

Studying the Management Mechanism of Government Microblogs in China: A Research Plan

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the research goals and plan of a study on the management mechanism of Chinese government microblogs. This study will conduct an empirical study with a perspective of public administration. The study attempts to explore government official microblogs' internal and external context, management mechanism and actual effectiveness, and then further investigate the relationship among those variables so as to build a systematic theoretical model.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.6.1 [Management of Computing Information Systems]:
Project and People Management-Management Techniques

General Terms

Management, Measurement, Performance

Keywords

Government microblogs, Management, Social Media, China

1. INTRODUCTION

By the mid of 2011, Chinese microblog accounts have exceeded 200 million. With its network effect taking shape, microblogs has been playing a more and more important role in Chinese social and political life. Consequently, the year of 2010 was named by Chinese netizens as "China's first year in microblog's era". By taking advantage of the rapidly growing microblog community, government could also open and run official microblogs to interact with citizens, enhance government information services, keep tracking with public opinion, help with emergency response, improve government credibility and further promote the development of e-governance. However, running "government official microblogs", a new social media, has posed great challenges to the current management mechanism, policies and regulations, governance style and institutional structure of Chinese government, and are also faced with a variety of constraints. Therefore, studying the management mechanism of

Chinese government official microblogs with a public administration perspective would have significant academic and practical value.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

International researchers have made some progress on managing social media by government. The Center for Technology in Government (CTG) identified several values sought from social media tools, and explored the main issues and concerns governments are facing, including resources, legal and regulatory ramifications, governance, making a business case, security, accessibility, perception and information overload [1]. Moreover, Hrdinova et al. identified eight essential elements for government social media policy, including employee access, account management, acceptable use, employee conduct, content, security, legal issues and citizen conduct [2]. National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) conducted a survey in 2010 and identified the main business drivers of government adopting social media [6].

Chinese scholars have also conducted some researches on government official blogs and microblogs. Liu Jia, by studying Obama's campaign, points out that social media could help to promote citizens' understanding of political knowledge and situation, gradually enhance citizens' basic political skills and cultivate the citizens' interests in political participation [4]. Li Duo investigates the positive effects of officials' microblogs on government and raises some issues that are concerned with official microblogs [3]. Liu Qiong [5], Shen Cuiting and Xiao Feng [7] also discuss the possible issues and disputes associated with official microblogs. Zhao Mengyang analyses the opportunities and challenges for constructing Chinese citizen society brought by microblogs [8].

Most Chinese scholars have discussed the potential impact, current issues and risks of government official microblogs from the perspectives of political science and political communication. Very few researches have studied the management mechanism of Chinese government official microblogs from a public administration perspective. Although American researches on governmental official microblog's management mechanism could have significant reference value to China, its fitness for China is limited due to China's unique national contextual. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the management mechanism of governmental official microblogs to fill the gap.

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3. RESEARCH PLAN

3.1 Research Questions

This study will conduct an empirical study on the management mechanism of Chinese government official microblogs with a public administration perspective. The study attempts to explore Chinese government official microblogs' internal and external context, management mechanism and actual effectiveness, and then further investigate the relationship among those variables so as to build a systematic theoretical framework. Based on the findings, the study would also give some advices and suggestions to Chinese government with regard to official microblogs. The whole study will explore the following research questions:

- 1) What are internal and external context of government official microblogs in China?

Different internal and external environment could bring out different management mechanism of government official microblogs. Therefore, in order to study the management mechanism of Chinese government official microblogs, we should first examine their internal and external context including:

Social, economic and technical context: overall development status of economy and education, overall informatization status, citizens' informatization awareness and abilities of using microblogs, users' maturity and integrity, public participation awareness and ability, etc.

Institutional, policy, organizational context: institutional factors, legal and policy factors, government level, leaders' awareness of and attention to microblogs, organizational goals, organizational structure, departmental features, agency interests, organizational culture, government's overall informatization status, etc.

- 2) What are the current management mechanisms of government official microblogs?

Studying various management mechanisms adopted by government official microblogs under different internal and external factors would at least include the following issues:

Strategy: goals and motivations of opening government microblogs, positioning of microblogs, functions of microblogs etc.

Management and Policy: Microblogs management structure, account management and maintenance, leadership, management process, norms of use for civil servants, norms of use for citizens, staffing and capacity training, financial resources, cross-boundary interaction and coordination, legal issues handling, and risk management;

Information and Content: Content categories, information resources, language style, interaction and feedback, information security, privacy protection;

Technology: Technical capabilities, platform stability, convenience, security, technical support and service.

- 3) What actual effects have government official microblogs achieve?

Effects Types: political effects, administrative effects, social effects, economic effects, etc.;

Beneficiaries: government, citizens, enterprises, social organizations, civil servants;

- 4) What are the interactive relationship between these variables including the internal and external factors, the management mechanism and the actual effects?

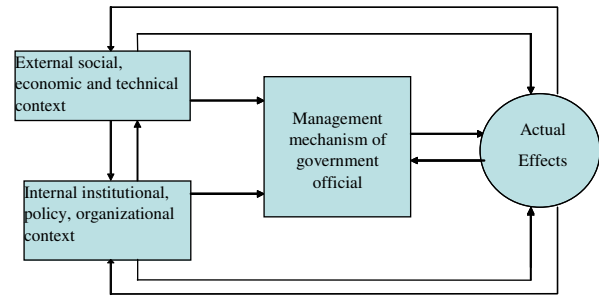


Figure 1. Hypothesized Interaction among Variables

3.2 Research Methods

This study will carry out an empirical study with 15-20 Chinese government official microblogs. Because provincial and municipal governments are playing leading roles in government-citizen interaction in China, this research will focus on these two government levels. Several approaches will be adopted in the process of collecting primary data including semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group, random interview with users, questionnaires, and observation on microblogs. Secondary data will be collected from government official microblogs content and government documents. Next, with the support of Atlas.ti and SPSS software, both qualitative and quantitative analysis will be carried out. This study is expected to be completed in 1-2 years.

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