

Research on the Diffusion of Rural Household Waste Classification Policy from the Perspective of Social Network: Field Study Based on Y Village

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Abstract: Based on the perspective of social network, this paper takes the practice of household waste classification in Y village of Shandong Province as the object of investigation, and explores the diffusion path of rural household waste classification policy. According to the research findings, the diffusion path of rural solid waste classification policy can be summarized into three points: First, functional social network, including social mobilization by the government and public service function of rural schools; The second is the social construction of social network, including family intergenerational transmission, children's cultural feeding. Rural elite demonstration, opinion leaders lead. Peer group dissemination, co-shaping values; Thirdly, in terms of media, the selective processing of media content exerts a subtle influence on the villagers' attitude towards the classification of rural domestic garbage.

Keywords: Rural household waste classification; Social networks; Rural revitalization; Rural governance; Persuade

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1. Background and Research Overview of Rural Household Waste Management

Garbage is a product of modernization, and its impact extends far beyond the scope of mere economic development or technological processing capabilities. When such a product becomes a part of life and combines with the social pathologies faced by rural China, it becomes a complex social issue. With the continuous advancement of urban and rural construction in China and the continuous improvement of rural economic development, the accompanying phenomena of garbage dumps, garbage surrounding villages, and garbage surrounding dams have become prominent, which not only pose hidden dangers to the health of rural residents, but also restrict the further development of the rural economy. In the long run, it is even more detrimental to environmental protection and ecological civilization construction. All of these make the problem of rural domestic waste a social issue that needs urgent attention.

2. Case Selection and Data Sources

(1) Case sketch and selection

The research site for this study is Village Y in L City, Shandong Province. As a county-level city under the jurisdiction of Shandong Province, L City is located in the central part of the Jiaodong Peninsula and serves

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as a crucial transportation hub in the region. Village Y boasts convenient transportation with bus stops available. The W community, where Village Y belongs, is equipped with a comprehensive range of public service facilities, including primary schools, kindergartens, police stations, clinics, supermarkets, barber shops, express delivery outlets, leisure squares, and more. Village Y currently has 98 households with a population of approximately 310 people. It has approximately 800 acres of cultivated land, where carrots, radishes, Chinese cabbages, and other vegetables, as well as corn, wheat, peanuts, and other crops are primarily grown.

The reasons for selecting this village are based on the following two considerations: Firstly, L City, designated as an open coastal county-level city by the State Council and ranked among the top 100 county-level cities in China in terms of comprehensive strength, has achieved remarkable progress in recent years. Through nearly two years of effective exploration, L City has been awarded the titles of "Demonstration County for Domestic Waste Classification in Shandong Province" and "National Demonstration County for Green, High-quality, and Efficient Agriculture." In L City's efforts to promote rural waste classification and governance, Village Y has stood out, achieving excellent results in multiple rural sanitation evaluations and being awarded the title of "Demonstration Village for Rural Domestic Waste Classification in L City." The experience of Village Y is typical and serves as a valuable reference for other rural areas.

Secondly, few researchers have focused on the rural waste governance in the major agricultural provinces in East China. As a successful example of rural domestic waste classification practices in the eastern coastal areas of Shandong Province, Village Y provides a suitable subject for our in-depth research on rural domestic waste governance in this region.

(2) Data sources

The author adopted a combined approach of participatory observation and in-depth interviews to conduct multiple investigations into the practice of domestic waste classification in the village, accumulating rich research materials. The sources of information consist mainly of three parts: Firstly, the in-depth interview method was utilized to interview personnel directly related to rural domestic waste classification, including village cadres, ordinary villagers, students, and so on. Secondly, the participatory observation method was employed to observe offline the daily work of village cadres and volunteer instructors in promoting domestic waste classification. This involved immersing oneself in villagers' lives to observe their waste sorting behaviors, as well as accompanying cleaners and supervisors to carry out their routine work on-site. Online, on the one hand, the author observed interactions related to domestic waste classification and village affairs information through the Village Y WeChat group. On the other hand, by following villagers' WeChat Moments and Douyin (TikTok) accounts, the author analyzed the relevant media content they posted. Thirdly, relevant government work reports, policy documents, propaganda columns, promotional materials, recordings from rural loudspeakers, and other materials were also included.

3. The Diffusion Path of Rural Domestic Waste Classification Policies

Judging from the objects and nature of farmers' interactions and connections, their social networks can be divided into functional social networks and socially constructed social networks. Functional social networks refer to the functional connections and interactions between farmers within the community and external institutions and organizations (i.e., between people and institutions). Socially constructed social networks refer to the connections and interactions between farmers within the community and all other social roles (i.e., between people). Functional social networks mainly include institutions such as governments, schools, and hospitals, while socially constructed social networks generally include relatives, friends, neighbors, government officials, etc. In addition, with the advent of the mediated society, the social construction role

of media has become increasingly apparent. Therefore, in the diffusion process of rural domestic waste classification policies, villagers' attitudes towards domestic waste classification are easily influenced by their social networks and media exposure. The following paragraphs will elaborate on this in detail.

(1) Functional social networks

Firstly, the government conducts social mobilization. Social mobilization is a "mechanism that enables individuals to organize and participate in collective actions," which can change individual attitudes, reshape values, and integrate social resources, thereby consolidating and mobilizing social forces to form a safeguard capacity for infrastructure and lifelines. Judging from the social mobilization methods employed by the three-level government of L City - X Town - Y Village, they can be roughly categorized into three types. First, economic social mobilization, where material rewards incentivize people to engage in activities they might not otherwise pursue, thereby enhancing the performance of their actions. The government links rural domestic waste classification with rewards and subsidies, mobilizing villagers' participation by offering them material incentives. Second, emotional social mobilization, which strategically employs emotions as a tool to evoke, stimulate, or change people's perceptions, attitudes, and evaluations of things. The government uses loudspeakers, hangs promotional banners and slogans, and distributes initiatives to disseminate content that evokes emotional resonance, such as "The village is my home, cleanliness depends on all of us" and "Building a beautiful countryside, sharing a wonderful life." These slogans, as tools for disseminating political ideas and governance, not only rally people and mobilize the masses but also evoke emotions, construct social values, and profoundly shape people's psychology and behavior. Third, organizational social mobilization. On the one hand, Y Village organizes and convenes party members and villagers to establish a mechanism for party members to visit households and further engage with villagers. On the other hand, the X Town Sanitation Organization conducts promotional education activities at the town's market, providing guidance and promotion on domestic waste classification to villagers, merchants, and street-front shops who come to the market, clarifying the significance of domestic waste classification.

Secondly, rural schools play a role in public service functions. Rural schools are not only educational institutions for disseminating scientific and cultural knowledge but also national cultural institutions that deeply penetrate rural areas to guide the spiritual civilization of grassroots people. In promoting rural domestic waste classification, rural schools also exhibit their attributes of serving the countryside. L City attaches particular importance to garbage classification education for adolescents, having conducted several "Garbage Classification in Schools" activities across primary and secondary schools and kindergartens in the city. At W Elementary School, waste classification lecturers used various forms such as interactive games and PPT presentations to provide students with detailed explanations of waste classification knowledge, enhancing their environmental protection awareness. Rural students are a vibrant and active force in rural society, concentrated in rural schools and dispersed among neighborhoods. Therefore, by conducting waste classification promotional education in schools, government departments not only positively influence students' environmental protection behaviors but also radiate to the families where they live, extending to society and creating an atmosphere for domestic waste classification throughout the city.

(2) Socially constructed social network

First, family intergenerational communication and cultural feedback from children. The family is the smallest unit of society, and in rural communities, the family is also an important communication unit. In the early stages of family communication, intergenerational interaction was generally based on the prefigurative culture. However, as children grow up, their knowledge, information, and skills surpass their parents in certain aspects, realizing a "cultural feedback" from children to parents. The survey results of Village Y show that whether children attending kindergarten, primary, and secondary schools in their hometown, college

students studying abroad, or young people working outside, they have all discussed the topic of domestic waste classification with their parents and persuaded them to accept this new thing. For parents, whether to set a good example for their young children or to comply with their children who are studying or working away from home to promote parent-child relationship, they are mostly willing to listen to their children's opinions, respect their ideas, and actively integrate into the "feedback situation" provided by their children in this parent-child interaction on "domestic waste classification". Out of filial piety, children will also help their parents understand and guide waste classification, thereby realizing intergenerational "value mutual metaphor" and enhancing the sense of identity and cohesion within the family.

Second, the demonstration of rural elites and the leadership of opinion leaders. Opinion leaders refer to individuals with high influence and a certain degree of discourse power in interpersonal communication networks. They have earlier access to information and a larger amount of information, allowing them to influence others' attitudes when providing information. In the rural social network environment, opinion leaders are also rural elites. In the eyes of villagers, rural elites are village officials who symbolize "authority" and work for the government, and this idea is deeply ingrained. As managers and service providers in rural communities, village officials are both recipients of policy notices issued by higher-level governments and communicators who continue to convey information to villagers. This requires them not only to implement the documents and policies of higher-level governments, set an example for other ordinary villagers, and play the leading role of opinion leaders, but also to provide feedback and reports on the effectiveness of their work to higher-level authorities, which also determines the execution strength of village officials. In the practice of domestic waste classification in Village Y, village officials, represented by the village director and the village women's director, have taken various measures to ensure the smooth progress of domestic waste classification. For villagers, they tend to comply with the notices issued by village officials due to their status as "public servants."

Third, peer group communication and shared values. A peer group refers to a group of people with similar social status, approximately the same age, and generally similar interests and hobbies. In the socially constructed social network of farmers, it mainly includes relatives, friends, and ordinary villagers in the same village. In rural areas, "chatting casually" among villagers is a relatively common form of communication.

During the survey, we observed that female villagers in Village Y gathered in the leisure square at night, dancing and chatting, while male villagers chatted while scrolling through TikTok videos nearby. At other times, villagers would gather to play cards or stand on the street and chat. Whether in the leisure square or on the village streets, people in this "rural public space" either express their opinions on the topic of "domestic waste classification" or form discussions on different viewpoints. This daily communication among peer groups gradually leads villagers to develop consistent attitudes towards waste classification issues, illustrating the "mutual contagion of group thoughts" and ultimately forming a public opinion that constrains the village's collective waste classification behavior.

(3) Media

With the all-round penetration of media into people's lives, the relationship between media and people has become particularly close. Whether it is for basic needs such as medical treatment and transportation or for leisure and entertainment needs such as travel and movie watching, people can always feel the power of media in meeting various needs of life. Even for rural residents in rural areas, with the steady development of rural economy, technology, and culture, the types of media they can access are almost no different from those of urban residents. In the diffusion stage of the rural garbage classification policy, media plays a powerful role by selectively processing "domestic waste classification" information and constructing a "cognitive framework" to influence villagers' attitudes towards domestic waste classification. The survey results of Village Y show that

the main media influencing villagers' attitude formation are loudspeakers, WeChat, and Douyin. Specifically, "repetition" is an important propaganda strategy. The loudspeakers in the village repeatedly broadcast domestic waste classification initiatives, strengthening villagers' awareness of waste classification through a high number and frequency of broadcasts. As for the WeChat medium, firstly, relevant notices issued by village officials in the village WeChat group, a virtual community, have a guiding and influential force on villagers. Secondly, articles with "framework" implications pushed by the official accounts of L City and X Town, such as "WDLX" and "XGZZX", as well as the content of waste classification shared by villagers in their WeChat Moments, have deepened people's understanding of "domestic waste classification" to a certain extent and promoted people's acceptance of this new thing. Finally, Douyin is regarded as a major tool for rural self-expression, social identity, and the dissemination of rural subcultures, and it is a favored medium among villagers. In the process of decoding visual information, villagers will not only read the video information of domestic waste classification policies released by officials but also obtain the content of personal waste classification practices uploaded by villagers in surrounding villages. Among them, except for the notices issued in the village WeChat group that must be received, WeChat official account articles, Moments, and Douyin short videos are all information that villagers choose and obtain voluntarily. Whether mandatory or voluntary, this information is subtly influencing villagers' attitudes towards domestic waste classification.

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