing the regional gap. The available evidence shows considerable short-term income gains among a wide variety of disadvantaged groups, such as rural craftsmen, urban service workers, small farmers, and ethnic minority sellers, with reported increases in income generally between 25% and 60%, according to sector and region. But with more stringent longitudinal studies, a less clear-cut picture is drawn, only about 55% were able to keep these economic gains beyond the first three years.

The main methods of how social media helps alleviate poverty such as increasing market access, eliminating the supply chain middleman, building up social capital, and digital finance integration are better documented and understood. However, important structural barriers persist that prevent some populations from being able to take full advantage of such opportunities. Barriers like differences in digital literacy, the amount of time available, age-related difficulty adopting new technologies, limitations in education, and differences in languages still prevent certain populations from equitably taking advantage of these opportunities. As such, as a result of what is known as the Digital Matthew Effect, without intentional public policy intervention, it could paradoxically be true that social media companies can grow in size without reducing existing socio-economic inequalities.

To truly tap into the full poverty alleviating potential of social media, policy makers and development organizations should focus on several strategies such as implementing long-term support structures that last much beyond initial digital literacy training, designing programs that are specific to the context of a particular demographic group's need, calling for platforms to have policies that actively work in favor of small scale creators and marginalized sellers, and continuing critical infrastructure investments in both digital access and community social trust building. A comprehensive longitudinal study of Chengdu shows that one-time intervention will not bring lasting results; Sustained poverty alleviation through social media requires multiple aid agencies to continue to participate in long-term support work, build a stronger brand image, and deeply integrate into the supply chain.

4. Conclusion and suggestion

4.1. Conclusion

Three ways to make social media a bit better at helping people out of being poor and also stop it from making some people poorer than others is suggested. First, transforming digital literacy training into a continuous system of skills development with mentorship and regular updates on the changes of algorithm as well as curriculums that would advance people from being able to use the platform for basic purposes to marketing their brands. Demographic specific program should cater to elderly farmers' learning pace and modular formats for time-starved urban workers. Language-specific content creation training for ethnic minorities. Second, to achieve urban-rural infrastructure equalization beyond just basic internet connectivity, to establish agricultural cold chain logistics, rural distribution centers, and the last mile of delivery systems in order to

lower the shipping cost differences. Ensure that there is comparable 4G/5G coverage so as to have stable live-streaming and real-time interaction with customers, and government-sponsored digital village programs which have a combination of training centers, logistics bases and community centers in order to create trust networks. Third, to implement market stability mechanisms like diversifying support for different products and being present on different platforms to avoid a reliance on a single channel, developing multi-seasonal products that transition from seasonal agriculture to year-round, and government-backed price stabilization to prevent poverty relapse during market crashes. Platform policy reforms support platform policies that facilitate design that promote small scale creator visibility versus winner take all dynamics. And producer cooperatives produce content together to market together and create social capital that reduces the chance of poverty.

The research itself explicitly acknowledges a number of important limitations to take into account while interpreting the findings. First of all, due to some reasons and geographical limitations, it can't reach more general research results at the level of national model under various socio-economic conditions. Because of this localization concern, it may ignore the differences between different places, such as where people access the Internet, how they interact with social media platforms, and local regulations on technology application, which affect the connection between technology development and currency issues in different ways. In addition, according to the preliminary research conducted during the five-year period from 2017 to 2020, these years are relatively stable in society. The digital divide will be bridged after the pandemic, and it remains to be seen that telecommuting, work and commerce, as well as the government's technical policy: accelerating rural digital transformation. This will lead to a gap in understanding the current situation. Third, the sustainability assessment lasts for three years; Therefore, a series of long-term studies are needed to investigate the continuous impact of social media integration on poverty reduction policies and programs after this period, which may show some adverse results of diminishing returns or unknown.

Generally speaking, through this study, the author finds that social media occupies a complex position in poverty alleviation talks; It is not necessarily a miraculous panacea technology, which can end all the great injustices by itself, nor can it be used as an insignificant break with the old forms of helping the poor. It is often valuable only under certain conditions in a specific background, and its effectiveness depends to a large extent on the surrounding conditions of the policy system. Technology interventions work inside complex networks of social norms, economic systems, and institutional settings which either boost or limit the poverty-cutting power of these technology interventions. This requires policy coordination and cooperation among sectors, not tech-specific solutions in silos. In future poverty alleviation plans, the authors need to pay more attention to the creation of enabling environments, treating the provision of continuous, extensive support systems for digital equity as an important measure. They must create digital-literacy at educational level, ensure fair participation in digital economies by improving working condition of the workers, create more technological infrastructure and reduce connectivity gap, create social capital which will help in community knowledge building, reform market institution and avoid monopolistic control over digital platform. Only thus could these digital platforms become tools to drive equity-oriented economic growth rather than reproduce it; Only with the above all digital platforms can the digital economy allow everyone who has joined the digital era a fair opportunity to participate and benefit from China's fast-changing digital era, no matter how one enters.

4.2. Suggestions for future research

Therefore, it is worth pointing out some areas for future research to focus on. There is a need for more longitudinal studies to determine if the Chengdu findings (55% sustainability) apply to other regions and occupational groups. Second-generation effects research, which examines how parents' social media

participation impacts their children's educational and economic results, would show longer-term development effects. A comparative study of various platform ecosystems (douyin vs. kuaishou) provides platform-specific policies for Xiaohongshu. This suggestion is worthwhile because much of the current literature relies on cross-sectional surveys and case studies, which can identify correlations but struggle to establish causality. This is a key limitation highlighted in both the geographical and temporal constraints.

For example, policy interventions such as China's "Broadband China" initiative or the staggered rollout of digital infrastructure across regions provide natural variation that can be exploited to compare areas with different levels of social media access over time. This would allow researchers to determine whether improvements in income or social capital are directly caused by social media adoption, rather than by other overlapping factors such as general economic growth or government support programs.

This approach would unlock new possibilities by offering more rigorous, policy-relevant evidence. It could help distinguish which specific mechanisms—such as digital finance, e-commerce, or social networking—are most effective, and under what conditions. Additionally, it would allow for more precise targeting of interventions, ensuring resources are directed toward strategies that demonstrably reduce poverty rather than those that merely correlate with improvement.

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