
The Role and Impact of Social Media in Public Governance

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Abstract: With the development of information technology, social media has been integrated into all links of public governance, reshaping the models and paths of traditional governance. Based on the background of the times and practical foundation, this paper analyzes the positive roles of social media in building communication bridges and strengthening public participation, while directly addressing potential challenges such as information chaos and irrational participation. On this basis, it further proposes practical paths to optimize the participation of social media in public governance, aiming to improve the modernization level of public governance and provide theoretical reference and practical insights for building a social governance community featuring joint construction, joint governance, and shared benefits.

Keywords: social media; public governance; governance modernization; public participation; collaborative governance

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1. Introduction

Amid the rapid development of information technology, social media is profoundly changing the model of public governance. From the information dissemination pattern dominated by traditional media to the current era where social media has become an important channel for the public to obtain information and participate in public affairs, its role and impact in public governance have become increasingly prominent. This paper focuses on exploring the positive roles and potential challenges of social media in public governance, and puts forward optimization paths, in order to provide reference for improving the modernization level of public governance.

2. Era background and practical foundation of social media participating in public governance

2.1. Technological change drives the reconstruction of governance scenarios

Over the past forty years, breakthroughs in information technology have reshaped the underlying logic of information dissemination, and people have become increasingly dependent on new information sources to obtain news and government information. According to a foreign survey, about 67% of the global population are independent mobile phone users. Approximately 45% and 42% of the global population are active on social media, and 42% are mobile social media users. It is evident that the widespread coverage of mobile Internet has made social media an important bridge connecting

the government and the public. Today, the integration of technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing with social media has further expanded the channels and forms of information dissemination, enabling faster capture of public needs, precise delivery of governance information, and efficient integration of governance resources^[1]. Public governance has gradually shifted from being solely controlled by the government to collaborative governance.

2.2. High alignment between public governance needs and media functions

Public governance is a complex project centered on the vital interests of the people, improving social welfare, safeguarding and improving people's livelihood, resolving social contradictions, and promoting social equity. It requires the participation of the government, the public, etc., as well as efficient information dissemination and social mobilization capabilities. Social media has broken the communication barriers of traditional media, enabling real-time and interactive information dissemination, allowing government policies to reach the public quickly, and at the same time enabling the public's opinions and demands to be conveniently fed back to governance subjects^[2]. Content such as the handling of cases in public governance, the resolution of contradictions and disputes, and grass-roots services are closely related to the public's life and have high attention, becoming important topics on social media platforms and providing a rich content carrier for media participation in governance. For example, the "Fengqiao Experience", a model of grass-roots social governance in China, has not only become a business card showcasing "China's governance" through multi-channel dissemination on social media but also promoted the promotion and innovation of governance experience.

2.3. Driven by policy guidance and practical exploration

The Party Central Committee attaches great importance to the combination of media convergence development and social governance, and has issued a series of policies to promote media to play a greater role in social governance. The Guiding Opinions on Accelerating the In-depth Integration and Development of Media emphasizes building "four comprehensive" media, strengthening the service function of media, and promoting media to become an important channel for Party committees and governments to connect with the masses. Under policy guidance, governments at all levels have actively explored the governance application of social media. For example, China Media Group has launched the special program Rule of Law New Fengqiao, Xinhua News Agency's client has set up the "Beautiful 'Feng' Scenery Here" national shooting project, and local media have also created various people's livelihood service columns to promote the integration and application of social media in all links of public governance. At the same time, the public's awareness of participating in public affairs has been continuously enhanced, providing a solid mass foundation for social media to participate in governance.

3. Positive roles of social media in public governance

3.1. Building communication bridges and enhancing governance interactivity

Compared with traditional media, social media is faster and more humanized. It enables direct communication between individuals, organizations, and the public with faster and more convenient feedback, allowing communicators to deliver messages in real time and receive feedback quickly^[3]. The government can publish policy interpretations, government affairs information, public service notifications, and other content on social media accounts. When information needs to be continuously and timely updated, the advantages of social media are more prominent, which can effectively reduce communication costs. For example, the Indian government's Twitter platform aims to reduce traffic accidents and enhance public safety awareness; government affairs new media accounts at all levels in China publish content such as social security handling to deliver policy information to the public.

Social media also provides a convenient channel for the public to express their opinions and needs. The public can directly reflect their demands and put forward opinions to the government through messages, private messages, comments, and other methods^[4]. The Swedish National Police uses social media to conduct reflexive discussions and interactions with

citizens to improve the transparency of the police force and enhance public understanding and trust in law enforcement work; the Sister Xia Helps You column created by Hunan Rule of Law News has recovered more than 3 million yuan in economic losses for the masses by responding to public complaints and requests for help. The two-way interaction between the government and the public can make policies more in line with public opinion and improve governance efficiency.

3.2. Strengthening public participation and promoting the formation of a co-governance pattern

Public governance attaches importance to the role of multiple subjects, and public participation is an indispensable part of the modern social governance pattern. Social media can lower the threshold for public participation in governance, broaden participation channels, and stimulate the motivation for public participation^[5]. In other words, social media enables the public to conveniently obtain governance information and understand the progress of public affairs. At the same time, the interactivity of the platform allows the public to participate in the governance process, such as participating in policy discussions, supervising government behaviors, and putting forward suggestions for public services. The public's role in governance has gradually shifted to active participants. For example, regarding public services, functions such as "national shooting" and "on-the-spot reporting" on social media platforms can make the public participants and supervisors of public affairs, better solving problems such as urban management and environmental protection. Government departments in Suriname hope to increase transparency, public online participation, and public participation in public affairs decision-making processes through the use of social media to improve public trust. From the effect, some government agencies have successfully used social media to support citizens' online participation in public governance. This multi-subject co-governance model can break the limitations of single government governance and form a prototype of a governance community where everyone has responsibilities, fulfills their duties, and enjoys the benefits.

3.3. Improving governance transparency and strengthening power supervision

Transparency is an important principle of public governance and the foundation for safeguarding the public's right to know and right to supervision. Social media provides a platform for government information disclosure. The government takes the initiative to release information such as government affairs processes and financial expenditures, which can reduce information asymmetry and improve governance transparency^[6]. For example, county-level media convergence centers in China integrate functions such as government affairs handling, Party affairs information, and people's livelihood services on their clients, allowing the public to query relevant information at any time.

More importantly, social media has become an important tool for the public to supervise the government. In the traditional media environment, the public has limited channels for supervision and needs to spend high costs. Today, the public can shoot videos and publish images and texts to expose the inaction and arbitrary actions of some government departments, promoting the solution of problems. A study on the impact of social media communication on government accountability and openness in Nigeria reveals that traditional media is difficult to strengthen social and government issues, and social media has become an important platform for citizens to publicly criticize the government and promote accountability, which can effectively strengthen government accountability. The public in China exposes food safety issues and environmental pollution incidents through social media, which can urge relevant departments to further strengthen supervision and rectification. This extensive social supervision can effectively curb the abuse of power and promote the government to administer according to law and with integrity.

3.4. Optimizing governance efficiency and improving service precision

By integrating and analyzing user data on social media platforms, the government can gain a deeper understanding of public needs, focus on hot issues and potential problems, thereby optimizing service supply^[7]. For example, by analyzing public messages, complaints, and other information on social media, the government can grasp high-frequency people's livelihood issues and prioritize resource allocation to solve them. In fields such as medical care and education, social media data can interpret the differences in public demand for services and provide more targeted services.

The role of social media in crisis management is also particularly prominent. In the event of major emergencies, the government can quickly release authoritative information on social media to stabilize social emotions and avoid the spread of rumors. The government can also collect help information and on-site conditions released by the public on social platforms to timely grasp the progress of events, allocate rescue materials, and improve crisis response efficiency. In addition, the development of models such as “media + government affairs” and “media + services” allows the public to handle businesses such as social security, traffic violation inquiries, and document appointments directly on social media platforms without going to offline windows.

3.5. Shaping governance consensus and uniting social forces

The effective advancement of public governance requires the whole society to form a common value orientation and governance consensus. Using social media to spread positive energy and promote mainstream values can guide the public to establish correct legal and moral concepts and create a good social atmosphere. Using it to objectively report the truth of events and interpret laws and regulations can effectively channel social emotions and resolve contradictions and disputes. Public welfare publicity and the spread of positive energy topics on the platform can also stimulate the public’s sense of social responsibility, creating a social atmosphere of courage to do what is right, mutual assistance and friendship, and joint construction and shared benefits^[8].

4. Potential challenges and negative impacts of social media in public governance

4.1. Information chaos impairs governance order

False information and online rumors frequently spread on social media platforms, which can mislead public perception, even trigger social panic, and disrupt normal governance order. False interpretations of people’s livelihood policies may arouse public misunderstanding of the government and affect the implementation effect of policies. Problems such as information overload and fragmentation on platforms can also lead to a large amount of irrelevant and repetitive information occupying public attention, while authoritative governance information is submerged instead^[9].

4.2. Risks of irrational public participation and polarization

The interaction mode of social media may amplify group emotional polarization. When participating in discussions on public affairs, some citizens are easily influenced by extreme views and emotional expressions, leading to the original issues being overshadowed and escalating into online abuse and personal attacks. For example, former US President Trump was one of the most active heads of state on social media such as Twitter, whose public discourse was dominated by simplistic, uncivilized, and impulsive arguments. The application of social media may erode the rational space and authenticity in US public discourse, bringing the risk of public discourse disorder. The “echo chamber effect” of social media tends to trap users in homogeneous information circles, continuously strengthening their existing views. On some controversial governance issues, the opposition between different groups’ views may be amplified, and even trigger online and offline conflicts, increasing the difficulty of governance.

4.3. Tests on government governance capabilities

Public opinion on social media ferments rapidly and spreads widely. The government needs to promptly address the reasonable demands of the public to avoid triggering public opinion crises and damaging government credibility. Faced with false and negative information spreading online, the government needs to release authoritative information in a timely manner to clarify the facts and guide the direction of public opinion. However, some government departments still lack sufficient response capabilities. In addition, when using social media, the government needs to clarify its positioning, update account content in a timely manner, and maintain good interaction with the public. Nevertheless, some local governments only release information on social media without exerting its interactive, service, and supervisory functions,

which affects governance efficiency.

5. Exploration of paths to optimize social media participation in public governance

5.1. Improve governance mechanisms and enhance government response capabilities

A growing number of citizens are paying attention to social media, and the government's sources and dissemination of news and information are increasingly dependent on social media^[10]. Against this transformation, the government should establish a dedicated team for public opinion monitoring and application, use big data technology to conduct real-time monitoring of relevant public opinion on social media, and achieve early detection and disposal of potential risks. At the same time, it is necessary to formulate public opinion response plans to quickly respond to and address public demands and negative public opinion.

Clarify the functional positioning of government affairs new media, focus on content quality, regularly update policy interpretations, service information, and other content, and promptly reply to public messages and inquiries. Government affairs new media at different levels and departments can carry out linkage, establishing a working mechanism for information sharing and resource integration. For example, provincial-level media can play a connecting role, promoting the interconnection of county-level media services within the province and coordinating cross-regional media and network information services.

5.2. Guide rational public participation and improve participation quality

Efforts should be made to enhance the public's information discrimination and rational thinking abilities through school education, media guidance, and other methods, guiding the public to correctly use social media to participate in public affairs, and ensuring rational expression and legal participation. The government should promptly adopt and feedback the implementation of reasonable demands and opinions put forward by the public, enhance the public's sense of participation and gain, and stimulate their enthusiasm and initiative in participating in governance.

5.3. Promote technological innovation and improve the intelligent level of governance

New technologies represented by artificial intelligence and blockchain continue to empower the transformation of social media. Artificial intelligence technology can improve the efficiency and accuracy of information review and public opinion monitoring. Blockchain technology can be used to ensure the authenticity, security, and traceability of data, enhancing the transparency and credibility of governance.

Promote the innovation of the "media + government affairs + services" model. Integrate social media platforms with government service resources to build an integrated public service platform, providing the public with convenient government affairs handling, people's livelihood services, policy consulting, and other services, realizing "one-stop" governance and improving the efficiency of public services.

6. Conclusion

The rise of social media has brought new opportunities and challenges to public governance. It plays an irreplaceable role in building communication bridges, strengthening public participation, and improving governance efficiency. However, problems such as information chaos and irrational participation also restrict the full play of its governance effectiveness. To promote the sound development of social media in public governance, it is necessary for multiple subjects such as the government, platforms, and the public to work together, give full play to the positive role of social media, avoid its negative impacts, promote the modernization of the public governance system and governance capacity, and build a social governance community where everyone has responsibilities, fulfills their duties, and enjoys the benefits.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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