

Application of Government WeChat Accounts in the Environment of Internet Plus

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Abstract: To study the application of government WeChat accounts in the environment of Internet plus is of great theoretical and practical significance. It is an urgency for government to explore how to change its Internet governance and combine Internet plus technology with its WeChat accounts so as to achieve a better communication with the public and provide satisfactory public services. The government WeChat platform in the environment of Internet plus can realize reoptimizing allocation of information resources and benefits.

1. Development Status of Government Wechat Platform in the Environment of “Internet Plus”

According to “Government New Media Report in 2016”, by the end of 2016, the number of WeChat public accounts of the people's government concerning people's livelihood in our country have exceeded 98,000 and the WeChat public accounts of provincial and municipal governments have basically become systematic. “Government New Media Comprehensive Impact Report in 2016” shows that in 2016, non-passive push messages of WeChat public accounts have reached more than 7.6 million pieces, the number of non-passive push WeChat articles has exceeded 70 million and the cumulative reading is as high as 2.2 billion times.

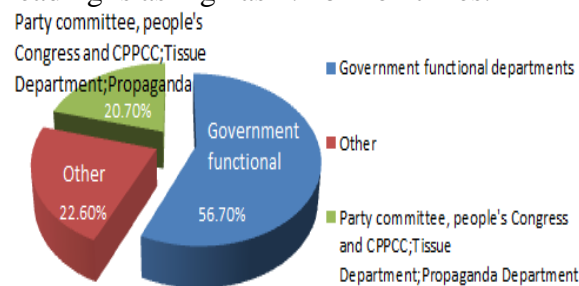


Figure 1 Distribution of Government WeChat Accounts (Statistics from “Government New Media Comprehensive Impact Report in 2016”)

As shown in Figure. 1, among all the government WeChat public accounts, 56.7% are officially registered by Government departments at all levels and those registered by Propaganda Department, Organization Department, Party Committee, NPC and CPPCC account for 20.7%.

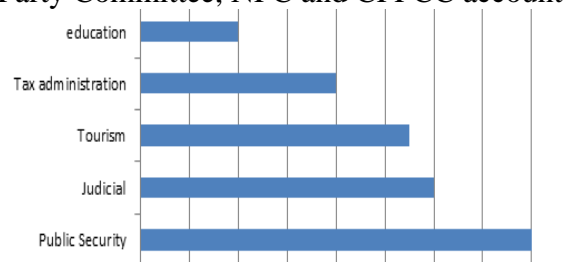


Figure 2 Distribution of Government WeChat Accounts in terms of departments. (Statistics from “Government New Media Comprehensive Impact Report in 2016”)

As shown in Figure. 2, among all the departments, the number of accounts from public security ranks the highest, followed by judicial system, tourism, tax system and education. They are the highest five. Most of the WeChat public accounts of governments at all levels use a customized menu for the sake of a better service and a better information channel for public.

Compare government WeChat platform and other platform for governance. With the advancement of Internet, traditional media cannot satisfy public needs, and e-government is first presented to public in the form of government websites. In this era of Internet plus, attracting public attention is the advantage of we-media. Therefore, government Microblog, government WeChat, government APP have become “a new trend” of e-government

Judging from the application and development of the above-mentioned four platforms, each has its own emphasis, providing its targeted while not overlapped services. The following table shows the similarities and differences between the four platforms.

Table 1. Comparison of Four Platforms.

	Criteria	Governmentwebsite	Microblog	WeChat	APP
Platform environment	Network environment	Mainly traditional network	Mobile network+ traditional network	Mainly mobile network	Mainly mobile network
	Internet devices	Mainly computer	Computer + smart phone	Smart phone	Smart phone
Information service	Message passing	Passive passing	Passive passing	Active passing	Active passing
	Completeness of information	complete	Fragmented+ restricted	Complete	Complete
	Convenience level	Average	High	High	Average
	Instantaneity	Slow	In time	Instant	Fast
	Content	Mainly text +images	Mainly text +images	Text+images+ video+ audio	Text +images+ video+ audio
	Direction propagation	Not supported	Supported	Supported	Supported
	Authority level	High	Medium	High	High
Affairs service	Affairs	Nationwide	Partly restricted	Partly restricted	Partly restricted
	Service channel	Mainly online	Online + offline	Online+offline	Mainly online
	Service object	Mainly individuals and enterprises	Mainly netizens	Mainly netizens	Mainly netizens
	Interaction ways	Little variety	Little variety	Much variety	Medium variety
	Instantaneity of response	A little lagging	Quick response	Quick response	Quick response
	Privacy level	Low	Medium	High	High
Others	Online payment	Partly available	Available	Available	Available
	Security level	With great disparity	Mediumly safe	Safe	Safe
	Relationship development level	Low	Low	High	Medium
	Intelligence level	Low	Medium	High	High
	Maintenance cost level	High	Low	Low	High

It can be seen from the above form that government WeChat platform has obvious features. It uses Tencent WeChat public platform as technical support, not only enabling the relevant government departments to focus on their own work, but also sparing technical efforts and reducing operating costs. Users can get access to government WeChat accounts via mobile phones and tablets. Through message pushing services, the platform can satisfy the personalized needs of public. As long as the user follows government WeChat account, the corresponding department would actively send messages to him or her through the platform, which makes government affairs information switch from “passively open to public” to “actively sent to users”. Thanks to the its instantaneity and privacy, users can have “one-on-one” communication and interaction with the

corresponding government department through texts or voice messages, which is quite convenient for users. (Jing Guo, 2015)

2. Problems Currently Existing in Government WeChat Platform

To see how mobile phone users in Henan Province view the current government WeChat platform, the author conducted a survey and inquired some government affairs civil servants and public media staff. Based on the views of these staff members, a questionnaire themed “How do you view the current government WeChat platform?” was designed, with subjects being users aged from 15 to 30, users aged from 31 to 45, and users aged above 45, including 60 males and 40 females. 100 valid questionnaires have been collected.

The data collected are as follows:

Table 2 Questionnaire on People’s View on Government WeChat Platform.

Are you willing to follow and use government WeChat platfrm?			
	Willing	Moderately willing	Not willing
Aged 15-30	80%	18%	2%
Aged 31-45	52%	33%	15%
Aged above 45	25%	45%	30%
Problems Currently Existing in Government WeChat Platform(Multiple choices)			
	Students	Media workers and civil servants	Freelancers
Difficulty in getting access to a real government WeChat account.	37%	15%	47%
Government WeChat accounts function badly.	70%	52%	65%
Messages and information posted is boring and useless.	66%	22%	19%
Lack of offline interaction	80%	48%	60%
Simplex function forms	34%	23%	33%
False messages or information posted	0	0	1%
Government WeChat accounts are in name only.	55%	22%	25%
Others	18%	22%	7%

Based on the above data, it can be concluded that most people are willing to follow Government WeChat accounts and show a keen interest in what are provided on the platform while showing some concerns as well.

2.1. The Credibility of Government WeChat Platform

As a new tool of governance, Government WeChat platform should obtain a reliable certification and have diversified elements for improving its credibility so as to be accepted by public. Unlike government Microblog, whose certification body is the relevant departments or agencies and non-profit organizations, the certifier of Government WeChat platform has the spokesman’s attitude and position, representing the image of the government. Currently, the lack of credibility of Government WeChat platform mainly lies in two aspects: one is fake government WeChat accounts, and the other is the problems in managing the platform. (Chaoxian Chen, 2013)

2.2. Problems in the content posted on Government WeChat platform

Although Government WeChat platform maintains a solemn and rigorous style in pushing information which is strictly controlled, some problems such as the simple form of posting media content and the high degree of homogeneity of news content still appear due to lack of experience. The multiplicity of news articles from the old chapter of the thematic news fail to meet the WeChat users’ reading needs, and frequent and simple news content will reduce the users’ interest, so multiplicity of content is not conducive to create a favourable environment for the healthy

development of government WeChat platform. They can be summarized in four aspects: 1. A lack of affinity in content; 2. Simple content and services; 3. The forms are not diversified enough; 4. Unreasonable posting time and posting cycle.

2.3. Insufficient interaction of some Government WeChat platform with public

Nowadays, due to the restriction of management and human resources, some Government WeChat accounts are indeed unable to realize the one-on-one instant interaction with mobile phone users, specifically in the delaying of response to public's messages, delaying of feedback for public's opinion and investment and the slow updating of information. How the government treats the maintenance of the information platform and its attitude of serving the people are the key to whether the "micro-governance" can really be reasonably and fully utilized.

2.4. Response to Public Opinion on Government WeChat Platform

"WeChat public opinion" is one in this new media era of "Internet plus". Public accounts and Moments constitute the best intermediary for the dissemination of public opinions. Government agencies, enterprises and a large number of celebrities have settled in WeChat. They are forming China's network media pattern by organized dissemination, mass communication and interpersonal communication. For WeChat accounts of an emergency nature, a slight deviation is not tolerated due to the very high accuracy of transmission requirements, so it is important to assume the responsibility of early mobile networks warning when unexpected incidents occur. (Lv Lv, 2014)

3. Development and Improvement of Government WeChat Platform

Compared with the government microblog, government WeChat is quite similar in the improvement of system management. WeChat has its unique channel of communication. WeChat public accounts and personal WeChat accounts jointly affect the dissemination and the relationship between WeChat members is more based on the real life. Compared with government microblog, it is different in forms of communication, the accuracy of information delivery, the authenticity of the content and the degree of information interference. To improve government WeChat platform, the author suggests the following measures:

3.1. Correctly Define Government WeChat Platform

There are two official definitions of government WeChat: one defines it as a tool for mass communication; the other is that it is committed to services. In light of the public's opinion on WeChat, it is not difficult to find that WeChat does not have such a large number of audiences as Weibo. Instead, most of the followers have regional restrictions, such as the accounts of Zhengzhou Traffic Police, Xuchang Traffic Police and Xinyang Traffic Police. But the accuracy of its disseminated information can be guaranteed, and the authority of government information plays an all the more important role of "pillar".

Take Xinyang City of Henan Province as an example. The city has many WeChat accounts which are mainly used to facilitate the exchange of work, reporting work progress, joint deliberations and decision-making. Among them, Xinyang Public Security Bureau, Xinyang City Bureau of Letters and Complaints, Xinyang City Bureau of Justice and Xinyang City Public Security Bureau Citizen reporting rank the top of the list. Since all the departments in the city have their WeChat groups, these WeChat public accounts can connect the various WeChat groups, facilitating the communication and interaction between each group in ways of business guidance, public opinion handling, and the implementation of real-name WeChat registration and filing. To sum up, the function of WeChat administration is to disseminate official and authoritative information to the region, innovatively serve the local people, and display a positive government image through the network platform of information dissemination.

3.2. Establish a Sound Government WeChat Platform Operating and Management Mechanism, to Promote a Dynamic Development of Government WeChat Platform

The future government WeChat platform should have an efficient, standardized and normal operating mechanism, from news posting to service interaction, from promotion to operation. At present, the top priorities are to establish an effective news distribution system and to develop professional government WeChat service teams. For the development of government WeChat platform, the author suggests the following approaches:

(1) Establish a unified, high-standard and professional team responsible for posting daily news on government WeChat platform.

(2) Work out government WeChat content and release working procedures. The information release should be based on three levels: convenience services information, news and insensitive topics, emergencies and sensitive events.

(3) Establish a mechanism for offline supervision and administration and establish a corresponding system for government WeChat, accurately defining the scope and breadth of published news content. Establish a cooperation mechanism, giving instant online WeChat response, to ensure the actual effect of interaction; each interaction will require reasonable and timely resolution by the relevant departments.

(4) Expand the publicity of government WeChat Account, with government affair inquiry and convenience services in parallel. Based on the total number of WeChat users, consider the proportion of followers of government WeChat accounts. The majority of government WeChat accounts have not got enough attention. In order to improve their popularity and awareness, various government WeChat accounts should expand its publicity besides posting news. In addition to the content-based development focus, government WeChat platform must pay attention to its promotion channels and terminals.

3.3. Enhance the Capability of Government WeChat in Coping Emergencies and Public Opinion Events

We should analyse the government WeChat platform in dealing with unexpected incidents. After hot events and emergencies broke out, people would like to know the real news and they would be satisfied if they can get the announcement of authority information in WeChat. Especially after the outbreak of the incident, relevant departments should take the initiative to publicize the government's credibility and increase the publicity of the WeChat public account to release information. Government departments should immediately take a clear stand in the WeChat field and make the news open to the public, while listening to people's opinions at the same time. Choosing an open, low-cost, high-precision communication channel is particularly necessary for the government's immediate announcing of messages. Of course, follow-up reports and public feedback are also important. The public will continue to be concerned about the disposal of the responsible persons by the government and the follow-up work after the incident. Therefore, the media still need to actively follow up and release instant messages. WeChat media should open up feedback channels and obtain the public attitudes and comments on this incident. That will help to maintain a benign relationship between the two parties and learn from the existing deficiencies in the government account in dealing with the incidents.

3.4. Guide the public to participate properly in the use, supervision of government WeChat Platform

The development of new media technology brings about new social problems, so the government should guide and manage through legislation. For WeChat governance, it is necessary for relevant departments to standardize systems, laws and regulations, and create a sound order from the aspects of government administration, public opinion supervision and network administration. For ordinary users, the government should guide them in using and participating, give proper warnings and protect people's rights and interests, and advocate rational and correct handling of complaints and interactions on government WeChat platform.

Take the WeChat public account of the Department of Education in Henan Province as an example, the introduction of the account is “For Henan education consulting, for Henan education image, for serving teachers, students and the masses.” The account lists its attractive service items such as “college entrance examination”, “New Media Alliance”, “convenience services”, “complaints and inquiry”, “documents and notices”, “public notices”, “convenient phone numbers”, “official microblogging”. Click “college entrance examination”, there are 2016 college entrance examination performance query, admission query, enrolment plan query, as well as enrolment column, exclusive materials, the admission scores of previous years. They are clear at a glance.

The account also sets automatic reply using number 1-5. Send number 1, and you will obtain the latest educational information in Henan Province; the contents of the consultation; send number 2, and you can get special topic on learning good school principals, and follow “Jiao Yulu spirit”; number 3 is an access to the Department’s charity activity “Send you warm water.” Reply number 4, and you can obtain information about forbidden acts about holidays and complaint telephone numbers; reply number 5 and you can get automatic reply about the telephone hotlines of relevant departments, numbers of academic records, employment and registration.

The author believes that, according to the accuracy and relative anonymity of WeChat communication, the platform for monitoring and reporting on the government WeChat has expanded the public’s right to speak and provided a platform for civic information. In “Notice on Better Responding to Public Opinions on Government Affairs” issued by the State Council in 2017, the government is required to respond to public opinions and clarify the government’s responsibility to respond to public opinion on public affairs, and public opinion involving major special projects and emergencies should require Press conference held within 24 hours while other government public opinions should also be responded within 48 hours. Relevant department heads or spokesmen should attend the press conference. The “Notice” also emphasizes the need to strengthen supervision, inspection and operation training.

The ultimate goal of government WeChat platform is the government returning the governance to the hand of the people. If the government agencies can actively abandon all the backward thinking of government WeChat platform as a one-way propaganda tool, utilize this new platform of mobile media to meet the demands of the masses, focus on guiding people to solve practical problems using lawful and reasonable approaches, and achieve real communication between officials and citizens, then in fact, anti-corruption can be effectively done to a large extent. That can be called “WeChat, all people’s power.”

4. Conclusion

By doing the research on the topic of government WeChat platform, the author has investigated the development process of government WeChat platform in the environment of “Internet plus”, made a clearer understanding on government’s attitude towards the new media platform from the perspective of communication, and made an in-depth analysis of the existing problems of government WeChat platform in all aspects of information dissemination.

In the environment of “Internet plus”, the number of mobile social users in China will further increase substantially in 2017. More and more Internet users will be using WeChat to participate in the dissemination and discussion of emergencies and public hot topics. The new social media will certainly become a new channel of communication that affects our public opinion. Therefore, the Party and government agencies will attach more importance to the “Internet plus” mobile platform of information communication.

There is still much improvement work to do in the construction of government WeChat platform. Government departments should pay close attention to its construction and continue to develop its diversified functions and improve the level of WeChat online services so as to attract the public attention to government WeChat platform. Only in that case can government WeChat platform play a good role in guiding public opinion, improving government credibility and providing public services, thereby promoting Internet governance. Internet governance refers to the government use of the Internet and new media in communicating with the public, in keeping informed of social

trends and public demands, in publicizing and explaining their own principles and policies, and in taking the initiative to seek public opinions and suggestions. That emphasizes the people-centred principle, emphasizes democracy, openness, participation and negotiation. To solve problems through the participation of different parties can achieve a benign interaction between the government and the public. We believe that all government departments will step up in using WeChat communication platform, take the initiative in information dissemination, and create a new interaction and information dissemination area led by government WeChat platform in this “Internet plus” era.

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