

Research on the Path of Improving Public Service Efficiency of Grassroots Governments from the Perspective of Digital Governance

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ABSTRACT

Driven by the national strategies of Digital China and the modernization of governance system and capacity, grassroots governments, as the "last mile" of public service provision, play a critical role in enhancing public satisfaction and policy implementation effectiveness. Although China has achieved visible progress in grassroots digital governance, prominent problems remain, including platform fragmentation, insufficient data sharing, mismatched supply and demand of public services, and inadequate digital talent support. Based on Holistic Governance Theory and Service-Oriented Government Theory, this paper adopts literature analysis and case study to examine practical dilemmas and underlying causes in the digital transformation of grassroots public services. It proposes optimized paths from five dimensions: top-level design, data governance, service supply, talent development, and supervision and performance evaluation. The research aims to provide a practical reference for grassroots governments to improve public service efficiency and advance governance modernization.

KEYWORDS

Grassroots governance; Digital government; Public service; Governance efficiency; Digital governance

1 Introduction

With the rapid development of big data, artificial intelligence, and other digital technologies, digital governance has become a key driving force for government governance reform. The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly states to "accelerate the development of Digital China and improve the grassroots governance system," placing digital transformation high on the agenda of national governance modernization. Grassroots governments are directly responsible for policy implementation, livelihood services, conflict mediation, and emergency management. The efficiency and quality of their public service provision are core indicators of governance modernization.

In recent years, local governments have promoted reforms including "One-stop Online Services," "Maximum One Visit," and "City Brain," which have significantly improved the digital level of grassroots government services. However, constrained by departmental barriers, unclear power division, inconsistent technical standards, and limited resource input, grassroots digital governance still suffers from problems such as overemphasis on technology rather than mechanism, construction rather than operation, and online channels rather than offline services. The goals of precise, equitable, and accessible public services have not been fully achieved.

From the perspective of public management practice, this study focuses on improving grassroots public service efficiency. It responds to real governance challenges and reflects the MPA education orientation of "integrating theory with practice and serving public decision-making". The conclusions can help local governments optimize governance processes and improve institutional design.

2 Theoretical Basis

2.1 Holistic Governance Theory

Holistic governance emphasizes citizen-oriented governance, breaks departmental segmentation and fragmented governance structures, and achieves coordinated governance through functional integration, data integration, and process reengineering. This theory provides a fundamental framework to address "information silos" and "duplicated management" at the grassroots level. It requires grassroots authorities to build an integrated digital platform to support cross-departmental, cross-level, and cross-regional collaboration.

2.2 Service-Oriented Government Theory

Service-oriented government theory takes public interest as the core, advocates shifting government functions from "control-oriented" to "service-oriented", and pursues fairness, accessibility, and public satisfaction. In the digital era, a service-oriented government should use digital tools to simplify procedures, lower transaction costs, expand service coverage, and realize systematic upgrading of public service supply.

3 Current Status of Digital Construction of Grassroots Public Services

3.1 Popularization of Digital Government Service Platforms and Rising Online Handling Rates

Regions across China have built government service websites and mobile applications, enabling online handling of high-frequency matters such as social security, civil affairs, household registration, and medical insurance. These measures have greatly reduced processing time and improved the standardization of government services.

3.2 Preliminary Integration of Data Resources and More Scientific Governance Decision-Making

Grassroots governments have gradually established data sharing and exchange platforms. Through data analysis in population management, community governance, and risk early warning, governance has shifted from experience-driven to data-driven.

3.3 Initial Formation of Multi-stakeholder Participation and Improved Social Collaboration

Some regions have introduced third-party institutions, social organizations, and tech enterprises to participate in platform development and operation, forming a public service system led by the government, participated by society, and supported by the market.

4 Prominent Problems in Improving Grassroots Public Service Efficiency

4.1 Fragmented Governance Structure and Inadequate Platform Coordination

Independent systems developed by different departments and levels lack unified standards and interfaces. Citizens still need to register and fill in forms on multiple platforms, causing obstacles in cross-departmental services.

4.2 Imperfect Data Sharing Mechanism and Insufficient Data Value Utilization

Data barriers exist between departments; some key data are not shared due to institutional or ideological obstacles. Inconsistent data standards and formats hinder integration. Inadequate data security and privacy protection further restrict data opening and application.

4.3 Mismatch Between Public Service Supply and Public Demand

Online services focus excessively on procedural electronization, lacking user-friendly design for the elderly, rural residents, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. The digital divide remains severe. The service feedback mechanism is incomplete, so a closed-loop system of demand collection, handling, and feedback has not been fully formed.

4.4 Insufficient Digital Governance Capacity and Talent Shortage

Grassroots staff generally lack digital literacy and technical application capabilities. Compound talents who master both public management and data technology are in short supply. The training system fails to match the rapid development of digital governance.

4.5 Inadequate Institutional Support and Deficient Performance Evaluation System

The division of powers, assessment mechanisms, and supervision systems for digital governance are incomplete. Some regions prioritize construction over operation and launch over effectiveness. Performance evaluation overemphasizes coverage and completion rate while neglecting public satisfaction and service quality.

5 Optimization Paths for Improving Grassroots Public Service Efficiency

5.1 Strengthen Top-Level Design and Promote Holistic Governance

Unify planning and technical standards for grassroots digital government services, integrate scattered platforms, and build an integrated service system. Rationalize cross-departmental powers and responsibilities, establish regular coordination mechanisms, and realize “one-stop handling for one thing”.

5.2 Improve Data Sharing Mechanism and Release Data Governance Value

Establish a hierarchical and classified data sharing catalog to clarify the scope, subjects, and timelines of data sharing. Strengthen data security management and privacy protection to promote secure data application. Deepen data application in livelihood services, risk prevention, and urban management to improve decision-making science.

5.3 Optimize Service Supply and Narrow the Digital Divide

Integrate online and offline services, retain offline windows and on-site assistance, and promote age-friendly and barrier-free transformation. Establish a closed-loop demand survey and feedback mechanism, simplify operations, and improve user experience. Expand public services to rural and community levels to promote equal access.

5.4 Enhance the Construction of Digital Talent Teams

Include digital literacy in regular training for grassroots cadres to improve practical ability and risk awareness. Introduce professional talents through government procurement, school-enterprise cooperation, and flexible employment. Establish incentive mechanisms to encourage innovation in digital working methods.

5.5 Perfect Institutional Guarantee and Performance Evaluation System

Improve rules and regulations for digital governance to clarify procedures, powers, and responsibilities. Build a performance evaluation system focusing on efficiency, fairness, and public satisfaction, and strengthen result application and supervision. Strengthen routine operation, maintenance, and iterative upgrading to avoid "heavy construction, light operation".

6 Conclusion

Improving grassroots public service efficiency is a foundational project for advancing national governance modernization. Digital technology provides an important tool for grassroots governance, but real efficiency improvement requires not only technological upgrading but also systematic reform in governance concepts, institutional mechanisms, talent teams, and supporting systems.

In the future, grassroots governments should adhere to a people-centered approach and holistic governance, continuously break departmental barriers, deepen data sharing, optimize service processes, and strengthen capacity building. Digital governance will shift from formal digitization to substantive efficiency improvement, constantly enhancing the equality, precision, and accessibility of public services and providing solid support for the modernization of the grassroots governance system and governance capacity.

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