



When Technology doesn't fit: Information sharing practices among farmers in rural China

Brief on site used for survey(1/2)

- Villages considered for ethnographic study in survey are
 - Well equipped with telecom and internet connections.
 - People of all ages and educational levels are capable to access these technologies.
 - Government takes significant steps to “informatize” rural areas in order to improve their lives and economic opportunities.

Brief on site used for survey(2/2)

- Most of people working are women, children and older people.
- Most family incomes came from remittances from migrants or wages from occasional non farming jobs.



Abstract

- Why receptiveness of ICT is poor among rural residents under farming sector?
- Why technologies didn't become an important part of farmers doing business?
- What are the factors that make a price fit to a farmer but not another?




Farming as a Community of Practice

- Farmers learn farming as part of a community of practice, where young people learn alongside the more expert participants in their families and in the rest of the village
- Correctness happen in an implicit rather than explicit way, with more expert farmer redoing the work done by novice without verbal comment.

- ICT provided information to farmers in school learning model where unit of learning was taught by experts.

“For example, there are television programs on agriculture, and then there’s a phone number that you can call to find out more information. (Q: what program?) The Shandong Agricultural Channel. It is reliable, with good information. The programs are mostly of specialists from universities, and they have experimental fields, so you can look at what happens. They talk about seeds, about technology, about pesticides. Then there is a number that you can call if you want to find out more information (Q: did you ever call?) I never called. (Q: did you ever do anything that you saw on tv?) I never did. But once I called a number that I saw advertised on the paper, it was a private company advertising grape seedlings, then I went and bought them, but it didn’t work. These ads are often unreliable, because they just want to sell things.”

Mr. Liu, Village B

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- Because of migration and other opportunities, there are many more old-timers than newcomers among farmers and, as noted by rural sociologists, they tend to keep their habits, and see ICT as irrelevant. The main concern for old comers is predictability than profit earning

“There isn’t a big pressure to get a better income from the land, because almost everybody has income from work outside. I’d say for most families, half of the yearly income is from the land, half from other work... Also, my goal is not to grow my income or business, as long as things remain ok, that’s all I need. The internet is useful for young people who want to improve and grow their business, not for old people like me. My children are all grown up and have good jobs, so I don’t need much and don’t have lots of worries. Until two years ago I also went out to work but now I don’t. There’s no need.”

Knowledge and information sharing

- Done by visiting each other houses or generally by outdoor gathering.
- In the villages, an oral system of 'checks and balances' has evolved to allow farmers to evaluate the information they get from different sources in a more general context, in order to decide its trustworthiness.
- Farmers are often aware that their agricultural extension officers might be getting kick-backs from companies that sell seeds or other agricultural products to promote their brand, but they evaluate this information within the context of their entire relationship with them.

Knowledge and information sharing

- Price is a fit between the farmer's priorities and the buyers' offer.
- There isn't an explicit awareness of the process needed to find out about prices. they were constantly discussed in the casual gatherings, so that they became almost unconsciously part of the shared knowledge of the village, rather than of the individual, to the point that people could rarely identify with precision how they had found out the going price for what they were growing.



Risk in Farmer's Lives

- Growing the unusual crops meant that they were alone in their experiments, and they could not count on other people helping them out with prices, with market forecast, with potential problems with the crop, or even on traders coming through the village to buy their crops.
- There are the usual risks associated with agriculture, like weather, parasites, and other plant diseases affect crops etc. These are the inevitable problems of farming, and it is easier to deal with them as a community rather than as individuals.



Inference

- Existing ICT assume that there is lack of information and tries to built solutions for farmers which will bridge the information gap.
- ICT solutions focused on individuals rather than community.
- ICT does not consider external factors that do play vital role in decision making of farmers.



Thank you!