

The Ways and Improvement Paths of Chinese Internet Public Welfare Platforms Participating in Social Governance

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Abstract. Taking internet public welfare platforms as the research object, this paper discusses their advantages and improvement paths in the current social governance system. Relying on the development of internet technology, the rise of internet public welfare platforms has lowered the threshold for public participation in public welfare undertakings and significantly improved the allocation efficiency of public welfare resources. However, problems such as privacy disclosure, information distortion, and insufficient supervision still arise during the operation of internet public welfare platforms. To this end, the research supplements specific schemes for strengthening privacy protection and optimizing the communication mechanism, and proposes improving the construction of supervision and regulatory systems for internet public welfare platforms to ensure their standardized and long-term development.

Keywords: Internet Public Welfare, Social Governance, Platform Governance, Optimization Paths

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the continuous advancement of "Internet Plus" and Digital China, China's social governance is shifting from being led solely by the government to multi-subject collaboration. Represented by Tencent Public Welfare and Shuidichou, internet public welfare platforms, relying on mobile payments and social networks, have lowered the participation threshold, improved the efficiency of resource integration, and quickly transformed individual predicaments into public issues. One end of the platforms aggregates scattered social goodwill and funds, while the other end connects public welfare projects and public service supply. The way of participating in public welfare has evolved from narrow-sense donation of money and materials to a broader sense of empowerment, collaboration, and development, and the connotation of public welfare has been infinitely expanded and extended [1]. Internet public welfare platforms have played an obvious supplementary role in scenarios such as medical assistance, educational support, disaster response, and community governance.

As internet public welfare platforms deeply penetrate the public domain, new governance challenges have gradually emerged. The adaptability of existing laws and regulations to internet public welfare scenarios is limited, and the review obligations, fund supervision, and liability boundaries of the platforms are not clear. The logic of algorithms and traffic may lead to structural

deviations in resource allocation. Information distortion and emotional narratives have impacted social trust, and there is a lack of stable interfaces and process standards between government departments and platforms, resulting in collaboration often remaining as temporary cooperation at the project level. The interweaving of the above factors means that the public nature and sustainability of the platforms still need systematic clarification and empirical testing.

Existing research on internet public welfare mostly starts from the perspectives of fundraising models or online mobilization, and has recognized the mobilization advantages and risk points of the platforms. However, there is still a lack of a verifiable overall framework for how the platforms are embedded in the governance process and actually affect governance outcomes. The indicator system for fundraising mechanisms and performance boundaries has not yet taken shape. Based on this, this paper adopts theories such as multi-subject co-governance, platform governance, and social trust as the analytical framework, and discusses the specific mechanisms by which platforms participate in governance and the differences in paths and outcomes among different types of platforms. The research design employs literature and policy text analysis, supplemented by a comparison of typical cases. Taking Tencent Public Welfare and Shuidichou as the research objects, this paper conducts a comparative analysis from the dimensions of organizational collaboration, data, and public opinion mechanisms, striving to depict the operational logic and empirical characteristics of internet public welfare platforms participating in social governance in the Chinese social context.

2. Legal interpretation of China's internet public welfare

2.1. Current situation of internet development in China

Over the past decade, the popularization of the internet has transformed the landscape of public welfare in China and reshaped the way people participate in social mutual assistance. With the widespread use of smartphones and mobile payments, public welfare activities have gradually shifted from streets and communities to online platforms. People can complete a donation or forward a piece of assistance information within a few minutes with just a few taps on their screens. Taking Tencent Public Welfare and Shuidichou as examples, before launching a project, the platforms verify materials and the background of the subjects. After the launch, they disclose the progress in phases and retain key records to facilitate subsequent verification and evaluation. This mechanism has significantly reduced search and transaction costs, enabling resources to flow more quickly to groups in real need. By 2024, Shuidichou has raised a total of 67.5 billion yuan, assisted 3.4 million patients, and carried out medical assistance cooperation projects with governments in many regions. By 2025, Tencent Public Welfare has raised a total of 36 billion yuan, with the total number of caring participants reaching as high as 1.7 billion. Ordinary people can also make a difference in public affairs through small donations that add up to a substantial amount. It has transformed public welfare from a temporary mobilization into a daily practice, and made the flow of goodwill more stable and sustainable. With lower costs, higher transparency, and stronger social mobilization capacity, it has injected new vitality into China's public welfare cause and become an important force for promoting social mutual assistance and a sense of responsibility.

2.2. Characteristics of China's internet public welfare

Compared with traditional public welfare models, internet public welfare has the following distinctive characteristics: Firstly, internet public welfare gains attention through case narratives, breaking the traditional one-way communication model. Participants form a virtual community

centered on common values through interaction, demonstrating the feature of "everyone is a medium, and the group communicates collectively" [2]. Secondly, internet public welfare effectively integrates scattered information and demands. By integrating the forces of the government, enterprises, and the public, it achieves multi-subject collaboration and efficient resource allocation, significantly improving the efficiency of public welfare communication and the level of social governance [3]. Taking Shuidichou as an example, the platform first verifies materials and the background of the subjects, then determines the fund account and purpose. After the launch, it discloses the progress in phases and keeps records of key bills and service records to facilitate sampling review and subsequent evaluation. In contrast, offline models rely on on-site activities and interpersonal networks, which limits the scope of traditional public welfare activities' social reach and results in a long feedback cycle. Thirdly, internet public welfare, with the help of mobile payments and online forms, minimizes search and transaction costs. The time from project launch to fund availability is shortened. Donors can promptly view phased progress and explanations of fund usage, and social organizations can complete public announcements and responses within the same system. Fourthly, the internet features a high degree of visualization and continuous recording. Everything from project initiation to fund disbursement can be organized into retrievable records, supporting post-event tracing and horizontal comparison.

2.3. Advantages of China's internet public welfare

Compared with traditional public welfare models, internet public welfare has the following advantages: Firstly, it breaks the limitations of traditional public welfare, which is "template-based and low-interactive" [4]. Online platforms connect individuals, social organizations, and enterprises on one end, and scenarios such as medical assistance, educational support, disaster response, and community affairs on the other end. Information, funds, and feedback operate in an orderly manner within the same technical system, enabling the entire process from problem discovery to resource availability and feedback disclosure to be completed on online platforms. This efficient and wide-ranging experience has significantly lowered the participation threshold of internet public welfare, improved the efficiency of resource matching, and enabled groups in need to receive tangible help more quickly. Secondly, internet public welfare is highly convenient. The in-depth integration of the internet and public welfare has integrated the internet's characteristic of convenience into public welfare undertakings. Through the simple settings of internet public welfare platforms, the public can complete the donation process in various ways within a short period of time [5]. Thirdly, internet public welfare has greatly simplified fundraising methods and further expanded fundraising channels, allowing more people to participate in social public affairs in a simpler way.

2.4. Significance of internet public welfare

The practical significance of internet public welfare lies in connecting demanders and suppliers at a lower cost and faster speed, providing people with abundant resources and information, thereby promoting communication and cooperation between non-governmental organizations and the public [6]. However, for this mechanism to function stably for a longer period of time, detailed work must be done at every link of implementation. Internet public welfare platforms need to balance popularity and public value in promotion, shift from page information to evidence retention in public announcements, and transform from one-time cooperation to standardized and reusable cooperation in collaboration. In this way, public welfare platforms can not only maintain the efficiency of online mobilization but also stabilize public credibility at the institutional level,

enabling online public welfare platforms to continuously exert their advantages in the social environment.

3. Challenges and dilemmas faced by the development of internet public welfare

3.1. Ethical crisis of internet public welfare

The commercialization tendency of internet public welfare has led to the weakening of ethical constraints, making it urgent to reshape the public moral foundation of the industry through political guidance and value education [7]. A 2024 survey report from a Grade A tertiary hospital showed that 62% of fundraising cases had exaggerated treatment costs. What is even more shocking is that professional writers mass-produced tragic stories at a price of 800 yuan per article, and hospital fundraising consultants took an 8% kickback per order, forming a complete gray industrial chain [8]. To make more people understand and sympathize with their predicament, many applicants have to disclose medical records and photos of patients. This information is viewed and forwarded by thousands of people on the internet in a short period of time. Although help follows, personal privacy is also magnified and exploited. Such exposure is not always voluntary. Family members or volunteers take the initiative to promote or even fabricate stories to improve fundraising efficiency. What was originally a warm public welfare activity has gradually turned into an interest field that consumes emotions. Over time, people have become accustomed to sad stories, and true kindness has been diluted with every click. People's kindness is aroused again and again, but it is difficult to know how long their help can last. Those individuals who have received attention often fall into loneliness again after the public attention fades. For internet public welfare to truly mature, it must rethink this model of gaining sympathy at the cost of privacy, find a balance between respecting privacy and pursuing efficiency, and ensure that love no longer comes at the expense of dignity.

3.2. Authenticity of internet public welfare

With the popularization of internet public welfare, authenticity has become the primary concern of the public. The virtuality and information asymmetry of internet public welfare make people rely solely on online materials to make goodwill decisions in the absence of interpersonal contact. This "being moved" judgment model is easily misled by external cues [9]. In the early days, due to insufficient supervision, public welfare platforms frequently exposed fake cases. Some people forged medical records, fabricated experiences, and even profited in the name of public welfare. Recently, on August 13, 2024, the Xiaochang County People's Court publicly heard a fraud case involving Shuidichou. The defendant Huang forged false medical records using image editing software to apply for 100,000 yuan of medical expenses on the Shuidichou platform. When Huang had raised 1,917 yuan through the platform, Shuidichou discovered the forged medical records. These incidents have repeatedly damaged public trust. People have begun to doubt the authenticity of the tearful appeal stories on the screen. On the other hand, internet public welfare spreads at an extremely fast speed. A piece of news can trigger large-scale donations within a few hours. Platforms usually have to make a choice between urgency and prudence. If the review is too slow, the opportunity for assistance may be missed. If the review is too fast, false information may be allowed to slip through. At the same time, netizens' judgments often rely on photos, texts, and emotions, and few people verify the details. How to transform internet public welfare from a trust crisis to trust-building has gradually become a hot issue in contemporary development. The future of internet public welfare does not lie in the number of participants, but in whether people can

participate continuously with trust and understanding. Empirical research has shown that "perceived transparency" and "perceived platform supervision" are the core variables affecting user trust [10]. Only when people believe that their kindness is not being exploited can this network connecting thousands of families operate for a long time.

3.3. Alienation of internet public welfare

The original purpose of internet public welfare was to make doing good deeds simpler, but driven by traffic and algorithms, it has sometimes deviated from its original intention. The dissemination of many projects no longer relies on facts but on emotions. Emotions such as sadness and anger, which are most likely to attract clicks, have become the priority content recommended by platform algorithms. As a result, public welfare has gradually been packaged into a commodity for emotional consumption, deviating further and further from its initial purpose. This tendency has made public welfare lose its original warmth. Platforms pursue exposure, organizations pursue fundraising amounts, and the public pursues touching moments, while the real social problems and institutional causes are ignored. A story about a seriously ill child may receive millions of donations, while a long-term project to support education in poverty-stricken areas goes unnoticed. Alienation is also reflected in the simplification of forms. More and more projects rely on the model of "short videos + links". Content is simplified into a few sentences, a picture, and a piece of music, and complex social issues are reduced to a few seconds of emotional stimulation. Although this superficial dissemination can mobilize people quickly, it also makes public welfare shallow. If public welfare becomes a traffic competition, it will lose the power to change the world. For internet public welfare to return to its original aspiration, platform algorithms must serve values rather than being driven by algorithms.

3.4. Insufficient supervision of internet public welfare

The development speed of internet public welfare far exceeds the construction speed of the regulatory system. Faced with tens of thousands of projects and platforms, infringement cases often involve problems such as "multiple subjects, wide impact, and difficulty in obtaining evidence". Individuals have a low willingness to safeguard their rights, leading to low illegal costs and frequent infringements [11]. Existing laws, regulations, and enforcement mechanisms are often inadequate. Crowdfunding platforms lack professional review teams, the fund flow link is not transparent, and it is difficult to track the use of donations. After problems arise, public opinion often emerges first, while legal trials lag behind. Insufficient supervision not only gives lawbreakers an opportunity to take advantage but also makes compliant platforms bear unnecessary trust costs. The public cannot distinguish between true and false, and can only face each donation with a skeptical attitude. In the long run, this distrust will erode the entire public welfare ecosystem. In recent years, the government and industry associations have begun to attempt to formulate standards, such as requiring platforms to regularly disclose fund flows and improve identity authentication mechanisms. However, these measures are still in their initial stages, and it is necessary to collaboratively build an "Internet Public Welfare Circle of Shared Interests" through systems, technology, and mechanisms [12]. This can be achieved by helping platforms establish more scientific review processes, encouraging social organizations to improve transparency, and promoting public education to enable people to understand how to donate and supervise rationally.

4. Countermeasures for optimizing internet public welfare

4.1. Establishing privacy protection and content review mechanisms

The convenience and transparency of internet public welfare are the foundation of its credibility, and this openness also places higher requirements on information protection and content review. Platforms must balance efficiency and privacy [13]. When applicants upload materials, the system should automatically remind them of which information can be hidden and which pictures can be blurred. For text descriptions involving family, address, illness, and other content, there should be an option to block it with one click. In this way, applicants do not have to worry about inadvertently exposing too much information, nor will their privacy be magnified due to lack of experience. Platforms can also set up a small review team to check photos and texts for excessive personal information before they are made public. Publishing after review, although it takes a little more time, can make people feel at ease. At the same time, content grading can be implemented. Assistance requests involving privacy can only display detailed content to real-name users, while others can only see summaries, ensuring both transparency and dignity protection.

Internet public welfare organizations can also regularly carry out privacy protection training to make staff aware of which information can be made public and which must be kept confidential. When seeking help becomes more decent and safe, public trust will naturally return. True help lies not in showing suffering, but in safeguarding dignity.

4.2. Improving review processes and information tracing systems

To build public trust in internet public welfare, it is crucial to ensure the traceability of information and the tracking of donations for every project. At present, there is no relevant legislation on online donations, donor information is unclear, and the use of donations is not open and transparent. Therefore, it is very necessary to standardize it [14]. After the upload of assistance information, the system can automatically verify basic data such as name, ID card number, and contact information, which will then be reconfirmed manually. Internet public welfare organizations can establish long-term cooperation with hospitals, schools, or communities, and let these institutions help verify the authenticity of documents. This does not require significant investment; as long as fixed communication channels are established, many errors and frauds can be avoided.

Internet public welfare platforms should establish a transparent review and tracking system [15]. For example, the page can display the specific verification status of the funded person's materials and identity information, making it clear to donors at a glance. Platforms can also add a tracking function to display the flow of donations, expenditure records, and feedback pictures on the page of each project. In this way, donors can check the results by themselves without having to ask.

In addition, internet public welfare platforms can use their extensive reach to set up a reporting portal, allowing ordinary users to participate in supervision. If someone discovers doubts about a project, they can submit feedback directly, and the platform should respond in a timely manner. At the same time, to prevent malicious reports, a real-name reporting system can be designed, and public thanks can be given to effective reporters. Through this method, the one-sided review by the platform is transformed into a multi-participant reporting mechanism. This may increase the workload, but it can gradually accumulate trust. Only when every sum of money and every story can be traced will people be willing to continue to trust and extend a helping hand again.

4.3. Adjusting platform algorithms and communication methods

For internet public welfare to return to its proper state, platforms must first learn to slow down. This can start with algorithms, which should no longer recommend content solely based on the number of clicks and reposts. For example, some long-term assistance projects can be set up to be displayed regularly even if they are not highly popular. In this way, internet public welfare can break free from the constraints of emotional donations in the long run, thereby allocating public kindness to everyone in need in a more rational and intelligent manner.

In terms of communication methods, the optimization of digital communication strategies is the key to improving the efficiency of online charitable communication. Public welfare platforms should enhance the visibility of public welfare content and public interaction through data analysis and algorithm iteration [16]. Platforms can encourage project initiators to tell the story in plain language instead of deliberately creating emotions. Public welfare platforms can also use this as a resource to set up special columns for long-term projects, using time to witness changes in donation goals instead of just pursuing temporary emotional excitement.

4.4. Improving the legal system and social co-governance mechanisms

The healthy development of internet public welfare platforms cannot do without systematic legal regulation. It is difficult to supervise and restrict members relying solely on internal articles of association. The establishment of a system of fiduciary duties for senior executives can improve the credibility of charitable organizations [17]. Regulatory authorities can formulate more detailed management measures to clarify the responsibilities of platforms. For example, it can be stipulated that identity verification must be completed before fundraising, and the use of funds must be regularly disclosed. Relevant laws should also clarify the platform's supervision obligations and accountability procedures, so that public welfare platforms know what they can and cannot do. Once someone violates the regulations, there should be corresponding penalties, and supervision should not rely solely on public opinion.

At the same time, internet public welfare platforms also need the participation of third parties. Industry associations, public welfare institutions, and social organizations can jointly establish a set of standards to evaluate and guide the operation of platforms. Associations can organize annual reviews to check whether the flow of funds is transparent and project management is standardized. The media can also play a role by conducting public reports and follow-up coverage to keep the public informed of the real situation of the industry. Social supervision is not about finding faults, but about making everyone feel at ease.

In addition, the public should also be part of the supervision of internet public welfare. Platforms can establish an open feedback mechanism to allow donors to ask questions and check progress at any time. Communities, schools, and volunteer groups can jointly carry out public welfare education to teach people how to judge the authenticity of information and how to make donations safely. When more people understand the rules and how to supervise, the foundation of public welfare can become cleaner. With the cooperation of laws, platforms, and the public, internet public welfare can be both warm and orderly. Only in this way can people who do good deeds not be let down, and those who receive help can truly feel at ease.

5. Conclusion

Taking technology as the medium and trust as the link, internet public welfare has reshaped the way of social mutual assistance. It has lowered the threshold for public participation, improved the efficiency of resource allocation, and played a positive role in promoting the modernization of social governance. However, it still faces systematic challenges in privacy protection, information authenticity, algorithmic orientation, and legal supervision. In the future, internet public welfare should operate institutionally within the framework of the rule of law, and build a sound donation system of multi-subject co-governance by improving platform review mechanisms, strengthening data transparency, and improving the social supervision system. Only by making technology return to serving the public good and letting rules safeguard kindness can internet public welfare achieve sustained and healthy development on the basis of stability, fairness, and trust.

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