

## Internet benefiting rural China

One step ahead: Primary school students using virtual reality headsets in a classroom in Hunan province of China. Reuters

China became the biggest gaming market in the world early last year, accounting for more than a quarter of the total gaming revenue globally. But it is much more than games and fun in the vast country where Internet is playing a big role in rural transformation with over 55 million students in rural schools getting access to live streaming classes.

According to the *China Internet Report 2018*, released at the RISE international tech conference currently on here, local governments in China spend 8% of their annual budgets on digitisation of education. Nearly 78 million rural users read news from three primary news apps at least once a month and 50% of China's poor villages will be equipped with e-commerce capabilities by 2020.

China's Internet penetration is just over 50%, much lower than the 89% penetration in the U.S., but the country's sheer size and scale of Internet use has meant that there are three times the number of smartphone users and 11 times the number of mobile payment gateway users in China than in the U.S. With a user base of roughly 210 million, China is discovering the value of internet in the development of e-commerce, education and media in the rural expanses.

The 100-page report says that about 2,100 Taobao villages would soon account for 4,90,000 active online shops, which would translate into \$19 million annual sales, creating 1.3 million jobs. Internet giants such as Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent are present in almost every tech sector, from streaming videos to self-driving cars.

According to the report, online shopping giants are going offline, allowing shoppers to scan product information with smartphones or use smart cards that guide them to their tastes. Users thus can place orders from their apps and have groceries delivered to their doors.

This writer is

currently in Hong Kong attending RISE 2018.

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