

## **PUBLIC CONCERNS ON SHANGHAI URBAN GOVERNANCE AFFAIRS: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON GOVERNMENT MICROBLOG DATA**

Jinqing CHEN<sup>1</sup>, Jing HAN<sup>2</sup>, Tingting QU<sup>3</sup>, Feng SHAN<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Urban Planning, Tongji University, shanghai, China, 4539326@qq.com

<sup>2</sup>Research Center of Human Settlements Environment, Shanghai Tongji Urban Planning & Design Institute, shanghai, China, hjbm333@163.com

<sup>3</sup>Technology Department, Zhuhai Huafa Cultural Industry Investment Holdings Co., Ltd., zhuhai, China, ottcat@qq.com

<sup>4</sup>Department of Urban Planning, Tongji University, shanghai, China, 32019386@qq.com

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*This paper builds a database of urban governance affairs through making textual analysis of all microblogs published in June and December 2014 by Shanghai Municipal Government official microblog account "Shanghai City". The public concern on urban governance affairs is reflected by netizens' attitude to Shanghai City's updates, and measured by the volume forwards. By this means the public concerns on urban affairs are known, which provides important decision-making basis for better listening to public's will and responding to their needs when the government allocates resources and sets priorities. The result shows that: (1) in content, the public concerns are mainly focus on leisure activities and traffic condition, then daily life information. Governance and policy matters are rarely concerned; (2) in attributes, people are highly concerned about the forthcoming events, rumor refuting and life services, but pay little attention to policy news except for housing, entrance test, holiday and car license auction related policies; (3) in specific affairs of most concern are entrance exams, leisure activities, health and hygiene, weather variations, city images, films and TV programs, food, traffic, car license auction, sports and holiday etc.*

### **1. Research background and purpose**

#### *1.1 Research background*

Chinese cities are experiencing two significant transformations: (1) the stage of urban development. China has entirely stepped into the middle-late period of urbanization. In this context, new demand emerges--from pursuing economic growth to emphasizing the quality of economic development, which is entirely distinct from what was before the 50% node. (2) the composition of citizens. The old generation fades while the next generation rises. The post-40s and post-50s retire from the stage of social management. The post-60s and post-70s become the social dominants. The post-80 and post-90s turn into the leading component of social forces and carries the city's future. The growing-up environment and living conditions of the new generation are completely different from the old. They have unique concerns and needs on urban affairs. Their mainstream demand varies from the pursuit of material possessions to the high quality of life. With the two changes interweaving, a structural change is taking place profoundly in the public mainstream demand for urban governance and services.

These two changes occur in a new context--widespread use of Internet and rapid rise of new media. New media perceived public demand for the government. By effective use of the new channel, the government can be more keenly listen to the latest pulse of the community and the people's will.

The existing researches do not give sufficient considerings about the desires of the new generation citizens (post-80s and post-90s), and lack quantitate analysis (e.g. by microblog data method). The previous works on new media and microblog are mostly focused on the aspects of online public opinion, social interaction, public participation, information dissemination, network marketing, social governance, etc. They see microblog as a channel of public participation in politics, but not regard it as a "mirror" to show urban governance affairs.

Shanghai is one of many Chinese cities experiencing two major changes in the new context. Its economic development leadership decides it walks in the front row of nation-wide in these changes. Research of Shanghai is representative and has a great meaningful reference for Chinese urban researches.

### *1.2 Research questions*

This research aims to capture the online hot issues of the public concern which reveal the "mainstream opinion" about the urban governance affairs, and provides important decision-making basis for better listening to public's will and responding to their needs when the government allocates administrative resources.

The research objectives can be summarized into 3 specific questions:

- (1) What contents of affairs are most concerned about?
- (2) What types of affairs are most concerned about?
- (3) What characteristics do the most concerned issues have?

Furthermore, what public needs and expectations on urban government's management and services do the three questions reveal?

## **2. Research design and data**

### *2.1 Research design*

This paper's objectives are achieved through the studies of the governmental microblogging content and public responses to them. We make textual analysis of the "Shanghai City" microblogging messages to obtain prototype data on urban governance affairs. "Shanghai City" is the official microblog account of Shanghai Municipal Government. Its microblogs cover all aspects of urban life, and can be used to represent a variety of citizen-related affairs. Launched on China's popular Twitter-like service platform Weibo.com in November 2011, "Shanghai City" has been in operation more than three years, published more than 20,000 tweets, and accumulated more than 500 million followers. Its influence has consistently ranked within the top five governmental microblogs of China. The characters of publicity, officiality, maturity, universality and quantity of "Shanghai City" make the reliability and validity of research data is guaranteed.

This paper uses the forwarding amount of microblog to measure people's concern on urban governance affairs. The logic is that: if a microblog is forwarded, the forwarder is concerned about the content of this microblog; once a microblog is forwarded, the larger the forwarding amount is, the more public concerns the forwarded microblog has.

### *2.1 Data*

We take the year 2014 as our study year, and choose microblogs published in June and December (to cover the first and the second half of the year) as research samples. The total number of valid microblogs is 1394. The forwarding amount is 180,373, where maximum forwarding amount of a single microblog is 4901 and minimum is 6. Each microblog is forwarded 129.4 times on average. The research data distribution is shown in Figure 1.

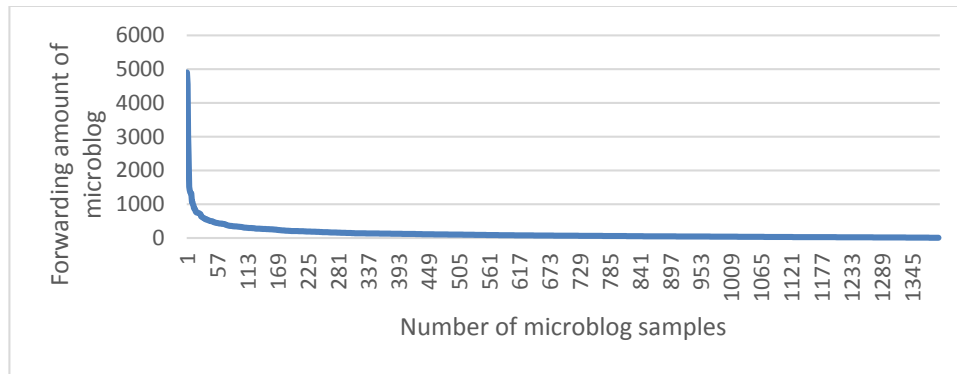


Figure 1. Data distribution of the microblog forwarding amount

### 3. The characteristics of affair content

#### 3.1 The category of urban governance affairs according to content

Depending on the content, urban governance affairs of the study are divided into 7 categories and 32 subcategories. The average concerning amount of each subcategory is shown in Figure 2. For the 7 categories, leisure activities and transportation are the most concerned affairs, then daily life information. Governance policy, weather and other affairs draw less attention. For the 32 subcategories, entrance exams, carnival, city image, housing policy, car license auction as well as health and hygiene are highly focused issues by people. In details, the microblog with the title “News: Essay theme of 2014 Shanghai college entrance published!” has been re-tweeted 4901 times and becomes the most concerned microblog among the entrance exam related affairs; the microblog “Oriental Pearl New Year's Eve countdown: 20 tickets waiting for you” has been forwarded 2474 times and ranked top in the carnival related affairs; the microblog “Photo: Shanghai Center stunning lighting” gets the most re-tweets of 3073 in all city image related affairs; the microblog “News: 2015 holiday arrangements announced” is the biggest concern in holiday related affairs with the forward amount of 1332.

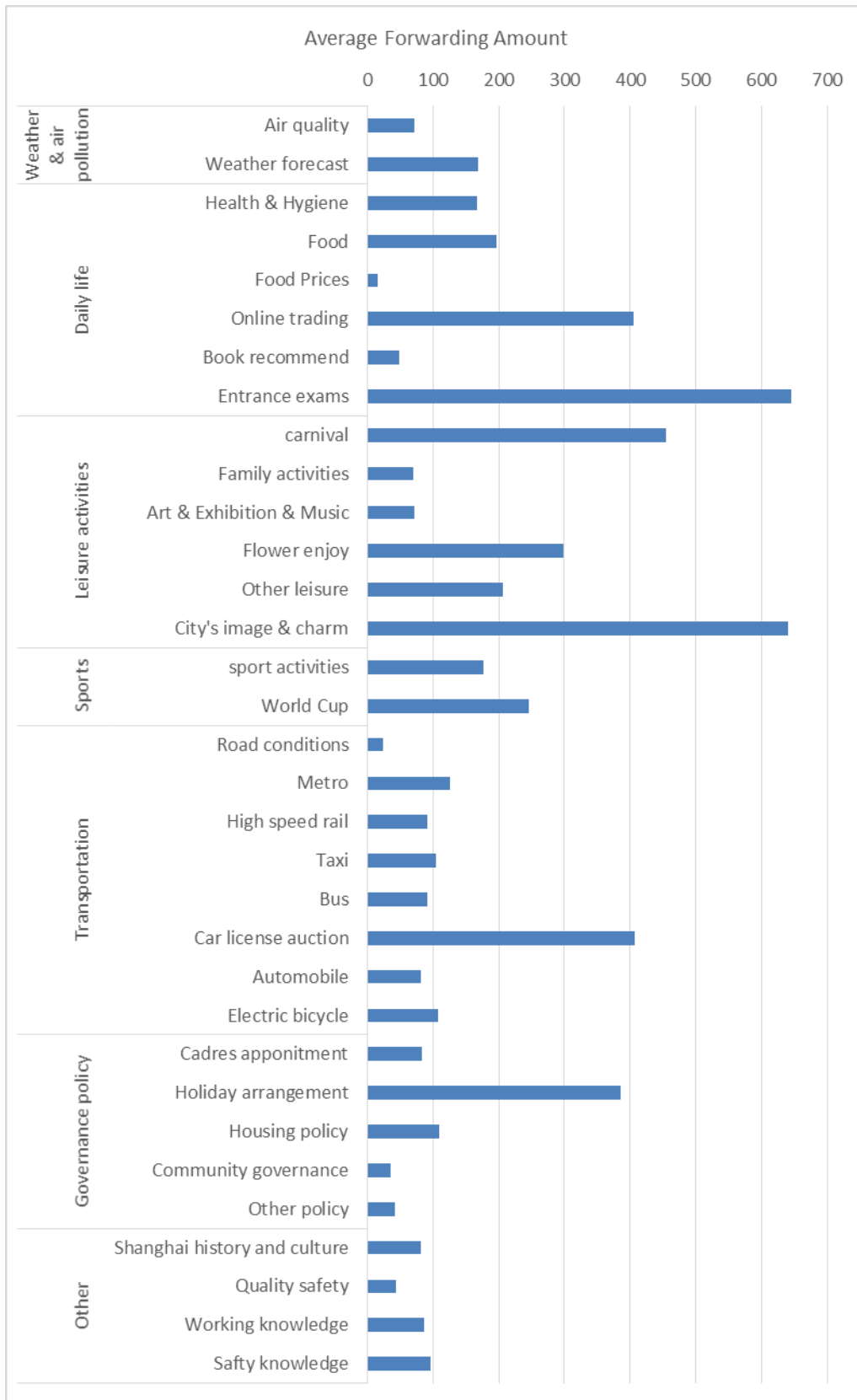


Figure 2. Categories and average forwarding amount of urban governance affairs

### 3.2 Some interesting phenomena

In the case of weather forecasting and variation, people's main concern is the sharp weather changes, especially the dramatically cooling or rain. If there appears "zero", "minus", "snow", "Storm"

and other similar words in weather forecast related microblog , people forward them several times higher than usual . For instance, the average forwarding amount of weather forecast microblog is 135 , but the one with the title " Storm hits Shanghai from tonight! It is expected to continue until the day after tomorrow morning" is forwarded 761 times.

In the case of air quality, public concern is generally lower with the average forwarding amount of 72. But that does not mean people are not concerned about air quality, because when the air quality deteriorates (e.g. PM2.5 reaches high level), the public will pay much attention. For instance, the microblog entitled "This morning severe pollution: the highest temperature is 13 degrees, New Year's Day fell to freezing point" get 208 re-tweets. Showing awareness on air quality indicates that Shanghai people tend to pursue more refined life quality.

For food and book, there are totally 61 book related microblogs (1 post per day) and 166 food related microblogs in sample. Their average forwarding amounts are 49 and 166, and their maximum forwarding amounts are 260 and 569 respectively. That is to say, food receives more attention than book. This result shows that in Shanghai "eat goods" outnumbers "reading people". The public usually are more concerned about where to eat good food rather than what good books come out.

For leisure and flower, Shanghai people have a unique interest in flower. For example, the microblog titled as "This weekend Guyi Park lotus exhibition: 60 tickets waiting for you!" gets 1070 forwarding amount, ranking 11th in the highest forwarding microblogs. This reflects that enjoying flowers is one of the important interests for Shanghai people's leisure activities.

#### **4. The characteristics of affair attribute**

According to information attribute, urban governance affairs in this study can be divided into six categories, in descending order of the degree of public concern is events information, rumor refuting, life services, news and report, culture and history, policy issuance (see Figure 3).

Rumor refuting affairs are highly concerned, indicating a strong public desire for accuracy of information. It also reflects a side of the information problems of the transforming Chinese cities. In the past, the degree of information openness was relatively low. But in the present, rumors spread quickly and easily on the Internet. People have a great need for disclosed and reliable information. For example, the microblog entitled "Rumor: 'Shanghai will cancel the property-purchasing limitations', Shanghai housing restriction policy has not changed" quickly gets 330 times re-tweets. It not only reflects that housing has become a matter of general concern of the public, but also mirrors that the public are less informed of the policy of the city government. In addition to the establishment of the government's future rapid rumor dispel mechanism, more effort must also be made to increase transparency in policy making and radically reduce the spread of rumors.

Governance and policy affairs are rarely concerned, indicating that people are not enthusiastic about the city governance. This may be involved in the possibility and convenience of the participation. When the public feel less likely to participate, they would have thought that the it is little to do with them and so choose to "ignore" them. For example, the microblog entitled "2015 My words to Shanghai" gets 1342 re-tweets. It said, "as long as the desire is send to 'Shanghai City', the selected aspirations will appear on the big screen of Lujiazui Citigroup Tower in the evening of December 31th". In sharp contrast, another microblog entitled "2010--2014 annual selection of model workers in Shanghai start! Raise your hand to participate!" receives only 8 forwards. The gap between the two is that the public think they may be involved in the former but they cannot be rated as model workers in Shanghai.

Despite the governmental issuance information is generally not as hot as others, the entrance examination, holiday arrangement, housing policy and car license auction etc. affairs which people think are directly related to their vital interests are closely watched by the public. For example, the microblog entitled "2014 Shanghai college entrance examination scores a two announced!" is

forwarded 1516 times; the microblog labeled “URGENT: 2015 holiday schedule announced!” wins 1332 re-tweets; another microblog headlined "Car plate new regulations released: driver's license must be submitted next month!" is forwarded 847 times.

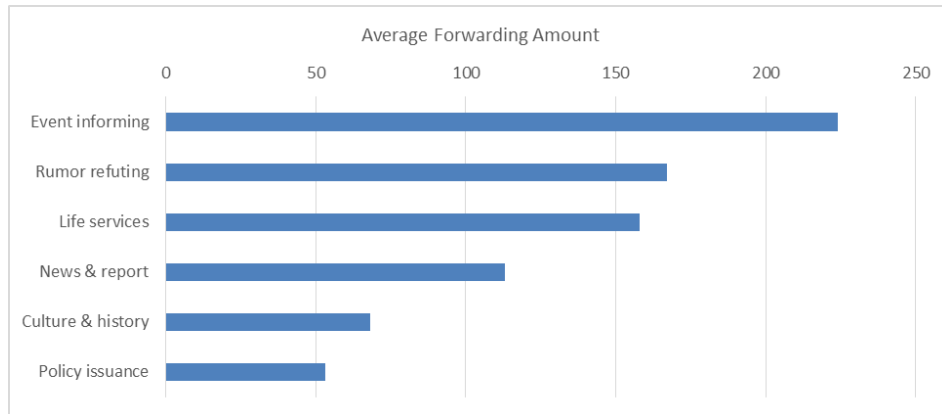


Figure 3. Public concern on urban governance affairs by different attributes

### 5. Analysis of the concerned affairs with high frequency

This research regards the microblog forwarded more than 500 times as the high-frequency microblog. There are 45 such kind microblogs in our statistic, accounting for 3.23% of the total. Their forwarding amounts are 46749, coming to about one-fourth of the sum number. By the data, entrance exam affair appears most in the high-frequency microblogs, along with leisure activities, health and hygiene, weather variation, food, films and TV programs (see Figure 4). Moreover, entrance exam affair also has the largest forwarding amount, followed by leisure activities, health and hygiene, weather variation and city's image (see Figure 5).

According to the above analysis, the high-frequency affairs in the government official microblog reflect several things: (1) affairs related to children's education and future destiny (entrance exam in this study) are dominantly the most concerned things of citizens; (2) leisure activities, health and hygiene, and weather variation affairs are stably and everlastingly watched; (3) City image affairs have big forwarding amount but emerge less in the high-frequency microblogs, suggesting that this topic is strongly cared by the public and the government should give more effort on enlightening the city's image and charm; (4) traffic condition and car license auction affairs attract great attention, meaning that Shanghai's transportation is not satisfactory; (5) the active performance of online trading affairs remarks that Internet has becoming a major channel of public buying and spending.

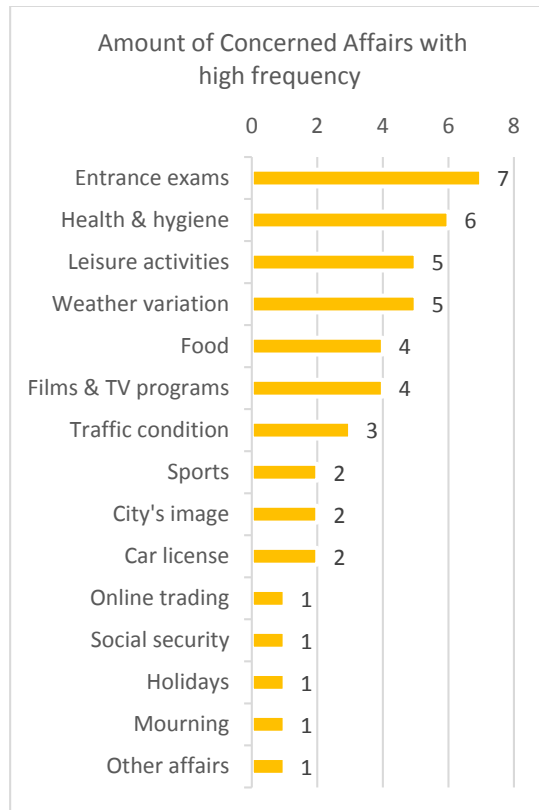


Figure 4 Amount of Each Concerned Affairs with high frequency (Unit: piece)

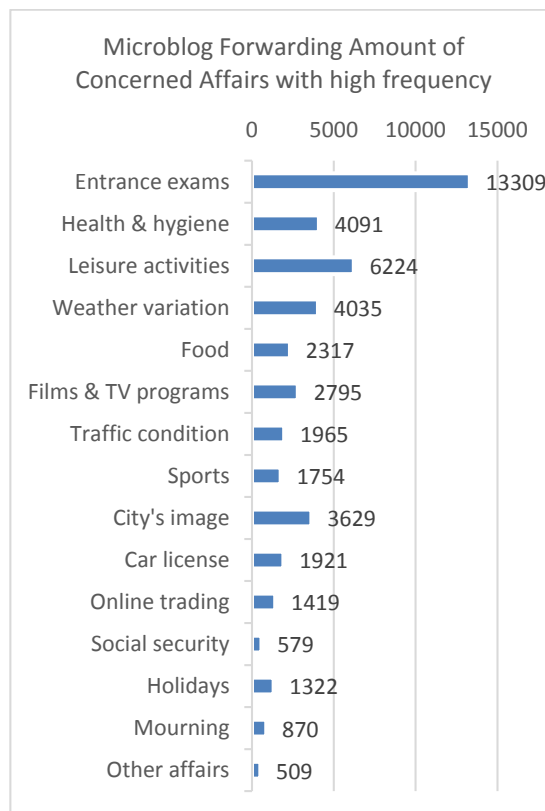


Figure 5. Forwarding Amount of Each Concerned Affairs with high frequency (Unit: time)

## 6. Conclusion and deficiency

This paper reveals three characteristics of public concerns on urban governance:

(1) In content, the public concerns are mainly focus on leisure activities and traffic condition, then daily life information. Governance policies, weather and air quality are rarely concerned;

(2) In attributes, people are highly concerned about the forthcoming events, rumor refuting and life services, but pay little attention to policy news except for housing, entrance test, holiday and car license auction related policies;

(3) In specific affairs, people show most concerns on entrance exams, leisure activities, health and hygiene, weather variations, city images, films and TV programs, food, traffic, car license auction, sports and holiday etc.

These characteristics indicate that Shanghai government should place more administrative resources in the following fields to meet the needs of the public: increasing the number of high schools and universities as well as enhancing the quality of higher education, providing enough leisure spaces and recreation facilities, shaping the city's image and charm, improving the traffic condition, optimizing the online trading environment, and making better services of food, sports, weather, etc. related affairs.

Taking into account the age structure traits of Internet users, data in this paper mainly reflects young people's concerns and demands. To fully grasp the needs of every age group, other approaches (e.g. telephone interview, questionnaire survey, etc.) should be taken to make supplementary and comprehensive analysis.

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