

## **The Reform of Chinese Public Management Mode in the New Media Context: Dilemmas and Countermeasures**

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### **Abstract**

*From the perspective of mass communication, this paper researches how new media widely accelerates the reform of Chinese traditional mode of public management. After arguing the fact that traditional media complies with and maintains the structure of Chinese pyramidal government management, we discuss that new media has made a strong impact on traditional media and analyze management dilemma and technology dilemma existing in our traditional public management mode. In order to adapt for the development of new media and shake off the fetters of double dilemmas, the paper puts forwards related countermeasures and suggestions for transforming traditional management mode, including adjusting traditional management thoughts, constructing double levels governance model, regulating behaviors of netizens' participation in government management and improving information management technology.*

**Keywords:** new media, traditional media, public management pyramid management mode, network governance

### **1. Introduction**

Chinese public management mode is in a long and difficult transition period. Historically, centralized management structure could be viewed as a pyramid, which possessed tight and top-down hierarchy (Harold, 2005; Göbel, 2011; Chen, 2011). It constructed a kind of dominant form of Chinese government management. As an inherent product from political and administrative system with Chinese characteristics, the traditional management mode had been deeply rooted in brains of government officials at all levels. Besides, under the influence of path dependence, this mode still played an essential role in China. Since the policy of reformation and opening had been implemented, in order to improve the administrative efficiency, lower the administrative cost, transform government function thoroughly and establish public service government, Chinese government made the institutional reform for seven times successively. However, all the reform effects were not obvious, so the pyramid management mode could not change substantially except from adjusting some departments and personnel slightly. Thus, the internal force from government organizations are not likely to break the vested benefit pattern. Therefore, relying on the external force can be thought as an effective way of promoting the change of traditional government management mode. It has been found that this force can be played by mass media, particularly new media (Tai & Sun, 2007).

From the perspective of mass communication, with the rapid development of digital information and mobile communication technology, mass media in China have transformed from traditional media to new media and this transformation speed has been far more than the speed of Chinese public management reform. It inevitably brings a fact that Chinese public management mode can not adapt to the need of governing the public problems reported and revealed by modern media. On the one hand, traditional media are becoming increasingly declining; on the other hand, the influence of new media are expanding rapidly, and some traditional media can be transformed into new media by aid of digital technology (Shi, 2009). These changes pose a big challenge for Chinese traditional pyramid management mode.

The article is structured as follows: we first indicate main characters of traditional media and how they maintain and consolidate pyramid management mode in China.

And then, we analyze management dilemma and technology dilemma brought by new media under Chinese pyramid management mode. Countermeasures of how government administrators deal with these problems in the age of new media are presented in the subsequent section. Finally, the conclusion follows.

## ***2. Traditional Media Maintaining and Consolidating Pyramid Management Mode***

Before the internet era, traditional media, such as television, newspaper, broadcast and magazine, held a dominant position in releasing the latest news and providing the newest information for the public. Furthermore, it deeply effected the quantity and contents of information the public accepted. Under the authority rule (Harris, 1976), wealth rule (Kendall, 2011), elite rule (Brody, 1991) and organization rule (Beck et al., 2002), traditional media can display intense political complexion. In China, traditional media characterized by one-dimensional output communication are also restricted to Chinese pyramid public management mode. As a result, traditional media are more likely to lose political independence when performing corresponding functions and duties. It is rather difficult for traditional media to stand an objective and neutral position to provide relatively comprehensive and accurate information for the public and to raise doubts to the officials who infringe citizen's rights and interests.

In the process of Chinese public management, traditional media can be viewed as a kind of information dissemination tool government organizations use to maintain and strengthen the pyramid management mode. All the administrative departments which locate in rigorous hierarchy system need to take traditional media as an important information dissemination medium to mold the public opinion which is beneficial for controlling the public and stabilizing society. Meanwhile, as traditional media with the color of government-run possess social power endowed by government sectors, they can actively serve as the mouthpiece of the political party and governments and they are subservient to the will of government officials (Zhao, 1998; Chen & Shi, 2001; Liebman, 2005). The performances that traditional media maintain and consolidate the pyramid management mode are as follows:

Firstly, communication channels are relatively fixed. Not only can the traditional media which have relatively fixed communication channels lower the efficiency of information dissemination and impair the degree of importance of dissemination contents, but also they constrain the dissemination scope severely and decrease the influence on the receivers. Because the dissemination speed of traditional media proves to be very slow and the spread range is also small, the public who can acquire the latest information are rather limited. Thus, it is hard to cause strong resonance among the public to a certain social issue and to form public opinion events, which is convenient for government organizations to manage the public directly.

Secondly, information sources are relatively concentrated. Under the pyramid management mode, the information sources are mainly concentrated in the powerful stratum of traditional media (e.g., Xinhua News Agency). These strong media strictly select and process the first-hand material they acquire under the constructions of the current mainstream ideology and governmental officials' purposes and preferences, and then convey local media in the form of wire copies to control the dissemination process. Thus, governmental officials can influence the agenda setting with the help of traditional media in order to strengthen their own legitimacy as well as public credibility, and make a further consolidation of pyramid management structure.

Thirdly, communication directions are relatively single. Traditional media characterized by one-dimensional communication output reflect that the information communication channels are constructed imperfectly, which means lacking the information feedback path. That is to say, the public can only passively accept the second-hand material traditional media provide, but can not express their attitudes towards acquired information through feedback path. Additionally, they also can not pass on their interest demands and value preferences up to decision-makers via traditional media. From this view, traditional media that are merely provided with one - dimensional output function can hardly communicate and interact with the public. Although this kind of "zero interaction" is easy to lower the probability of civic participation, but it can achieve the governmental goal of keeping stability successfully.

## ***3. New Media Challenging and Disorganizing Pyramid Management Mode***

With the rapid development of modern digital information technology, new media become an inevitable product in this age. New media include digital television, digital broadcasting, touch media, mobile phone, internet, and etc.

Different from traditional media, new media are characterized by mass information accumulation, timely data production and material dissemination bilaterally, which are more fit for the tempo of information communication at a high pace in modern society. As a typical representative of mass media, new media can not only provide a convenient interaction platform for our human being, but also enhance the information communication efficiency.

In China, new media have experienced more than ten years' development. The number of audience has surpassed the number of people using traditional media, and this trend will become more obvious over the years. Among all types of new media, the internet is used relatively widely. It showed in "The 32nd Statistic Report on Chinese Internet Development" that by the end of Jun. 2013, Chinese netizens had reached 591 million, increasing by 26.56 million compared with last year, and that the internet popularization rate had arrived to 44.1%, which had been 2% more than 2012. In addition, in the respect of utilizing network tools, the number of netizens using search engine had been 470 million (79.6% utilization ratio); the number of netizens who read netnews had been 461 million (78% utilization ratio); the number of netizens having personal blog and homepage had been 401 million (68% utilization ratio); the number of netizens who enjoying social-networking sites had been 288 million (48.8% utilization ratio); the number of netizens using micro-blog had been 331 million (56% utilization ratio). It is not difficult to find that the number of Chinese netizens are increasing year by year and the internet tools are becoming diversified. New media represented by internet are accelerating to change the ways Chinese people obtain and convey information and communicate with each other. Influenced by new media, the information structure and the value structure in the whole society are being faced with unprecedented deconstruction and reconstruction. Under this background, Chinese traditional pyramid management mode will be disorganized gradually because it has not adapted with the need of modern social governance.

### **3.1 Management Dilemmas in the Pyramid Mode under the Influence of New Media**

From the management level, before the advent of new media, governments could barely mediate choices dilemma in a closed surrounding. However, the prompt appearance of new media have deeply affected inherent management thoughts and behaviors of Chinese government officials and have gradually transformed their management ideas which emphasize keeping stability merely. Moreover, new media compel them to seek applicable management methods to cope with fast developments from new media. New media have made a strong impact on Chinese traditional public management mode and reformed the existing pyramid management structure. Specifically, management dilemmas encountered by government administrators are mainly showed in the followings.

1. Mass information accumulation can interfere with administrators' attention. In modern society, information has become an important resource. It is a necessary premise and guarantee for government officials to acquire accurate and effective information immediately. In the era of new media, mass information can accumulate quickly in a short time, but only a small part of information utilized by government authorities is submerged in the information flow which contains a large number of redundant, ineffective and even false things. For government administrators, because they lack the ability to tackle the problem of information storm, mass information accumulation is bound to intervene their attention. They can not discern and pick useful information from the mass, which increases the difficulty of acquiring information they want and decreases the efficiency of making scientific and reasonable policies.

2. Instant information dissemination can tribulate administrators' ability to respond rapidly. With the information society running up today, government administrators establish a series of communication and interaction platforms for the public, such as official website, official micro-blog, to understand the public opinion. But in the process of real interaction, governments are still difficult to extricate themselves from problems of hysteretic information delivery, tardy information renewal and inefficient information feedback. Therefore, apart from using official interaction ways, the public can also take advantage of unofficial interactive channels, such as civil forum, virtual community, personal micro-blog to express their own viewpoints about social issues or reveal part of officials' corruptive or tortious behaviors. Noteworthy is the fact that the information conveyed by this two kinds of interactive platforms (especially the unofficial platform) can spread in a large scale as sudden as a lightning speed. Government administrators are unable to reflect towards those information in time, let alone take actions to deal with it. If things go on like this, the government management will fall into crisis.

3. Transborder information flow can challenge administrators' management manners. If performances on instant information dissemination indicate how new media affect Chinese government administrators from the perspective of time, then the performances on transborder information flow will demonstrate how new media exert influence on government institutions in China from the perspective of space. In the era of new media, since channels of information dissemination present a kind of diversified state, the information can freely flow everywhere and diffuse widely through various methods in the dissemination process. This kind of flow and diffusion is non-linear and borderless. Transborder information flow has a profound effect on Chinese government institutions and government administrators. Firstly, the hierarchical dissemination construction from top to bottom within the government is being disorganized gradually. With the information flowing freely, vertical and horizontal information barriers from the internal government organizations are broken; information can be enjoyed together. Secondly, government administrators have not been able to occupy the entrance of internet information (Wei, 2014). The internet information entrances are networked thoroughly under the influence of new media. Main internet tools, such as web portals (Sina, Sohu), search engines (Baidu, Google), social networks (Facebook, Twitter), cloud (Dropbox, Kingsoft Kuaipan) and micro-blog, have begun to capture the internet information entrances. As a result, government administrators in pyramid management mode have not been able to occupy those influential information on the internet actively. They are forced to be besieged by mass information and have to accept the external supervision constantly.

4. Citizen Journalists promote administrators to transform the way of thinking of public management. In the age of new media, information is not a certain privilege any more. Some citizens use internet tools to record social issues and public problems happening around them, to push forward their developing processes and to disclose the truth concealed behind the fact, and these people are called "citizen journalists" (Good, 2006; Xia, 2009; Greer & McLaughlin, 2010). For instances, "Tiger Temple", who was known as the first Chinese citizen journalist, took the bloody crime happening on the street of Wangfujing in Beijing on Nov. 7th, 2004 on line; Shuguang Zhou disclosed the most noticeable tartar (nail household) from Chongqing; "North Wind" revealed PX event of Xiamen; and etc. With the enhancement of Chinese citizens' awareness of democratic participation and the improvement of their ability to discern and select information, it can be predicted that more and more citizens will participate in the group of citizen journalists in future. These citizen journalists who play a leading role can not only motivate more people to join in the discussion and dissemination about a certain problem, but also attract traditional media to take part in reporting and publishing events they issue. Citizen journalists possess the first-hand information closer to the truth. These valuable materials are much more likely to trigger a large-scale topic effect through conveying and diffusing on the internet platform, which can transform administrators' traditional public management thinking of maintaining stability.

5. Frequent occurrence of public opinion events can accelerate the reform of traditional public management mode. In Aug. 2013, Chinese Academy of Social Science published "The Report on Chinese Social Opinion and Crisis Management (2013)", which indicated that the number of public opinion events from 2010 to 2012 increased year by year. In addition, the report pointed out that from the subject of public opinion events, focus issues were reported the most in local governments, private enterprises and national ministries and commissions ranked 2nd and 3rd separately; from the type of public opinion events, most of them occurred in enterprise finance, laws and rules violation. Under the background of new media, social issues and emergencies are very easy to attract the public attention. These public opinions will experience the process of brewing and fermentation, and become public opinion events finally. For example, in the rail crash accident of Wenzhou on 23rd July, 2011, the public used different internet tools (e.g., micro-blog, forum) to spread the whole event, to send out help signal and to give solving details the first time. It was evident that the traditional public management structure had made government administrators be trapped in a passive situation. They were not the earliest information receiver and did not expect the suddenness and severity of this emergency as well, so it was impossible for them to take measures to settle the event immediately. In particular, when the scope of citizen participation in this accident expanded largely, an obscure problem of financing chain breakage hidden behind the railway ministry was rooted out. At that time, government authorities were confronted with serious public crisis and their legitimacy encountered severe challenges. For another example, the event of Meimei Guo, through the internet amplification, pushed the Red Cross Society of China to the cusp of public opinion, leading to a sharp decline of national public credibility. Thus it can be seen that high-density occurrence and large-scale diffusion of public opinion events on the internet can change current public opinion atmosphere in China. Meanwhile, it can also make a transformative influence on Chinese traditional public management structure.

### **3.2 Technology Dilemmas in the Pyramid Mode under the Influence of New Media**

From the technology level, modern information and internet technology can be thought the effective means to reinforce interactive communication with the outside world. Government administrators need to master them well so as to perform functions of the information and internet management. However, with the rapid growth of new media, government institutions under the pyramid management mode are short of modern management technology advancing with the time, so it greatly impedes the development of public management.

Firstly, it is difficult to collect primary information. The existing technology can not automatically collect primary information provided by all types of new media, which is impossible to find out useful and focused contents among mass information in time. Secondly, it is hard to intelligently extract information. The present technology can not efficiently extract basic internet information (e.g., web title, author, releasing time, provenance, click rate) through intelligent methods. Thirdly, it is not easy to retrieve and trace specific information. The current technology fails to automatically judge and discern the latest topics on the internet; related data model used to distinguish and analyze subject correlation on web page need to make a further improvement. Fourthly, it is tricky to make the analysis of information orientation. The technology at present can not judge and analyze information orientation from new media. In other words, we can not master advanced technology to predicate whether a certain information is commendatory, derogatory or neutral accurately. Fifthly, it is awkward to predict developing trend to a certain thing. The subsistent technology can not comprehensively analyze data in space-time scales. Besides, it is hard for us to understand the entire landscape about a social issue or an emergency. Particularly, the model that predict its developing trends in future is not built roundly. Sixthly, it has difficulty in exploring dissemination features concerning specific information. The available technology can not identify and detect the traits of information spread, such as identifying opinion leaders, online water army and etc.

In general, many problems on the levels of management and technology in Chinese government authorities emerge under the influence of new media. These problems are basically subject to Chinese traditional pyramid management mode and directly make an undesirable impact on performing government functions. In order to cope with opportunities and challenges created by new media better, governments at all levels not only need to transform traditional management ideas and change demoded management methods, but also are committed to surmounting technical difficulties that result in governing inefficiency and disorder.

### **4. New Media Reforming Chinese Traditional Public Management Mode**

Under the wide and deep influence of new media, Chinese traditional pyramid public management mode is confronting with two dilemmas from management and technology. In consequence, transforming outdated management methods and establishing new governance construction are the basic thought of settling the present problems and getting out of factual troubles. Because government institutions do not possess the external competition system and the interest relationships among all departments display more intricate, so it is rather difficult for governments to depend on internal strength to reform inherent public management mode. Even if government administrators have reached a consensus to the institution reforming and the mode transforming, they are still hard to promote the reform for a long period and they can not get desired results due to lack of the outer impetus. But new media can become this outer impetus that promotes the reform of traditional governmental management mode just right. Because of its convenience and high efficiency, new media are easier to attract a large number of actors (e.g., citizens, experts, NGO) to participate in the process of public governance. The actors can interact with government authorities relying on new media in a free, equal and open environment, which can compel administrators to change traditional pyramid management mode into a kind of network governance mode little by little.

#### **4.1 Adjusting Traditional Public Management Thoughts**

For keeping pace with new media, Chinese government officials need to adjust traditional public management thoughts of keeping stability merely. They have the responsibility and duty to maintain social stability, but this goal should not be treated as the only one. Preserving a steady society and a peaceful political situation are important because these are key indicators evaluating a government's legitimacy level. But if keeping stability is regarded as an unique target governments pursue all the time, it will strictly restrict administrators' management thoughts and narrow their visual field. As time passes, they have been accustomed to walk in the old steps and seclude themselves from modern society. For ensuring social stability and their vested interest, they are unwilling to attempt new things and even thwart reform.

Therefore, government officials at all levels must adjust public management thoughts of their own on the basis of practical needs. Not only need they maintain social stability, but also they need to adapt themselves to the rapid development of new media, dealing with all kinds of information conveyed by new media, replying feedback from netizens via corresponding dissemination channels, tackling tricky public opinion events properly, avoiding blockading and distorting the truth, and creating a relative free space for new media permeating governmental public management.

#### **4.2 Reforming Traditional Public Management Mode**

New media accelerate to change Chinese traditional pyramid management mode and compel government officials to set up a new mode. The idea of network governance is thought to be more applicable to the development of new media. Governance, as a type of network public behavior, emphasizes cooperation and interaction, which is rather different from hierarchical pyramid management mode (Rhodes, 1997). The idea suggests that the privileged position of government authorities be weakened, but it is not that their governance status in a network is deprived completely because a network which keeps the normal operation needs to a competent governor. Network governance breaks traditional pyramid management mode and gives other network actors more independence and autonomy, which creates a kind of free, equal, loose, decentralized and multichannel communication and interaction environment for network governors and other network actors (Torfing, 2005; Mathur & Skelcher, 2007; Provan & Kenis, 2008). Based on the idea of network governance, we construct “double levels governance model” used to public management in China in order to fit in with the background of new media era. In this new mode, the first level can be described as the vertical governing line, which aims at sticking out government institutions’ governance status; the second level can be called the horizontal acting line, which displays the interactive participation of other network actors. The vertical governing line should intersect with the horizontal acting line; the former plays a ministrant and supporting part and the latter serves as action subjects in the whole network. There are at least two points to be concerned in practical implementation.

Firstly, envisaging and encouraging the development of new media. Influenced by new media, pyramid management mode characterized by hierarchical bureaucracy has to transform into a new network mode with features of independence, freedom, parallel and openness. Actors in the network, including governments, deputies to National People’s Congress, representatives of Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, interest groups, experts and scholars, citizens as well as NGO, can communicate and interact with each other through using new media. Because the qualifications, abilities and resources network actors possess are quite different, their role-playing and status in the network exist great differences, which can cause divergent interactive results. But it should be pointed out that the fast development of new media can not only balance strengths between strong actors (e.g., government, interest groups) and weak actors (E.G., citizens, NGO), but also ensure the high efficient interactions among all the actors, which make the entire network more energetic and tolerant. So governments at all levels must envisage and encourage the development of new media. Secondly, reinforcing the ability to govern the network. In the model of double levels governance, the acting line composed of network subjects except governments should give play to dominant functions, while the governing line made up of government institutions present the functions of guidance, service, coordination and supervision. Government administrators should position themselves as a maker of network regulations, a provider of public services, a coordinator of public relations, a supervisor of network subjects in the governance process. For reinforcing the ability to govern the network and guarantee the normal operation of the whole network, government officials must take effective measures to enhance the feedback efficiency of network information, coordinate interest relations among all the network actors, strengthen network supervision ability and create harmonious interactive atmosphere. Moreover, administrators need to attract actors who can create public values as many as possible so that the network maintains a sustainable development.

#### **4.3 Regulating Netizens’ Participation Behaviors**

New media are more likely to induce netizens to be engaged in illegal or criminal activities if their participation behaviors are not supervised or regulated well. Firstly, because the speed of development of new media have far exceeded our ability to understand and resolve, some emotional problems which are difficult to control, such as network conflict, network violence, usually happen on line. Secondly, some netizens take advantage of the internet to conduct illegal behaviors or commit crimes (e.g., libel, financial fraud, larceny, smuggling) for their private ends. Thirdly, influenced by specific network atmosphere or network leaders, it tends to form some strange phenomenon, such as group polarization, double spirals of silence.

For governing these problems, government administrators must make more concrete and feasible laws and policies to regulate netizens' participation behaviors to set up a healthy and normative internet surrounding. In addition, it is crucial for governments to foster a trust system and establish a trust relationship with netizens. Thus, government institutions can decrease the inner operation cost and the outer governance cost. What's more, it can reduce governance obstruction and raise governance efficiency.

#### **4.4 Improving Information Management Technology**

In order to deal with technological problems confronted by Chinese government institutions in information management mentioned above, we strive to make technology breakthrough and innovation from six aspects. Firstly, in terms of principles of instantaneity, integrity, reliability, usability obeyed by automatical network information collection, difficulties existed in the information collection technology (e.g., information analysis and filter, RSS) need to be surmounted in an all-round manner (Zhou et al., 2013). Secondly, for meeting various information needs from netizens and improving governmental intelligent information management, we need to take extraction technology on the basis of information format when designing information extraction softwares. Thirdly, research on retrieval and tracking technique of network information needs to be made a further improvement; data models on distinguishing and analyzing subject correlation on web page need to be constructed as quickly as possible; the intelligence and self-determination of proxy technology need to be further explored to fulfill intelligent service of searching and tracing information (Wang, 2012). Fourthly, new methods on text orientation analysis need to be studied continuously; corpus construction and polarity dictionary refreshment need to be paid more attention and to be put into effect; information orientation involved in model building, model analyzing and model calculating needs to be carried out deeply; the application range in this field needs to be expanded comprehensively (Li et al., 2010). Fifthly, current network algorithm and model used to forecast trends in future need to be updated to enhance predictive precision and accuracy; data mining technique and knowledge extraction skill need to be developed better. Sixthly, traits and rules with regard to information dissemination need to be clarified; the way of information spread in network media needs theoretical modeling and simulated analysis; technologies of monitoring public opinion events, discerning opinion leaders and examining water army all need to be improved and optimized.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This article applies the method of combining mass communication and management to research dilemmas and mode transformation in Chinese public management under the background of new media. The research presents that traditional media characterized by the color of government-run play an important role in maintaining the normal operation of pyramid management mode and consolidating management results. However, in the era of new media, mass information can rapidly accumulate in a short time and disseminate instantly. Transborder information can flow freely through different communication platforms. With the wide internet popularization, increasing netizens attempt to use network to participate in the governmental management. It not only brings up a host of citizen journalists, but also leads to frequent occurrence of public opinion events. New media with mighty influence are accelerating to change Chinese traditional public management mode, so government authorities and administrators are confronting double dilemmas, which are management dilemma and technology dilemma respectively. Taking account of this, government administrators must adjust their traditional public management thoughts that keeping stability merely, change outmoded public management mode and construct double levels governance model with the guidance of network governance, regulate netizens' participation behaviors and conquer technological problems in governmental information management.

Overall, it is a rather big and complex problem to research public management mode transformation in the Chinese context. After embedding new media in it, the research becomes more complicated, but it broadens the scope of follow-up study. Sequential studies can focus on some concrete research points. For examples, we can combine related cases to explore whether double levels governance model can be used in China and rectify it constantly; we can discuss and analyze governmental credibility construction affected by new media; how governments cope with examinations from internet public opinion is also an important topic to be researched; and etc.

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