

Research on the Evolution of Media Practices of Leading Cadres' New Media and the Communication Characteristics

Hebin Zhang^{1,2*}, Muhammad Zaffwan Idris¹

¹Faculty of Art, Sustainability & Creative Industry, University Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Perak, Malaysia

²School of Journalism and Communication, Henan University of Technology, Zhengzhou, China

Email: *zhanghebin297@gmail.com

How to cite this paper: Zhang, H.B. and Idris, M.Z. (2023) Research on the Evolution of Media Practices of Leading Cadres' New Media and the Communication Characteristics. *Social Networking*, 12, 57-66. <https://doi.org/10.4236/sn.2023.123004>

Received: June 10, 2023

Accepted: July 14, 2023

Published: July 17, 2023

Copyright © 2023 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Purpose/Significance: This study aims to define the concept of leading cadres new media usage in China specifically, and to describe and analyze the forms and typical cases and characteristics of leading cadres new media in different stages. **Method/Process:** Based on the themes and contents of a few media accounts of leading cadres at different ranks, we summarize leading cadres new media usage in a systematic perspective and content analysis method. **Result/Conclusion:** The study defines the concept of Leading Cadres' new media from the perspective of media practice, determine its position as a media communication platform in the government affairs new media communication system and its relationship with the other elements, and then systematically review the evolution of its media practice from personal website, blog, microblog and microblog to WeChat, live show. On this basis, with the Harold Lasswell communication model, this article summarizes leading cadres new media communication characteristics from five aspects: content producer, content, channel, audience, and effect. Future studies may also enhance the empirical research from the effect perspective.

Keywords

Leading Cadres' New Media, Evolution of Media Practices, Communication Characteristics

1. Introduction

At present, the huge number of Internet users and rich applications constitute a flourishing and colorful new media ecosystem in China, which also supports and

nourishes the continuous development of China's government communication. As far as China's current government communication is concerned, new media plays a very important role in it, with news websites at all levels, various government new media at all levels, and county-level Media Convergence Centers playing major roles and functions, and being given more attention in practical applications as well as in research horizons. However, the personal new media accounts such as leading cadres' 1 websites, blogs, microblogs, WeChat platform account, etc., which are often seen in the press and often praised as a new style of government communication or a model of new media usage by government leaders. They are different from both news websites and of government new media, and their separate existence naturally has its inherent social needs and special values. Although often talked about, its value in government communication is yet to be explored, even as the fifth important form of government communication platform other than news websites, government websites, government new media and county-level media convergence centers, its further regulation or optimization is worth exploring systematically.

In the literature and practice evaluation of leading cadres' new media usage in China, most of the previous literature focused on the media literacy or crisis response [1], also on the practice of e-government [2], auxiliary tools and mechanisms of government affair, Internet + government, and the new media literacy and application skills of officials' online spokesperson role [3]. Based on different provinces, the literatures are mostly on the investigation of current situation, problem analysis, and countermeasures [4]. The key research elements of officials are generally generalized, and the specific level and type of new media are not discussed in detail, and new media usage values and strategies are superficially discussed. There are also a few papers that argue the relationship between officials and new media and the necessity and feasibility of using them from the perspective of Marxist party theory and the requirements of propaganda work for party and government officials [5]. There are also a few papers that summarize the experiences of individual officials in using new media from the perspective of media practice [6].

In terms of practical evaluation, from the initial inclusion in the e-government system to examine the level of use, to the inclusion in the evaluation of the communication capability of new media for government affairs. And it is the public presentation in the form of the official's new media usage rankings.

It seems that there are few systematic studies on the media practice of new media for officials as an important media form in government communication from the perspective of the intersection of media communication and political communication, and there's no detailed study of its longitudinal and cross-sectional aspects.

2. The Definition of Leading Cadres' New Media and Its Place in Government Communication

Currently, any new media form is a unique media landscape formed by the in-

tersection of multiple elements such as technology concept, media practice, and reality demands at a specific historical moment, and leading cadres' new media usage is one of the unique landscapes. Leading cadres' new media usage is associated with the needs of government communication, and has special value in China's new media ecosystem, and is different from the policy definition of government new media.

2.1. Concept of Government Communication

What is government communication? There is no authoritative definition yet, but the related "political communication" is a relatively mature research field. Political communication refers to the process of diffusion and acceptance of political information in a specific political community [7], and its basic forms are political propaganda, political communication, and political marketing [8]. Government communication is a specific practice at the level of propaganda and communication among the three forms of political communication. Therefore, government communication can be defined from the definition of political communication, combined with the process of government communication practice. Government communication is a kind of communication activity in which government institutions compose and organize political information to the public at multiple levels through certain symbols and media, and then the public effectively interprets the symbolic information through various media platforms, and then accepts the government information to realize governmental communication [9].

2.2. Government Communication and China's New Media Ecosystem

In China's new media ecosystem, new media forms directly related to government communication include central news websites, provincial news websites, various government websites at all levels, various government new media at all levels, and county-level media convergence centers. They are directly managed by CPC and government agencies at all levels and naturally have the attributes of government communication, and are government communication platforms at the inner, with the main function of producing government content and disseminate it to the public. In addition, various commercial portals, microblogs, WeChat platform and other commercial new media organizations in the periphery of the government communication platform provide a rich public space for social issue generation and fermentation, and are the outer communication chain on which the inner-loop government communication relies to generate value.

2.3. Leading Cadres' New Media and Government Communication

In terms of practical logic, it is a special form of we-media created by the cross-fertilization between government communication and commercial new media communication. There are two reasons for defining leading cadres' new media in this way. The first is the specificity of the identity of content produc-

ers-officials, because they are in the government system, so their production and dissemination of content with strong government characteristics, their communication behavior should belong to government communication. The second is the specificity of the content dissemination platform, because officials rely on commercial institutions to form their own media platforms, so different from news websites, although there are similarities with the formation mechanism of governmental new media platforms, but between individuals and institutions, and therefore very different from government new media.

2.4. The Difference between Leading Cadres' New Media and Government New Media

There are many ambiguous perceptions about whether leading cadres' new media belong to the government new media, and it is necessary to discern three aspects here.

Firstly, in the actual application environment, the current mobile Internet-oriented new applications have made "Website + Microblog account + WeChat account + APP" become the "standard configuration" of most provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government), municipal governments and relevant departments in the application of new media [10].

Secondly, in the State Council documents, according to the December 27, 2018 State Office issued [2018] 123 documents, April 1, 2019 General Office of the State Council document "General Office of the State Council Secretary Bureau on the issuance of government websites and government new media inspection indicators, supervision of the annual assessment index notice" related provisions, government new media refers to the government affairs accounts or applications opened by administrative departments at all levels, public agencies with administrative functions and their internal institutions, on third-party platforms such as microblog and WeChat accounts, as well as the app developed and built by themselves. The definition of government new media in the document is very clear, and leading cadres' new media is not included in this provision.

Thirdly, in the new media content production and dissemination mechanism, although government new media in the technology and dissemination mechanism, more relying on commercial new media, but its content production and dissemination increasingly tends to be organized, that is, by specialized agencies specialized team for professional job content work, while leading cadres' new media has the same reliance, but more dependent on officials themselves for content production and dissemination. Therefore, it is clear from the above three aspects that the two are quite different and should not be mixed together.

3. The Evolution of Leading Cadres' New Media Practice

The media practice of leading cadres' new media starts from personal websites and personal blogs, passes through personal microblog account and personal

WeChat account, and enters the stage of coexistence of personal TikTok account, personal live streaming account, etc. Its evolution is on the same path with the media practice of mass communication in China.

3.1. Leading Cadres' Personal Website Stage

In the personal new media system of leading cadres, personal websites did not form a scale effect because they were in the period from 2000 to 2004 when China's Internet hardware and software environment was not developed enough, new media technology was not enough to support smooth Internet expression, and the number of Internet users was relatively small, and cyberspace expression was limited to the group of intellectual elites with almost university degrees, and the public had no access to the Internet. Therefore, the personal websites of officials in this period did not play a large political communication value, but still had great leading value. One of the most generative is "Hong Yu Online" set up in September 2003, by the deputy of Wuhan Education Bureau, Zhou Hongyu, was called by netizens China's first National People's Congress delegates of the political website.

3.2. Leading Cadres' Personal Blog Stage

Personal blogs emerged in 2005, following personal websites, providing a new form of personal new media for officials. Wei Yu, former vice minister of education and academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, launched a blog, which was called the first Chinese minister of blogging by netizens, focusing on child growth and education issues, and developing some interactions through the blog comment function. During the same period with Wei Yu, Zhou Hongyu and Ye Qing, then deputy of the Hubei Provincial Bureau of Statistics, both bloggers used the Internet and offline to collect public opinion and discuss issues during the national and local sessions, which had greater influence and demonstration significance among officials at that time.

3.3. Leading Cadres' Microblog Stage

After the gradual decline of blogs in 2008, microblog quietly emerged in 2009, and a large number of key opinion leaders who had accumulated in their personal websites or blogs or online forum communities with beautiful narratives and justifications, and who had greatly influenced the public's emotional perceptions in many major online public opinion cases, including many officials at all levels, turned to microblog to take up the role of key opinion leaders. The 140-character short and fast communication format is a new public space that is more suitable for expression, easier to spread, and more conducive to the formation of an opinion climate. Subsequently, various CPC and government agencies at all levels set up microblog account, followed by microblog accounts applying for real name certification, and government microblog representing the official micro images of CPC and government agencies emerged, and personal micro-

blogs of officials in the form of “V” identity verification became an important part of government communication on the microblog platform [11]. Even the initial ranking of new governmental media by People’s Daily and Xinhua, and academic studies also included personal new media of officials.

3.4. Leading Cadres’ Wechat and Tiktok Stage

With the gradual emergence of government WeChat and TikTok, government new media have sprang up all over the country and become more and more an important tool for CPC and government institutions at all levels to reform and improve their functions in the new media era, and government new media system has become richer and richer, especially since the 18th National Congress, the main concern of government new media has shifted from communication capability to public service capability, and leading cadres’ new media is limited to the attributes of personal platforms at the technical level, because it is difficult to access the big data cloud platform to expand its application, and it is difficult to make a breakthrough in the direct public service capacity. Therefore, it is no longer included in the ranking of local government’ new media communication, influence, and public service capacity.

3.5. Typical Cases of Leading Cadres’ New Media Usage

The most representative leading cadres’ new media usage in the last decade is microblog, which started in 2011, almost simultaneously with government microblogs at all levels, and the enthusiasm of opening microblogs among the officials’ group is high, and it has greater influence and attention as an early social new media platform for online government. Some of the leading cadres’ government microblogs have successfully become very famous and have been noticed by many netizens to occupy the public space of discourse as an important platform for government communication. Cai Qi, then Committee Member of Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee and Minister of Organization, set up his microblog in 2010 and authenticated himself as “a Bolshevik”, and sent out his first microblog on May 13, praising the scenery of Lishui, Zhejiang Province, with 74 words, which received 259 comments and soon had 5.31 million followers. Since then, it has been updated almost every day for nearly four years, with content revolving around government affairs but rich in themes. In Zhejiang Province, 90% of the organization’s cadres set up their microblogs. Wu Hao, then vice minister of the Yunnan Provincial Party Committee’s propaganda department, set up a microblog on November 21, 2008, and has since become a vocal participant in major public opinion events in Yunnan and nationwide, causing huge social repercussions. The early blogger Ye Qing was one of the earliest officials to set up microblog account, and in 2011 he surpassed many high-level officials to rank sixth among the “Top 10 Public Officials Microblog List”, and his microblog is still updated continuously until today, ten years later.

After the widespread use of microblog, many officials set up personal new

media account of microblog and WeChat to expand the form of government communication. For example, in 2010, Chen Shiqu, deputy of the Criminal Investigation Bureau of the Ministry of Public Security, innovated anti-trafficking work on his real-name Sina Microblog and Tiktok platform; “Duan Talk Show”—Duan Xingyan, deputy secretary of the Discipline Inspection Committee of Jiangxi Jiujiang Public Security Bureau; and “Director Tang”—Tang Aihua, secretary of the Party Group of the Rucheng County Agricultural and Rural Bureau in Chenzhou City, Hunan Province, has a microblog and WeChat, TikTok, Tiktok account. Tang’s microblogs are dedicated to public opinion propaganda and promotion of special agricultural products. Li Hong, deputy secretary of the Yushui District Committee of Xinyu City, Jiangxi Province, personal microblog “@XinyuLiHong” is one of “Top 10 Public Officials’ Microblogs” at the 2018 Government V Influence Summit. And He Jiao Long, female deputy county head of Zhaosu County, Yili, Xinjiang, promoted the tourism project Snow Cema in TikTok. Deputy county head of Yuli County, Xinjiang, “Xinjiang He Miao” used microblog to promote the local winter dates, etc.

3.6. Effectiveness of Leading Cadres’ New Media Usage

As far as the evaluation of the effect of their media practice is concerned, it can be seen that in recent years, People’s Daily and Sina have paid more attention to the level of leading cadres’ new media applications, and since 2013, they have mainly carried out the selection of the top ten microblogs of public officials or public officers nationwide to promote the development of government communication. For example, in 2014, People’s Daily selected the “Top 10 Public Officials’ Microblogs in China”, and in 2018, People’s Daily, Microblog and Sina.com jointly selected the “Top 10 Public Officials’ Microblogs in China”. Local governments do not specifically manage or evaluate leading cadres’ new media account, and provincial government websites and government new media management follow the implementation of document 123 of the State Office [2018], which does not involve the inspection of new media platforms and accounts such as microblog and wechat for officials.

Through the evolution of the media practice of leading cadres’ new media, we can see that leading cadres in each new media form period can use the new media in an appropriate way to start the media practice of governmental communication in conjunction with their own work areas, whether they are provincial or ministerial leaders or county leaders or even civil servant, whether they are in regular periods or special periods of local major emergencies opinion response, whether they express their views from long graphic narrative reasoning or live show. The richness of their media practice fields, the multi-level practice subjects, and the variety of practice forms can even surpass the communication effect of government websites in the same period, and lead the government new media account in the same region, as well as the social effect of government communication in special periods of central and provincial news websites in the same period.

4. Communication Characteristics of Leading Cadres' New Media

As a kind of media form, from personal microblog to personal WeChat, and TikTok, etc., the personal new media of leading cadres in different periods show different from the media forms of other contemporaneous new media communication agencies, and also reflect the media communication characteristics of the new era as an important platform for government communication. Taking a longitudinal view of the use of various personal new media platforms in government communication, and drawing on the analysis of the elements of Harold Lasswell communication model, we can summarize them into five communication characteristics.

4.1. Content Producers Have a Strong Sense of Participation

Leading cadres as content producers have a strong sense of participation, from provincial and ministerial leaders down to village cadres are actively setting their own personal new media account for their own government communication, and most of them can insist on uninterrupted updates for several years, and can create a new media matrix according to the new media form, and even organize a team to operate it.

4.2. Rich Content Themes

In the early days, leading cadres' microblogs included personal testimonials and opinions on social hotspots, but nowadays most of them are mainly about government and public affairs, with less personal expressions [12].

4.3. Diverse Communication Channels

Leading cadres' new media communication channels are of various forms and types, and officials apply different types of new media in different periods of new media, covering all new media forms from microblog to live show.

4.4. Large Number of Audiences

As the communication audience of the public responded positively, the public through the CPC and government cadres personal new media account vividly feel the warm side of political life, the serious and orthodox official communication language into the public communication context of joy, laughter and scorn, close to the political communication and the reality of interpersonal communication, group communication proximity and intimacy, the public is happy to participate in this government communication enthusiasm increased.

4.5. Good Interactive Effect of Communication

Whether it is a simple text and graphic microblog or a live show, the effectiveness of the interaction between the public and officials is better than any original means of government communication, especially in the face of major public

emergencies, and even in the face of continuous controversial online public opinion, leading cadres' new media can be the first to approach and understand the core concerns of the public, improve communication, and dissolve social antagonism. Therefore, they are generally praised by the public.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, leading cadres' new media belongs to a form of government communication and has special value in China's new media system. Although it does not belong to the government new media, it has the function of government new media. The media practice of leading cadres' new media has different characteristics in different media form periods, and the special characteristics of the communication producer and the communication content make its communication value widely recognized. An analysis of the five elements of its communication process concludes that the participation of the communication producer is strong, the governmental characteristics of the communication content are obvious, the communication channels are rich, the communication audience is extremely numerous, and the communication interaction is very good.

Project Funding

2021 National Social Science Foundation General Project: Research on Optimizing the Effect of New Media Empowering Migrant Workers to Return to Their Hometown and Start a Business (21BXW068), and 2023 Henan Province Graduate Student Excellence Online Course: New Media Research (YJS2023ZX09).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- [1] Liu, L.M. and Qin, G.W. (2013) An Empirical Study of the New Media Literacy of Leading Cadres: Taking the Cadre Training Students of Anhui Province as an Example. *Journal of Anhui Agricultural University (Social Science Edition)*, **22**, 30-35+78. (In Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.19747/j.cnki.1009-2463.2013.05.008>
- [2] Wang, X.D. (2009) The Progress, Status and Development Trend of E-Government in China. *E-Government*, No. 7, 44-68. (In Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.16582/j.cnki.dzzw.2009.07.014>
- [3] Hou, Y.Z. (2010) Internet News Spokesman. *Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China)*, No. 5, 115-119. (In Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.19997/j.cnki.xdcb.2010.05.031>
- [4] Li, T. and Cai, F. (2016) An Investigation and Reflection on the State of New Media Literacy among Chongqing's Leading Cadres. *Chongqing Social Science*, No. 10, 103-107. (In Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.19631/j.cnki.css.2016.10.016>
- [5] Wu, Y.S. (2018) On the Adaptability of Political Image Construction under New Media Circumstance. *Theoretical Discussion*, No. 4, 131-136. (In Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.16354/j.cnki.23-1013/d.2018.04.020>

- [6] Jin, T. (2015) Analysis of the Development Status, Problems and Countermeasure Suggestions of the New Media of Government Affairs. *E-Government*, No. 8, 21-27. (In Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.16582/j.cnki.dzzw.2015.08.004>
- [7] Jing, X.M. and Shi, H.L. (2009) The Convergence of Political and Communication Perspectives: An Analysis of Five Basic Theoretical Issues in Political Communication Research. *Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China)*, No. 4, 18-22. (In Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.19997/j.cnki.xdcb.2009.04.005>
- [8] Jing, X.M. and Duan, R. (2016) The Basic Form and Operation Mode of Political Communication. *Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China)*, **38**, 8-15. (In Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1007-8770.2016.11.004>
- [9] Chen, R. (2019) The Construction of Evaluation Index System of Crisis Communication Effect of Government Social Media. *Statistics and Decision Making*, No. 18, 31-35. <http://doi.org/10.13546/j.cnki.tjyc.2019.18.006>
- [10] Zhang, H.B. (2021) An Empirical Study on the Evaluation of the Communication Capacity of Local Municipalities' New Government Media—Based on Data from 18 Municipalities in Henan Province. *Journal of Henan University of Technology (Social Science Edition)*, **37**, 112-120. (In Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.16433/j.cnki.cn41-1379.2021.03.016>
- [11] Zhai, X. and Ji, C.P. (2018) Analysis of the Current Situation of Media Literacy Research among Leading Cadres in China. *Journal of Theory*, No. 1, 124-131. (In Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.14110/j.cnki.cn-37-1059/d.2018.01.018>
- [12] Shi, H.L. (2014) Political Discourse and Ideology in Political Communication. *Qinghai Social Sciences*, No. 1, 8-11. <http://doi.org/10.14154/j.cnki.qss.2014.01.033>