

# Making Digital Technology Return to The Essence of Government Affairs: Generative Logic and Resolution Strategy of Digital Administrative Burden

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**Abstract.** Along with the continuous advancement of the digital government construction in our country, in order to effectively build a service-oriented government that the people are truly satisfied with, this article discusses the administrative burden that the digital government brings to the citizens in the implementation process, analyzes the reasons and proposes the solution path, and provides the reference for future research. Based on the interview method, the experience and feelings of different groups in the process of interacting with the digital government are intuitively obtained. The research finds that the learning cost, obedience cost and psychological cost borne by different groups are slightly different, which is related to the service attitude of government staff and the friendliness of product development and design. Relevant departments should improve the working system to improve the quality of the team. Improve the response mechanism and the product temperature; Strengthen digital empowerment, optimize government services and other measures to reduce the administrative burden of citizens in the implementation of digital government.

**Keywords:** Digital Government; Administrative Burden; Digital Administrative Burden.

## 1. Introduction

In Recent years, with the integration of new generation digital technologies into the construction of digital government, China's digital government construction has been promoted, and the efficiency of digital government services has been improved. The wide popularity of new service management models such as "one network management" and "one network cooperation" has made the digital business environment continue to optimize and the level of online government services continue to improve. Many existing studies and practices have shown that digital government construction is an effective means to promote the modernization of national governance system and governance capacity and is the embodiment of the people-centered development concept in the era of big data in improving government governance capacity, which can greatly reduce the administrative burden on citizens. However, the research finds that the construction of the digital government has brought a certain degree of spillover effect while reducing the administrative burden of citizens. If the mechanism and boundary range of the digital government cannot be understood, it is likely to increase the administrative burden of citizens. Therefore, from the perspective of administrative burden, this paper discusses the administrative burden brought to citizens by the construction of digital government in the era of "Internet +" through interviews and combined with existing studies, analyzes the reasons and puts forward feasible countermeasures. It is significant for local digital governments to make up for shortcomings in the construction process, finding and timely solving problems, optimizing the interactive experience in the process of "online" interaction between citizens and the government, practicing the "people-centered service concept", and improving the credibility of the government and the sense of happiness and gain of citizens. At the same time, starting from the reality, this paper uses the interview method to summarize the administrative burden faced by citizens in the process of digital government construction, which is significant for enriching the theoretical research on digital government and administrative burden and providing new research ideas.

## **2. Concept Definition**

### **2.1. Administrative Burden**

Administrative burden, as a new concept widely concerned by the international academic community in recent years, was first put forward in 2012, and the discussion of this concept can be traced back to the research on modern bureaucracy and bureaucracy. Baden first introduced the concept of administrative burden into the field of public administration and defined administrative burden as "the onerous experience of individual policy implementation". [1] Some studies have found that administrative burden is a series of obstacles or frictions experienced by citizens in the process of interacting with the government, which is closely related to related concepts such as red tape, mud, and torture mechanisms. [2] Some scholars also pointed out that administrative burden is a variety of costs that people need to bear in the process of dealing with government departments. These costs often make them feel unbearable or at a loss, and affect their perception and evaluation of government performance and credibility. [3] The author believes that the administrative burden is the pressure and tedious experience that citizens feel in the process of handling various businesses that need to interact with the government. This kind of pressure and tedious experience will only increase the resistance of citizens in the process of interacting with the government, which is not conducive to the good maintenance and development of the relationship between the government and the people in the long run.

### **2.2. Digital Administrative Burden**

With the continuous development of the Internet the way of interaction between the government and citizens is undergoing profound changes. Most of the things that used to need to be handled in the offline window can now be done through the online terminal platform. Although this process transformation can objectively reduce administrative costs, improve administrative efficiency and reduce the administrative burden of citizens, practice shows that the construction of digital government is likely to give rise to the administrative burden of citizens, leading to the digital burden of administrative burden. [4] Therefore, some scholars refer to the administrative burden in the digital environment as the digital administrative burden -- the heavy experience suffered by individuals under the background of digital government, which is a special form of administrative burden in digitalization. [5] In the author's opinion, the digital administrative burden refers to the negative experience brought by digital technology and other reasons in the process of citizens' interaction with the government when handling a certain business under the background of the government's operation dominated by digital technology.

## **3. Research Summary: Digital Government and Administrative Burden**

### **3.1. Research on the Performance of Digital Administrative Burden**

Administrative Burden is a kind of cost that citizens need to bear in the process of dealing with government departments, which can be divided into three categories: learning cost, obedience cost and psychological cost. [6] Therefore, when studying the performance of administrative burden brought by the operation of digital government to citizens, most scholars mainly find and discuss from the above three aspects. In terms of the cost of learning, some scholars pointed out that the cost of learning refers to the time that citizens need to learn to do things online. [7] For example, citizens need to understand and learn about policy requirements online, spend time and effort searching, querying, and interpreting policy documents, and determine whether they meet the requirements. In terms of compliance costs, some scholars have pointed out that compliance costs refer to the extra costs people have to bear in order to meet the requirements of the government, such as leave, commuting, finance and intermediary. [8] Under the background that the new technologies requires learning and mastering digital skills, some citizens do not have the necessary equipment, knowledge and skills and other subjective and objective conditions, so their compliance costs are reduced, but

citizens' distrust of information technology and digital government may increase their psychological costs. At the same time, the implementation of digital government the number of errands that need to be done and the time taken to do so has been reduced, but if it is not possible to achieve the effect of "15 minutes" of government service circle through decentralization and technological empowerment, this quantitative reduction will still bring about a residual administrative burden. [9] In terms of psychological costs, some scholars have pointed out that psychological costs run through the entire process of citizens' interaction with the digital government, including all regulations or bureaucratic actions that cause citizens to feel anxiety, shame, loss of autonomy or pressure.[10] In the process of digital business handling, when citizens have urgent problems, most of them are answered by intelligent customer service, and manual customer service personnel are in short supply, which cannot solve the problems for citizens in the first time. [11] Users can not get a timely and accurate response, will have a frustrated mood. In addition, citizens will also choose to seek help from grassroots bureaucrats, and citizens will fully consider the language expression habits and content before contacting them, because they are afraid of inappropriate dialogue or verbal conflict in the conversation. In addition, after submitting an application online, citizens need to repeatedly check whether there is the wrong information or application. Worrying about their application will be successfully passed, and guessing how long the period of time will be, which will cause a certain degree of anxiety and can be uniformly attributed to psychological costs.

### **3.2. Research on the Causes of Digital Administrative Burden**

The three costs brought by the operation of digital government to citizens can try to analyze the reasons behind them. Through the summary of literature, there are mainly the following aspects. One is the way the government provides services. [12] From the traditional offline window where citizens can describe their problems and the business they need to handle, citizens need to download the APP or enter the business interface through the wechat mini program, and judge which option to click according to their actual situation, and then complete the following business independently. Therefore, citizens will bear different degrees of administrative burden; The second is the individual characteristics of citizens. Some scholars put forward the concept of "administrative literacy" and believe that it is a human capital worthy of attention. [13] The administrative burden brought by the implementation of digital government is related to citizens' education level, patience level and willingness to devote attention, etc. People who bear the administrative burden significantly in the process of contacting the government may because their education level and administrative accomplishment are not high enough. Third, the connectivity and sharing of data. [14] At present, many regions have not established an efficient and collaborative data information system. The "information chimney" problem will bring administrative burdens to citizens. What can be accomplished by one platform has to go through multiple platforms. The cost of learning that requires re-careful study, the cost of compliance that requires jumping multiple platforms and the psychological pressure of staff who ask for help will have a greater impact on citizens' administrative burden.

### **3.3. Review of Research on Digital Government and Administrative Burden**

Based on the analysis of the existing research, the author draws the following views.

As for the viewpoints raised by the existing studies, firstly, the implementation of digital government has indeed changed the way the government provides services. By establishing an online service platform, the government can automatically process various applications and services, greatly reducing the use of paper documents and the need for manual operation, and innovating and optimizing government services. However, those who lack the necessary technical knowledge, equipment or Internet connectivity bear a heavier administrative burden to some extent. And, with the digitization of government services, the security and privacy of personal data becomes a major concern. As the risk of hacking, data breaches and improper use of personal information increases, so

does the psychological burden on citizens. Therefore, the transformation of the way governments deliver services is an important reason for the burden of digital administration on citizens.

Secondly, in terms of the individual characteristics of citizens, the author believes that when analyzing the reasons and proposing solutions, we should focus on analyzing the reasons of the government itself and the technical level, rather than trying to find the reasons from the citizens. There are the following two reasons: First, although the individual characteristics of citizens are one of the factors that cause administrative burden in the process of citizens' interaction with the digital government. From the perspective of disciplinary value attributes, what we should pay more attention to is the administrative literacy of the government, which is also the value of the administrative discipline. Second, citizens' own administrative literacy can not be improved overnight. Comparatively speaking, it is easier to reform and innovate in the internal system of the government.

Finally, in terms of data connectivity and sharing, in the context of digital government, the information chimney problem still exists and may become more prominent due to the complexity of technology and the diversity of organizational structures. Digital government relies on highly interconnected information technology systems to deliver efficient and transparent services. However, in the absence of effective data sharing and communication mechanisms between departments and agencies, information smokestacks will be formed. Specifically, at present, different government departments have their own independent databases and information systems, and it is difficult to exchange data between them, which will lead to the situation of information isolation. Due to the existence of "information chimneys", citizens may encounter inconsistent user experience when they contact different government services. For example, when citizens handle cross-departmental business and seek continuous services (such as social security and medical services), they may encounter service gaps, need to provide the same personal information multiple times, and cannot enjoy seamless public services. Moreover, due to the independent information systems of various departments, citizens may face different application processes, submission requirements and approval time limits when using different government services, resulting in reduced efficiency and inconvenience, and increasing citizens' confusion and dissatisfaction. Another example is that different government departments may adopt different online service platforms with different user interface and user experience design styles, which will bring learning costs and inconvenience to citizens to a certain extent. Therefore, the connectivity and sharing of data in the context of digital technology empowerment should be a key aspect that needs to be paid attention to.

As for the research methods of existing studies, most of them are based on case studies and analysis, and the author believes that most of them lack in-depth research, that is, empirical research. For example, interviews and symposiums are used to go deep into citizens' lives and deeply understand the administrative burden that citizens face in their actual daily life or in a specific context when they interact with the digital government. Therefore, the author believes that digital government and administrative burden should go deep into citizens' lives, find out the administrative burden brought by citizens' pain points in the process of interacting with digital government, and analyze the reasons from the objective aspects of government and digital technology and propose solutions.

## **4. Research Methods and Findings**

### **4.1. Research Methods**

This paper adopts the qualitative research method and collects data through structured interviews, so as to conduct a holistic study on digital government and administrative burden. This time, the author conducted face-to-face interviews with a total of 30 people, composed of different age groups, among which the ratio of men to women was 1:1, and there were 5 people born after 50 to 00 respectively. Through interviews with people of different ages, the experiences and feelings of different groups in the interaction with the digital government in real life can be intuitively obtained, so as to ensure the authenticity and reference of the research.

## 4.2. Research Findings

Through interviews, the author finds that for ordinary citizens born in the 1970s and earlier generations, the administrative burden they need to bear in the process of interacting with the digital government is the most significant, which is mainly reflected in the learning cost, obedience cost and psychological cost.

In terms of learning costs, the implementation of "digital government" requires citizens to understand and learn about the various processes, links and application operations of online affairs. All of these take a lot of time and effort.

At the beginning of the implementation of the new way of doing things, I did not dislike it. However, due to the influence of the environment where I was born and the habits I have developed over a long period of time, I have encountered many difficulties in the process of interacting with the digital government. For example, the procedures published online by the government require me to read and learn by myself. In fact, I am not willing and impatient, and I prefer to operate through the staff or let the staff directly help me. (20230121B Community Resident A interview record)

Under normal circumstances, although the staff will provide help, but more citizens need to explore their own. In the process of exploring and learning, citizens bear a certain learning cost because of the difference of their cognition level and ability quality.

The design of products will also bring learning costs to citizens and is the direction of future improvement.

When doing nucleic acid, the APP often needs to log in again, enter the account, password, verification code, and verify identity. My kids aren't around, and I need someone to help me. Some kind people would show me how to do it, but after learning it I forgot or wasn't sure if it was the right way to do it. Now, although all aspects are more advanced and convenient, it still makes us feel more difficult to operate. (20230121B Community Resident B interview record)

At the level of compliance cost, in the process of the implementation of digital government, citizens must complete the required online steps if they want to do things. Citizens who cannot do these operations independently will choose to seek help offline, and citizens will have to bear the human, material and financial resources to travel back and forth, as well as a series of compliance procedures.

My social security card was applied for in the place of residence registration. In order to receive money normally every month, I need to operate on the mobile phone and use the social security card of rural credit cooperative. However, I am not good at these steps, and my children are not familiar with the business process, so my son finally took me to the offline business hall to ask the staff to complete the processing. In the process, I had to go through a series of identification and face scans, as well as blinking, opening my mouth, turning my head, etc., but my speed was too slow to react several times, and I tried several more times before I passed the authentication. (20230122B community resident C interview record)

At the level of psychological cost, in fact, citizens also unconsciously bear a psychological cost after bearing the cost of learning and obedience. In the process of the implementation of digital government, citizens have to learn to operate with mobile phones. Worry about the irritability and anxiety caused by the failure to cancel the operation error; afraid to ask questions repeatedly for fear of causing trouble to others; faced with the staff's poor service attitude and fear that clicking on the wrong page will cause personal privacy concerns. These are the psychological costs that citizens need to bear in the process of implementing digital government.

I still prefer the traditional offline approach, because after I tell my needs to the staff, they can help me complete everything, which makes me feel at ease. If I do it myself, I always feel that something will fall, afraid of revealing personal information in the process of my own operation, and I feel insecure. Although some businesses still have offline Windows, most of them still let us operate on

our mobile phones, I will not go back to ask if I can't operate because I am embarrassed and the attitude of the staff is not very nice.(20230122B Community resident A interview record)

## **5. Reasons Why the Construction of Digital Government brings Administrative Burden to Citizens**

### **5.1. Poor Service Attitude of Government Staff**

Government staff is the bridge between citizens and the government. As the "spokesperson" of the government image in the eyes of the masses, the service attitude of the window staff directly affects the service experience of citizens.If the window staff serve warmly and respond to requests, they can not only guide the working masses to efficiently handle the business, but also gain the trust and dependence of the masses on the government, which is conducive to enhancing the credibility of the government and the influence of the grass-roots administrative departments in the hearts of citizens.On the contrary, if the attitude of the window staff is cold and hesitant, it is likely to cause conflicts, turn small problems into big contradictions, and bring administrative burdens to citizens.Therefore, the service attitude of government workers is very important.Through interviews, it is known that the service attitude of the staff is the most intuitive feeling of the citizens. According to the interview results, the citizens generally reflect that the service attitude of the front-line staff is poor, which brings great administrative burden to the citizens.There are two reasons for the poor attitude of government staff:

#### **5.1.1. Civil Servants are in Poor Working Condition**

Under the pressure system, the higher government plays a controlling and leading role, and the lower government accepts its guidance and is responsible for it. [15] Specifically speaking, the higher level government is the distribution center of goals and tasks, goals and tasks will be quantified and decomposed, and implemented one by one to the lower level government departments and individuals, they need to complete within a specified time. Civil servants will always work under high pressure in order to complete various tasks and indicators stipulated by their superiors, so as to better respond to their superiors' tasks and requirements and strive for certain material rewards.Moreover, with the implementation of today's digital government, civil servants will think it is a good opportunity to "reduce the burden", because most of the business citizens can handle online, as for whether citizens themselves will operate, what kind of costs are not within the scope of concern of grassroots civil servants. They focus more on whether they can complete the tasks assigned by their superiors within the specified time.In the state of being tied up with many affairs, when some citizens ask grassroots staff to handle their offline business or ask how to conduct online operations, grassroots staff will be poor in responding to the needs of citizens, and there are phenomena such as reluctance to handle for them, bad attitude and tone.In addition, the structure of the civil service has not been thoroughly optimized, and some business posts have not yet completed the personnel handover, and older civil servants are still on the job.Young civil servants are selected through strict examinations, and they have better working ability, ability to withstand pressure and physical fitness, and can adjust their work status in a timely manner to serve the people, while older civil servants do not perform well in this point.Therefore, older civil servants are more likely to be affected by the workload than younger civil servants, which affects the service experience of citizens.In this case, when citizens try to handle business offline or seek help from staff, they will face problems of unwillingness, difficulty, and lack of help as well as poor service attitude, and citizens need to learn by themselves or seek help from others.Therefore, there will be a large administrative burden, bearing different degrees of learning, obedience and psychological costs.

#### **5.1.2. The Scientific Assessment System for Contacting and Serving the Masses is not Sound**

At present, there is still a lot of room for grass-roots units' improvement in the assessment of contacting and serving the masses of grass-roots staff.On the one hand, there are some problems in the appraisal system.First, the assessment index design is unreasonable.The assessment and

evaluation system ignores the opinions of the masses to a certain extent, and lacks a fair and comprehensive assessment standard. Second, the assessment process is mere formality. There is a phenomenon of uniform leadership evaluation, which may be because leaders' attention to performance evaluation has been diverted, they cannot devote themselves to performance evaluation, or because the results of performance evaluation have little impact on the personal promotion of civil servants. Therefore, the performance appraisal fails to really find out the problems existing in the actual work of the grass-roots staff. Third, the assessment methods are not detailed. As long as the "door is easy to enter, the face is good", according to the regulations to perform their duties, complete their work, you can pass the assessment, and whether the masses have done well, the masses are satisfied or not, it is not in the content of the assessment; Fourth, the use of assessment results is not in place. The lack of a perfect reward and punishment mechanism, the final assessment results outstanding can not be effectively inspired, the final assessment results poor can not get appropriate punishment, over time the grass-roots staff will ignore the evaluation and opinions of the masses, lack of respect for the masses, naturally can not do their best to serve the masses. On the other hand, some grass-roots governments fail to establish or maintain effective communication channels, such as complaint hot lines, online feedback systems, etc., so the voice of the public can not be conveyed in a timely manner. The upward feedback channels are blocked, and so on, a considerable part of the masses' opinions are not accepted, and after acceptance, they fail to rectify and give feedback.

## **5.2. The Friendliness of Product Development and Design is Not Good**

At present, many online government service apps are not designed with citizens' real feelings in mind. For example, the prompt is not obvious, the icon is not clear, the operation guide page stays short, the font size can not be adjusted and other problems affect the citizens' experience in the actual use of the product. These problems come down to product development and design that is not friendly enough to take into account factors that may cause problems for some citizens. The specific analysis mainly has the following two reasons.

### **5.2.1. Product Development and Design in the Early Stage of the Basic Research Work Lack**

The current product development and design is more concerned about the overall direction of the "upper needs" to adapt to the "superstructure" requirements such as saving work time, improving work efficiency, reducing the work burden of staff, and creating a smart government, but in some aspects ignore the "lower needs", the reasons may have the following three points: First, due to the urgency of time, limited budget or insufficient human resources, there is a lack of research on the user groups and group characteristics of the actual use of products at the grassroots level; Second, due to the lack of clear research objectives and rigorous and scientific research methods, the opinions and suggestions of citizens are not fully absorbed to understand their expectations and special requirements for product design. Third, the lack of stakeholder participation and poor communication may lead to the omission of important information and inadequate information transmission, which will affect the breadth and depth of demand research. Therefore, a large part of the products are not clearly identified before the development of problems requiring special attention and avoidance, so that the products can be more in line with citizens' habits of use after being put into use, reduce discomfort during use and operation errors caused by unreasonable design, and enable citizens to complete various operations more easily when handling business. Therefore, it will make citizens feel that the product is not friendly in the process of use, and it will bear different degrees of administrative burden in handling business.

### **5.2.2. The Enabling Effect of Digital Technology has not been Fully Utilized**

First, the problem of "information overload". In the process of building "digital government" and implementing "digital government", there is a huge amount of information and data, but there is also a problem of "information overload". A lot of data is not screened, not effectively collected, integrated and analyzed, the public may have to spend considerable energy and time in screening, understanding and using this information, thus increasing their cognitive burden. Second, data security and privacy

issues. In the digital government environment, citizens need to provide a large amount of personal information in order to enjoy services, and they will face data security and privacy risks. If the government has omissions in the processing and protection of citizens' personal information, it may lead to the disclosure of citizens' personal information, causing some unnecessary troubles and losses, and bringing different degrees of psychological burden. Thirdly, digital-oriented service quality issues. Although digital government can work 24 hours a day, if the quality of services is not high, problems such as a lack of digital technology experts, frequent system errors, and slow response may impose additional burdens on citizens. Finally, the digital divide cannot be ignored. In the process of digitization, the digital divide between different age groups may further widen, not only making a large part of the population unable to enjoy the convenience provided by digital government, but also bringing many problems, thus increasing their administrative burden.

## **6. Measures to Solve the Administrative Burden Brought by the Construction of Digital Government to Citizens**

### **6.1. Improve the Work System and Improve the Quality of the Team**

Standardizing the relationship between the central government, local governments and the community level, rationally divide their responsibilities and rights, and give local governments full autonomy. In terms of the selection, supervision and performance evaluation of officials, the central government should strive to build an effective procedural mechanism, change the current situation of community-level leading cadres and government staff struggling to cope with too many detailed tasks with hard targets, give them more space for autonomy, and enhance their motivation and enthusiasm for work. In the construction of the grass-roots government system, it is necessary to establish and improve various rules and regulations. Regular organizational training should be carried out to improve the professional ability and service level of civil servants. Grassroots civil servants should be able to reserve and update the knowledge of public management, laws and regulations, and digital information technology. In terms of performance management, all units and departments should formulate and implement a performance appraisal system according to their own conditions. Give material and spiritual rewards to individuals and teams with outstanding performance, and timely adjust those who are not qualified for their posts. In terms of talent introduction and training, it is necessary to strictly regulate the quality of newly promoted public officials and inject fresh blood into grass-roots governments. In terms of democratic participation, improve the public supervision and feedback mechanism, open up channels for citizens to give upward feedback, encourage and expand people's participation in grassroots governance, collect public opinion through opinion surveys, public hearings and other forms, and enhance the transparency of work and public satisfaction.

### **6.2. Improve the Response Mechanism and Improve the Product Temperature**

Product development should meet the needs of the "superstructure", but also people-oriented, because the product is ultimately a service for people, so it is very necessary to listen to the opinions of citizens. In the early stage of product development, the government can conduct extensive user research to understand the specific needs and usage habits of citizens, and clarify the functional requirements, performance indicators and user interface requirements of the software. When understanding the needs of citizens, appropriate technologies and methods should be adopted to comprehensively collect the opinions of groups of all ages. In the middle stage of product development, select a professional team for product design and development, take into account the characteristics and specific needs of all users who may use the product, and ensure that the user interface of the product is simple and intuitive, easy to navigate, so as to reduce the learning cost of users and improve the use efficiency. In the later stage of product development, government departments can organize relevant education and training activities to help citizens become familiar with the use of software and improve digital literacy. Provide citizens with professional customer

support services, including FAQs, help documents, online chat support and customer service hotline, etc., to ensure that citizens can get timely help when using the product. It is also necessary to set up convenient and diversified user feedback channels, such as user forums, social media interaction, etc., to collect and respond to users' opinions and suggestions in a timely manner, adjust product functions and content according to users' behaviors and preferences and improve product usability and satisfaction. In addition, a government-led user community can be created to encourage exchanges and sharing of experiences among users, who can help each other and also serve as a platform for collecting feedback and suggestions.

### 6.3. Strengthen Digital Empowerment and Improve Government Services

Strengthening digital empowerment and optimizing government services can better serve the public. Specifically, in terms of e-government platform construction, it is necessary to build a unified e-government platform, integrate various government services, achieve one-stop online management. In terms of data connectivity, break information silos, build an open and shared system of government service data resources, promote data convergence and integration among government departments. In terms of network security, strengthen network security protection to ensure the stable operation of government service platforms and the security of citizens' personal information. In terms of institutional mechanisms, government departments should formulate unified service standards and process norms, ensure service quality, and improve citizen satisfaction. At the same time, it is necessary to establish a regular working mechanism for improving the efficiency of government services, conduct digital skills training for civil servants to solve problems for citizens. In terms of civic literacy and supervision mechanism, establish and improve supervision mechanisms and citizen feedback channels, collect and process citizens' opinions in a timely manner, and constantly optimize service processes. Most importantly, government departments at all levels need to work in partnership with other government departments, the private sector to improve government services and better serve citizens.

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