A Discursive Analysis of the Public Appeals from the E-Government Platforms

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Abstract: People's wellbeing has always been the focus of the government and the relevant departments. With the development of the Internet technology, e-government has not only provided a new platform for the public appeals, but also a new channel for the government and the relevant departments to know public appeals and the ways to improve people's wellbeing. By studying the distribution features of the online appeals, the relevance of time and events with the appeals, and the content of the appeals, we can have a better understanding of the focus of people's wellbeing in a more timely and effective manner. It is also expected that the study could provide a much more practical reference for the government and the relevant departments to plan works and make policies.

Keywords: E-government Platform, Appealing Discourse, Topics, Focus

1. Introduction

The people are the basis and the cornerstone of the State. The issue of people's wellbeing has a great impact on the economic promotion and social stability. Throughout the ages, it has even influenced the rise and fall of successive regimes. At the current stage of China's reform, which is entering an assertive phase, a proper solution to wellbeing issues will provide a harmonious and stable social environment for the development of other aspects of the cause. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that people's will is the greatest politics. Only by thinking what the people think and urgently addressing the needs of the people can we ensure stable and coordinated social and economic development, in line with the Party's aim of serving the people.

Liaoning Province has always attached great importance to people's wellbeing. In 2018, the proportion of the province's financial expenditure on people's wellbeing reached 74%.The 2019 Liaoning Provincial Government Work Report also emphasizes that the province should focus on strengthening social construction and wellbeing protection, and continues to promote the new wellbeing of the people. In this way, correctly knowing and appropriately dealing with people's appeals timely and effectively is fundamental to doing a good job in people's wellbeing. The Internet has become one of the main channels to understand public appeals and to know people's demands. As of June 2021, the size of China's Internet users has reached 1.011 billion. Influenced by the Covid-19 in 2020, the Internet has become one of the core channels to ask for political governance. By analyzing the public appealing discourse on the Internet, we can better understand the main contradictions of people's wellbeing, and the urgent wellbeing problems, and understand what people's wellbeing refers to and what the people want and need, which is of great practical significance to the steady and harmonious development of provinces and cities and to the development planning of economy and society, and provides a realistic basis for the construction blueprint of the wellbeing work in the urban areas of Liaoning Province. At the same time, from the previous academic research, there has been little research on the appealing discourse on the e-government platform. Therefore, this study is also a further extension of the theoretical framework of discourse analysis, which enriches the content of the theory, broadens the scope of practice, and plays a positive role in the supplement and improvement of the theory.

2. Literature Review

The discourse of public appeals refers to the discourse of the citizens request for their needs or the complaints about the relevant issues (individual, group or institution) . In terms of the traditional appealing path, this kind of discourse is mostly realized through standardized written requests. With the establishment and popularization of the Internet, the construction of e-government platform has become a new channel for citizens to express their demands and a new mode for the government to solve people's demands. The study of discourse in this networked administrative ecological environment has also become one of the focuses of many academic fields in recent years [1].

2.1. Related Research at Home

In terms of domestic research, China's research on public appeals began in 2002, and has gone through three stages of awareness sprouting, arousing and awakening[2]. In 2008, Hu Jintao communicated with netizens for six minutes online through a live video broadcast on the online platform of the People's Daily, unveiling the curtain of online interaction between the government and netizens. Since then, "online public appeals" has become the focus of all walks of life. So far, domestic research has focused on the role of the Internet in promoting the process of political democratization, the classification of the netizens' political participation and government response modes according to different criteria, and the change of discourse power in the interaction between the public and the government [3-5].

2.2. Related Research Abroad

Oversees studies on online public appeals began in 1999, mainly focusing on the role of the new media on citizens' political participation, the impact of online participation on actual political behavior, public opinion governance and orientation, and comparative studies on government response strategies among countries [6-8].

In terms of research content, there are few studies on the discourse of online public appeals, which is a direct reflection of the public's focus on wellbeing issues. And the analysis of discourse construction and strategy use is very crucial for exploring the expression and attitude of public appeals. In terms of research methods, most of the studies are qualitative, and only three of them are quantitative studies based on big data from national online government platforms. Therefore, this paper will use the big data of Dalian, Liaoning Province's online e-government platform, Public Opinion Network, as the basis, and take the public appealing discourse of this platform as the object of analysis, by exploring the types of appealing issues to see the distribution features of the appeals, the relevance of time and major events with the appeals, and the focus of the appeal contents. Meanwhile, the socio-cultural driving factors behind the appeals will also be explored to get an insight from the people's social needs and value belief systems.

3. Data Collection and Research Methodology

The data of this study was collected from the public appeals from June to August on the e-government platform of Dalian public opinions (Min Yi) website, Liaoning Province with a total of 666 valid entries. At the same time, quantitative research methods were used to analyze the distribution features of the appeals, the content of the appealing focus, and the relevance of the time and major events with the appeals. In the process of data collection, some information involved cross-counting, and for the same appeal in the same month, it was counted as valid information only once.

4. Discourse Analysis of the Public Appeals

4.1. Features of the Distribution of Topic Types

From the topics of the appeals, they can be divided into nine categories: traffic and transportation, environmental protection, health insurance and social security, household registration, water and electricity and natural gas, heating, quality regulation, urban construction, education and teaching, and real estate and property. As shown in Figure 1, among the ten major topics, the one with the most entries is environmental protection, followed by traffic and transportation, and then by quality control.

The topic with the least entries is heating, followed by household registration and social security. Among the topics with more entries, environmental governance has become the most concerned one, which has a lot to do with the awareness of environmental protection by the state and the society over the years; traffic travel is a daily routine, which is closely related to people's life, so the number of the entries is also high; quality regulation involves all walks of life and covers a wide range of industries, so it is a highly appealed topic. Regarding the issues with a low   number of appeals, the heating issue has strong seasonal properties, and is a high demand issue in winter, because the data collection time dimension coincides with the summer, so the number of this topic appealing is in low or even zero status; the other two issues, household registration and social security, also has a close relationship with interests of the people, but the main reason for the low appeal rate is, first, the government's wellbeing services has never slackened in the supervision of service quality, effectively guaranteeing the people's needs for convenience and efficiency; secondly, a large number of businesses can be operated personally through the online platform, reducing the business process and simplifying the way of handling, directly meeting the needs of the people without having to find other approaches to meet the demand.
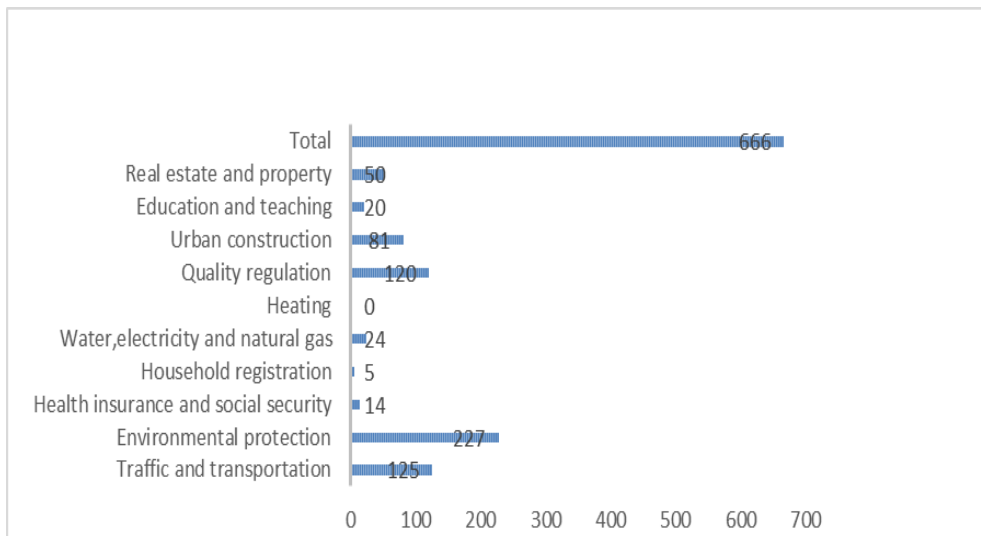

Figure 1: Distribution of appeal topics
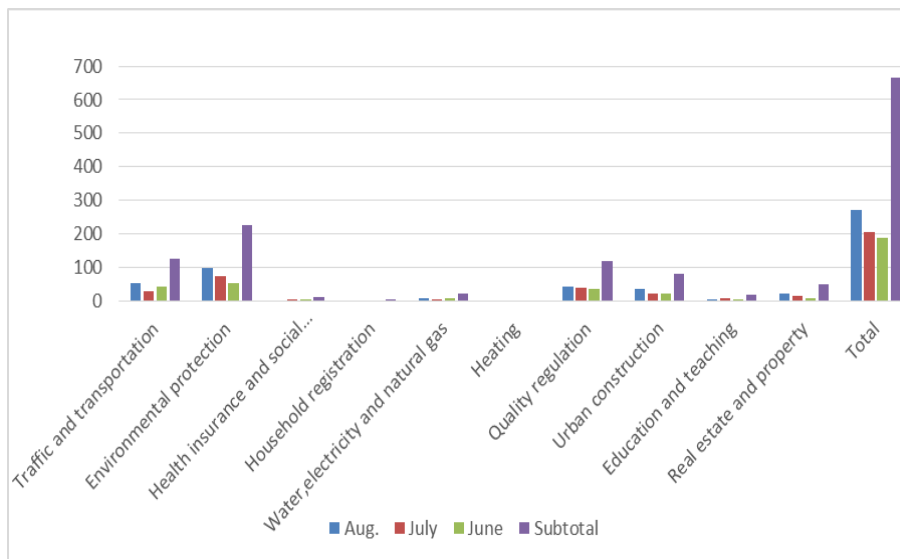
4.2. Correlation with Time and Major Events

Figure 2: Monthly distribution of topics

By looking at the monthly distribution of the appeals (Figure 2), we can see that there is a certain correlation between the appeals and different months and major events or government policies that occur in that month. In the case of environmental protection, for example, the appeal to this topic has

been rising steeply since June, reaching its highest value in August in particular. From the content of the appeal, there were a lot of complaints about the piling of debris in the building not being cleaned up since July. In August, due to a series of major fire incidents in Dalian, people's awareness of the public environment and fire prevention was further raised, so there were a lot of complaints about the piling of debris in the building and illegal buildings blocking the fire escape. Take traffic accidents as an example, from the content of the topic, a certain proportion of the appealing information focused on the sudden appearance of certain areas of parking fines in various residential districts, which should be related to the traffic management department to further regulate the parking action in the district. The other topic on the route setting and planning, in some way, reflects the fact that the new planning has not solved the existing problems but has created new ones. In terms of education and teaching, it was relatively low in June but high in July, and slightly down again in August. The high frequency in July was mainly related to the series of effects of the double reduction policy. In August, as we enter the summer, students are basically on vacation, and the relative appeal is lower. However, judging from the content of the topics to be discussed in the subsequent part of this paper, September is expected to be high again, with the issue of tuition arrears still being the main appealing topic.

4.3. Analysis of the Content Focus of the Appeals

From the content of the demands of each topic, traffic and travel mainly focus on road planning, parking and bus route setting; environmental protection issues mainly focus on three major environmental pollution appeals: environment pollution, air pollution, noise pollution, and light pollution. Environment pollution mainly involves building debris not cleaned, sewer discharge problems, unauthorized building construction not removed; air pollution mainly involves garbage cleanup, dust factor, smoke emission problems; noise pollution mainly involves construction noise, horn noise and business noise pollution; light pollution mainly involves night billboard light source. The contents of the appealing topic of water, electricity and natural gas are mainly focused on gas replacement services and water supply outage.

There is a lot of cross-cutting information among the three topics of quality control, urban construction and real estate and property. The topic of environmental protection, mainly covers the areas of building (including residential) quality, road surface, illegal construction, and public environmental management (including building and the community area). In addition, quality control also involves the authenticity of data declared by the citizens, arrears of wages, service qualification and service attitude, etc.; urban construction also involves the renovation and reinforcement of old buildings, the installation of elevators and parking spaces, etc.; property also involves issues such as transferring school districts and the price of quarantined hotels in pandemic time.

Health insurance and social security issues are mainly focused on the enterprises payments, vaccine appointments, health insurance policy processing and information communication and notifications. Household registration issues are mainly reflected in the settlement and transfer policies. Water, electricity and natural gas issues are mainly reflected in the gas replacement, gas connection and water outage. Education and teaching is mainly reflected in the transfer-related policies, institutions absconding with the money, and illegal training institutions as well as teaching qualifications.

5. Conclusion

From the above analysis, we can see that the distribution of appeals in terms of topic types is characterized by an asymmetrical distribution with three major topics: environmental protection, transportation and travel, and quality regulation. The focus of the topics is significantly correlated with time factors, major events and policy-making or undertaking factors. The content of the appeals covers a wide range of topics, and some of them have a strong correlation with time factors. For this reason, the person in charge of the network platform should check out t, organize and process the messages in time to ensure that the people's problems can be resolved immediately, and the people's demands can be met promptly; at the same time, the appeals should be submitted with the basic information needed for investigation, such as the relevant parties involved, the date and the location information, etc. In general, the e-government platform provides the public with the opportunity to lodge the appeals and participate more in social construction. It also enables the government and the relevant departments to have more channels to understand the needs of the people, to hear the public's voice. Therefore, No matter it is the relevant authorities in charge of the platform or the claimant on the platform, only they both use and maintain the platform actively, effectively, and reasonably can the initiative of the

government that "the officials have a response as long as the people have a call" could be truly at work.

Acknowledgments

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