

A Gender Perspective of E-commerce

Rural Women's Participation and Empowerment

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E-commerce environment: rising internet users in rural China

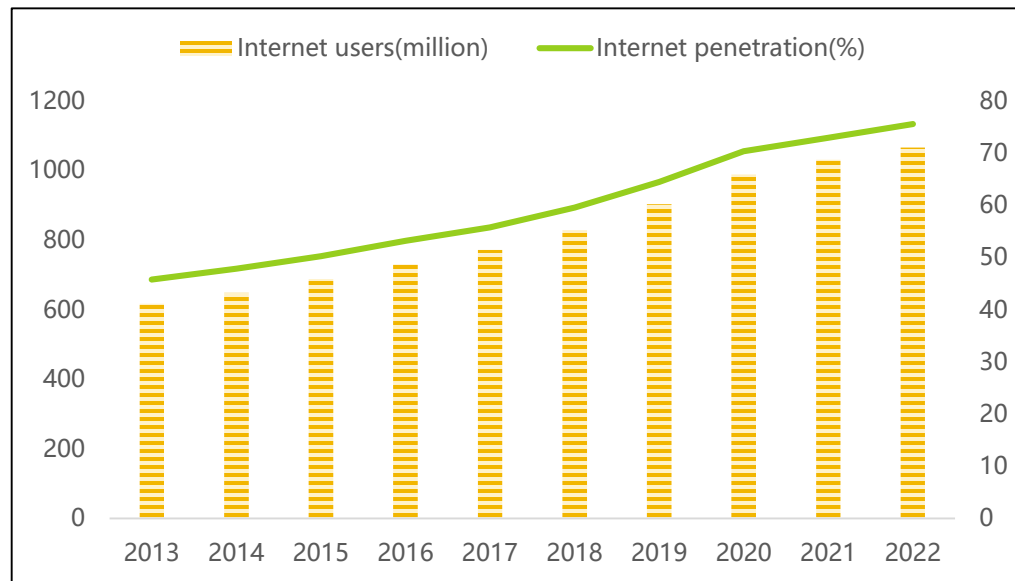
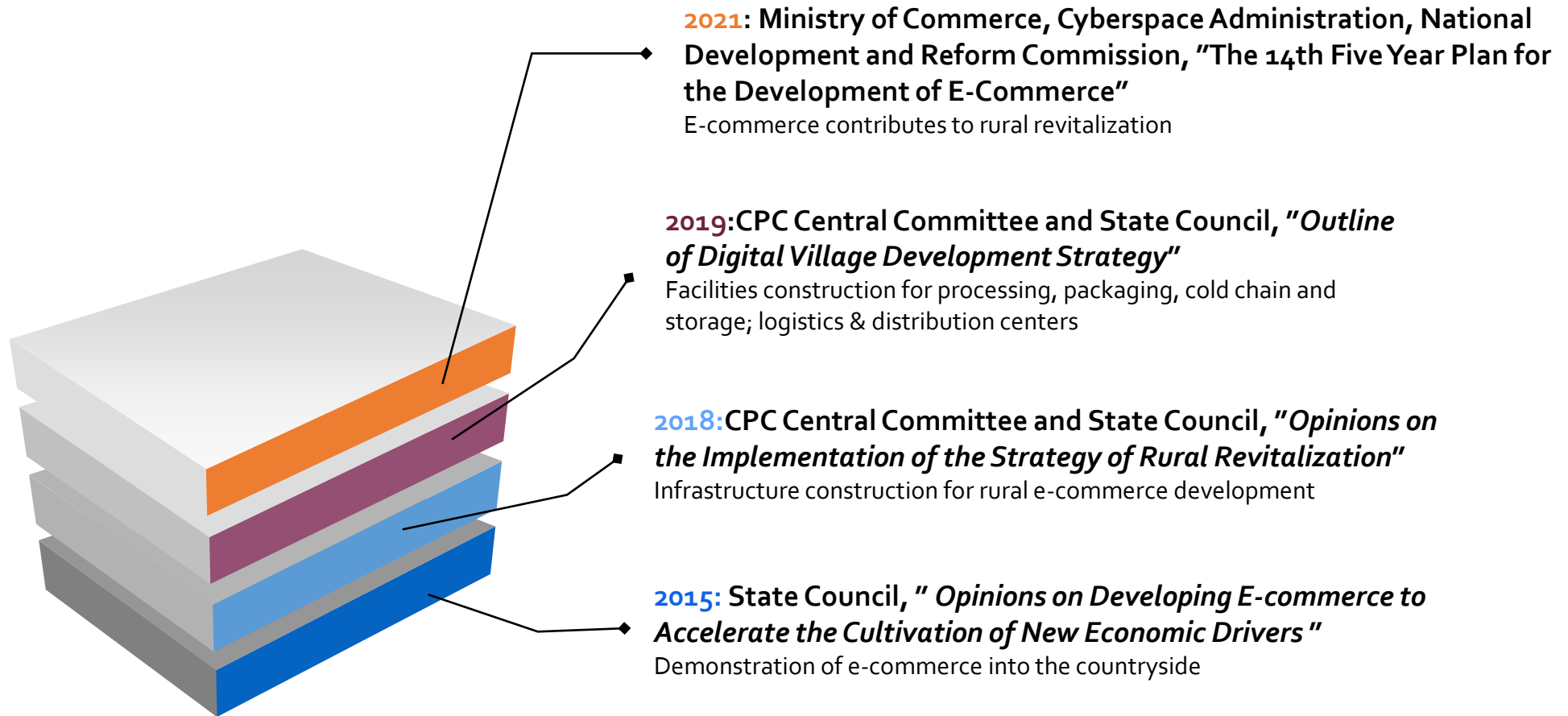


Figure1: 2013-2022 internet users and penetration

Data source:..Statistical Report on China's Internet Development

- In 2022, internet users were 1.067 billion; mobile internet users were 1.065 billion.
- In 2022, rural internet users reached 308 million, accounting for 28.9 % of nation's total.
- In 2022, the internet penetration in rural area was 61.9% but 21.2% lower than urban area.

E-commerce environment: national policies push on rural e-commerce



Note: a series of related policies have been issued since 2015, and some of them are listed above.

E-commerce has become a hotspot in rural digital economy

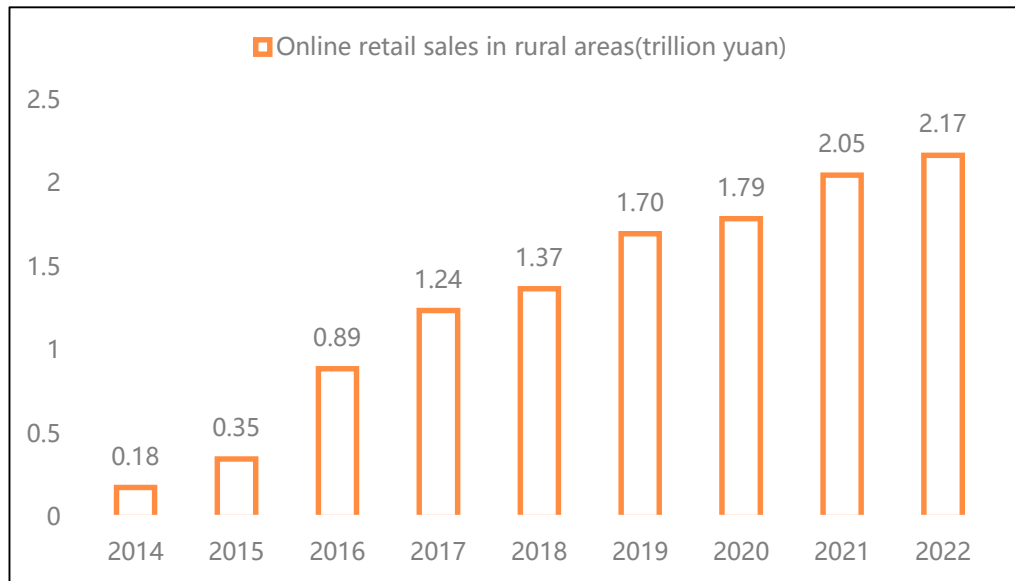


Figure2: 2014-2022 online retail sales in rural areas

Data source: E-commerce in China (2014-2022)

- Online retail sales soared to 2.17 trillion yuan (about 298.4 billion U.S. dollars) in rural areas in 2022, up 3.6 percent year on year.
- Online sales of agricultural products amounted to 531.4 billion yuan (about 73.1 billion U.S. dollars), representing a year-on-year growth of 9.2 percent.

Q:What can rural women benefit from the development of e-commerce? How can we connect e-commerce and gender in a research design?

A:Hopefully, value chain analysis could help us at the first step to get better understanding of this question.

E-commerce enterprises: a new actor entering into value chains

- It was estimated that Alibaba, JD.com and Pinduoduo accounted for over 80 per cent of the retail e-commerce market in 2021 in China.
- E-commerce enterprises are engaging in rural markets such as Alibaba's Taobao villages and JD's county-level service centers.
- In our survey, 51.5% of 130 sampled villages indicated that there were farmers selling products online in 2021, compared with 35.4% in 2018.

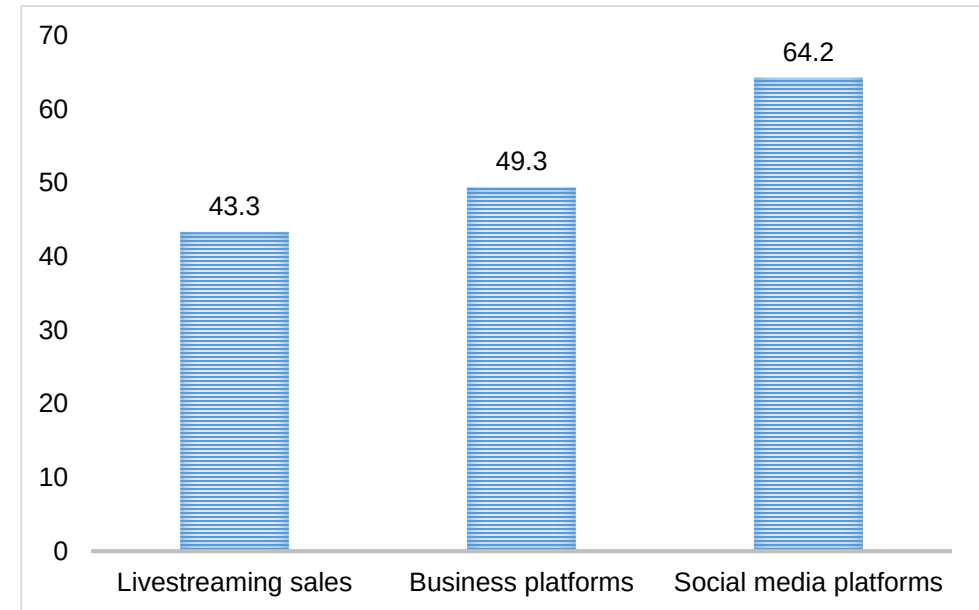


Figure 3: Diverse channels to sell products online in 2021 (%)

Data source: Rural China Poverty and Food Security Household Longitudinal Survey (2010-2021), conducted by Agricultural Information Institute of CAAS

Note: livestreaming sales (Tik Tok, Kuai, WeChat livestreaming, Taobao livestreaming, Toutiao, etc.)
business platforms (JD.com, Taobao, Tmall, Pinduoduo,, Meituan, etc.)
social media platforms (WeChat Group/ WeChat Moments, WeChat subscription account, Weibo, etc.)

Reshape value chains: new value chains are formed, traditional value chains are changing tailored to meet diverse demands

- E-commerce value chains have been established and gradually improved with growing specialized service providers involved in, especially MSMEs.
- E-commerce integration with value chains can upgrade the traditional value chains toward more brands, higher quality, more diverse services.

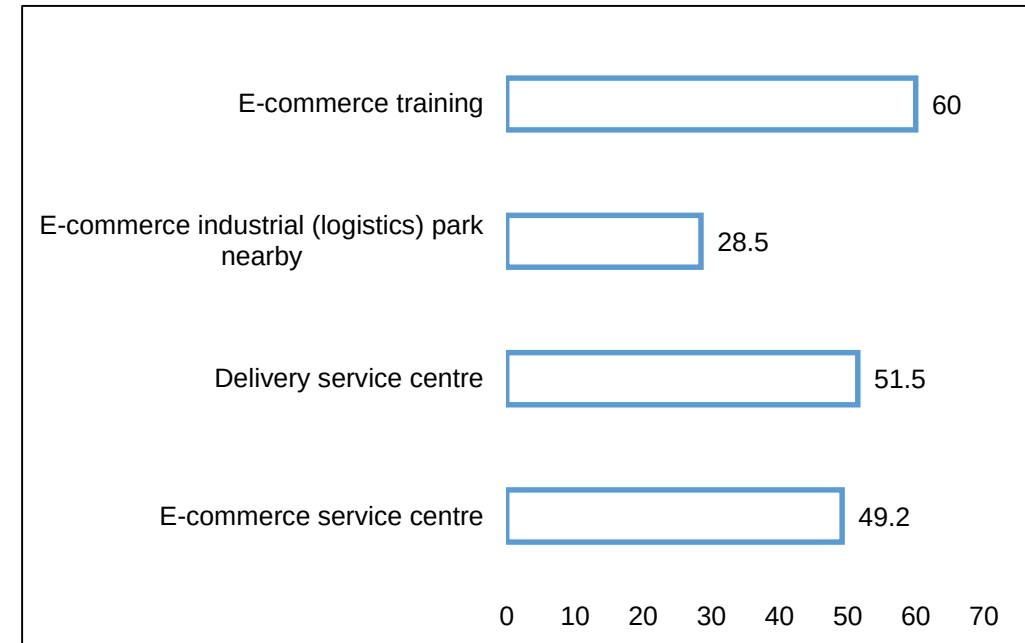
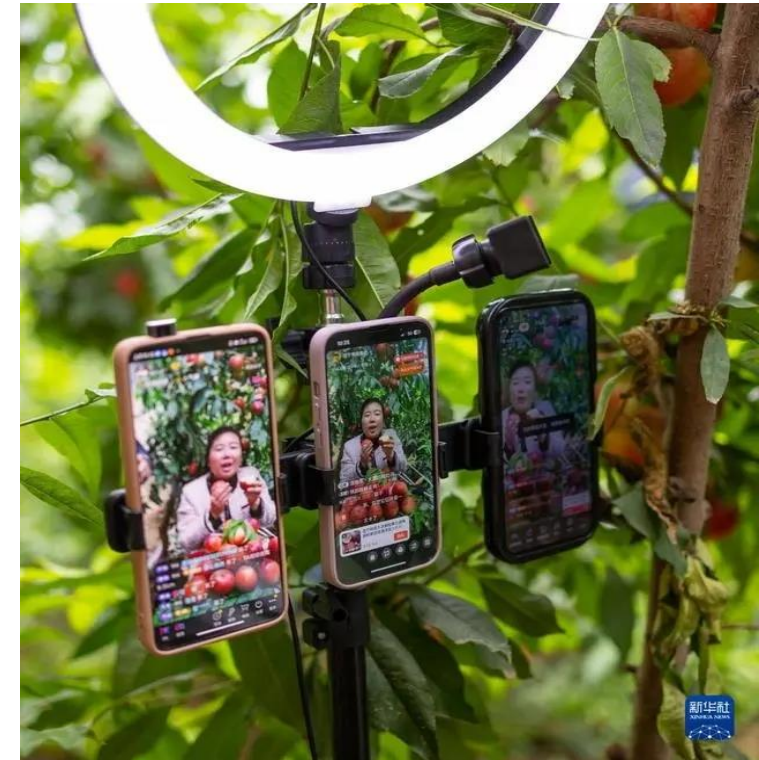


Figure 4: E-commerce related services (%)

Data source: Rural China Poverty and Food Security Household Longitudinal Survey (2010-2021), conducted by Agricultural Information Institute of CAAS

Rural women' participation in e-commerce: as employees and entrepreneurs

- New job opportunities are created and provided for rural women such as grading & packaging, online marketing, last-mile deliveries and customer services, with the development of rural e-commerce.
- E-commerce can increase rural women' economic participation by breaking through time and space limitations. Returning home to start up e-commerce business provides a feasible path for rural women to balance family and work.



Ms. Ma, with leg disability, sold nectarines through livestreaming on three platforms, in Beihuang Village, Nianqiao Town, Dali County, Weinan City, Shaanxi Province, China. [Photo: Yang Cai/Xinhua]

Complicated transformations for women: from ICT to empowerment

- First, turning technological opportunities into income generating activities, which depends on women's literacy, skills, culture and demands. (hardware-software relationship?)
- Second, improving intra-household decision-making power, which may be constrained by older cultural stereotypes in the short term. (wealth ≠ intra-household decision-making power?)

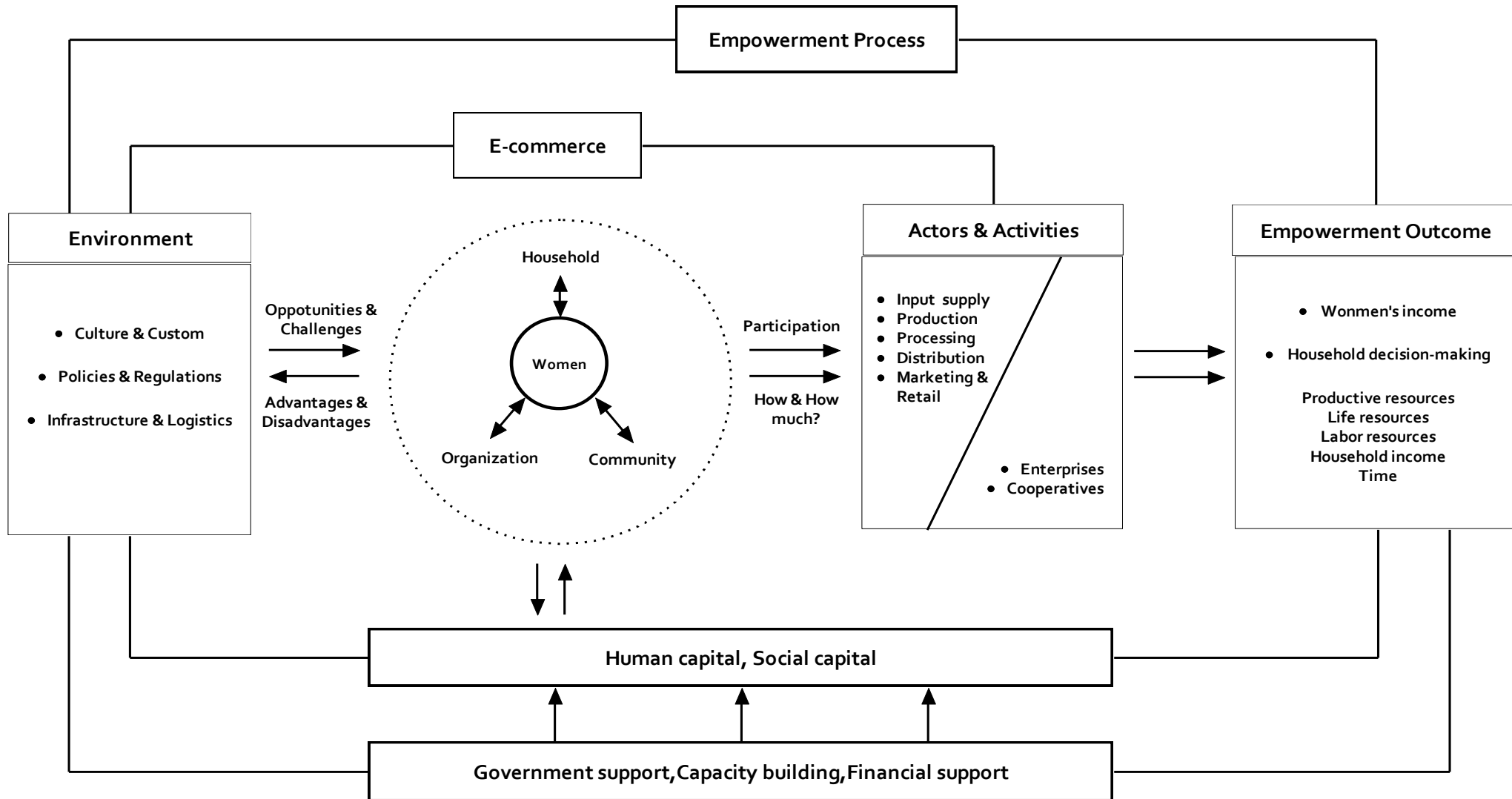


Figure 5: a framework for rural women's participation in e-commerce, proposed by the author

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Thank you!

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