

# Study on Social Media Applications by Government in Hong Kong

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## ABSTRACT

In the Web2.0 Era, social media is playing a more and more important role in government affairs. This paper conducts a research based on 44 accounts opened by Hong Kong government on five social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, SinaMicroblog and Blog. The authors identify fourteen observation contents of those accounts in order to give a general picture of the current situation of Hong Kong government social media application. Finally, give some suggestions to mainland China social media application practice.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.6.1 [Project and People Management]: Management Techniques

## General Terms

Management, Measurement, Performance

## Keywords

Hong Kong, Government, Social Media, Application

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Chinese government agencies and officials have set up microblog accounts since 2008 and are facing many challenges. Even though western countries start early in government social media application, it's hard to copy their experience due to China's unique national contextual. Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, on one hand, shares the same language and culture origin with Mainland China. On the other hand, it started social media application in government earlier. Its experience will have a great reference value to Mainland China. Through observing 44 social media accounts of Hong Kong government agencies and officials, this essay studies the current situation of social media application by Hong Kong government and gives suggestions for the future social media practice of mainland government.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many scholars have contributed a lot in the field of government

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using social media tools in recent days. David Landsbergen (2010) studies the use of social media by several departments within the city of Columbus, USA and discusses how social media provide the government a way to do things in way that government haven't done before[1]. Enrique Bonson et al. (2012) find out that most EU local governments are using social media tools to enhance transparency[2]. Sergio Picazo-Vela et al. (2012) present the perceptions of risks, benefits and strategic guidelines about social media application in Central Mexico[3]. John Carlo Bertot et al. (2012) indicate how governments promote transparency and accountability through ICTs, social media, and collaborative e-government[4]. Chinese scholars also have done some researches on government using social media. The 2011 China government microblog research report generally introduced the current situation of government microblogs development in China[5]. Yan Su (2011) introduces several examples of the internet and social media communication by Hong Kong government[6].

Since Chinese government social media application is now facing many challenges, this study aims to analyze the current situation of Hong Kong social media application and give some suggestions to Mainland China.

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD

On the basis of non-participant observation and secondary data analysis, this article studies the current situation of Hong Kong government social media application from the public management perspective. This study conducts both quantitative and qualitative analysis by observing fourteen contents of Hong Kong government social media accounts. This study selects the research objects by applying the data provided on Hong Kong Government portal (www.gov.hk) which has set "social media links" that lists Hong Kong government agency and official social media accounts. According to the data updated on the website in April 2011, a total of 44 social media accounts have been opened by 14 Hong Kong government officials and 16 government agencies on five social media platforms including Blog, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and SinaMicroblog. In reference to western countries' social media application handbooks while considered the actual situation in Hong Kong, this study identifies the following fourteen observation contents.

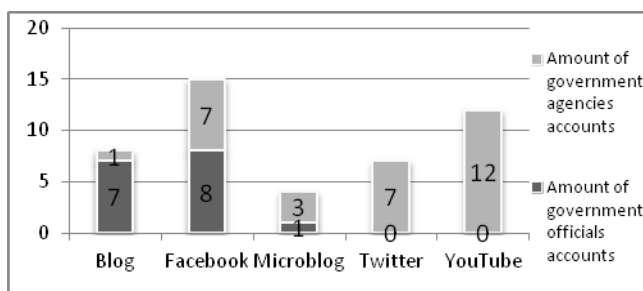
- 1) Account owner: to distinguish whether the social media account is owned by government official or government agency;
- 2) Social media types: to specify which social media platform the account belongs to: Blog, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or SinaMicroblog;

- 3) Established year: to specify the established year of the social media account;
- 4) Account introduction: to find out whether the social media account identifies itself as government agency or official clearly;
- 5) Account images/photos: whether the Hong Kong government social media account has its own account image or photo;
- 6) Amount of followers: refers to the amount of followers who subscribe the government social media accounts;
- 7) Amount of followings: refers to the amount of social media accounts that government social media accounts have subscribed;
- 8) Type of followings: refers to the type of accounts that Hong Kong government agencies and officials subscribe;
- 9) Amount of posts: refers to the amount of posts that released from the established date till April 20, 2011;
- 10) Posting frequency: refers to how often Hong Kong government agency and official accounts post one piece of information;
- 11) Content of posts: such as work-related information, entertainment information, personal views, etc.;
- 12) Posting forms: to find out whether government agency and official accounts use pictures, video or other forms in posting;
- 13) Language: refers to the type of language used in posting, including English, traditional Chinese and simplified Chinese;
- 14) Interaction: to find out whether there is interaction between government social media account owners and netizens.

## 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

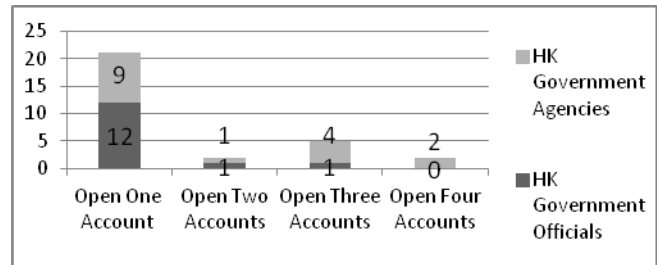
### 4.1 Account Owners, Social Media Types and Amounts

The figure 1 shows that the most widely used government social media types are Facebook and YouTube. The data also shows that Hong Kong government agencies and officials have different preference on social media types. Government agencies prefer opening accounts on Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, while government officials prefer Facebook and Blog.



**Figure 1. The number of Hong Kong government agency and official accounts on different social media platforms.**

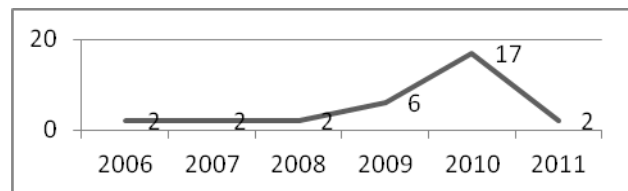
The Figure 2 shows that nine out of thirty HK government agencies and officials have opened more than two social media accounts, among which seven are government agencies. Government agencies, compared with government officials, seem to open two even more social media accounts.



**Figure 2. Number of social media accounts each Hong Kong government agency and official opens.**

### 4.2 Established Year and Newly-Opened Social Media Accounts by Year

Figure 3 shows that Hong Kong government has opened social media accounts as early as in 2006 (Since the web design of Facebook is difficult for researchers to find the established year, Facebook is not included in this statistical analysis.). The annual amount of the newly-opened government social media accounts has raised up since 2009. Seventeen new social media accounts were established in year 2010, which seems to be the peak year of Hong Kong government social media application development.



**Figure 3. Newly-opened HK government accounts by year.**

Among seventeen newly-opened social media accounts in 2010, fourteen are opened by government agencies while three by government officials (Table 1). Government agencies social media applications appears to develop faster than government officials. Furthermore, most newly-opened accounts in 2010 open on YouTube and Twitter.

**Table 1. Newly-opened Hong Kong government social media accounts in 2010 on different social media platforms**

	Hong Kong government officials	Hong Kong government agencies	Percentage
Twitter	0	4	24%
SinaMicroblog	1	2	18%
YouTube	0	8	47%
Blog	2	0	11%
Total	3	14	100%

### 4.3 Account Instruction

Ninety-five percent of the Hong Kong government social media accounts clearly identify themselves as government agencies or officials. All of those accounts not identifying themselves are Hong Kong government official accounts opened on Facebook.

#### 4.4 Account Images/Photos

All the government social media accounts have their own images or photos. In terms of the consistency of images/photos of the same government agency/official on multiple social media platforms, this study finds out that three Hong Kong government agencies (Chief Executive's Office, Hong Kong Observatory and the Investment Promotion Agency) and one government official (Kenneth Chen, Deputy Secretary of Department of Education) use the same images and photo on different social media platforms. Another four government agencies, each of which has opened more than three social media accounts, use partly the same image on different social media platforms. One government agency, the Hong Kong Government, use different images on its Twitter and Facebook accounts.

#### 4.5 Amount of Followers and Followings

The amount of followers of government agency and official accounts indicates the coverage and effectiveness of accounts among the netizens. The analysis of the amount of the followers of 36 Hong Kong government social media accounts (Since Blog doesn't have the function of following, it is not included in this statistics.) shows that 78% government social media accounts have 100 to 10000 followers. Only a few accounts have either less than 100 or more than 10,000 followers.

Compared to the large amount of followers of Hong Kong government social media accounts, most government agencies and officials follow only several accounts. Seventy-five percent government accounts only follow other government accounts, while 25 percent follow other government accounts as well as non-government accounts such as news and media, celebrities, companies, ordinary netizens, etc.

#### 4.6 Amount of Posts

The amount of posts is calculated from the established date to April 20, 2011. Most Hong Kong government accounts post fewer than 1000 pieces of information till April 20, 2011. Only four accounts including Hong Kong Radio on YouTube, Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) on YouTube and Government Information Services on both Twitter and YouTube have posted more than 1000 pieces of information. (Since the lack of data of the amount of posts on Facebook, accounts on Facebook are not included in the statistics.)

A cross analysis of amount of posts and social media types indicates a significant difference among each platform. The amount of posts of 75% government accounts on Blog is less than 100 while amount of posts on Twitter and SinaMicroblog is mostly between 100 and 1000. The amount of posts on Blog is smaller than that on other social media platforms (figure 4).

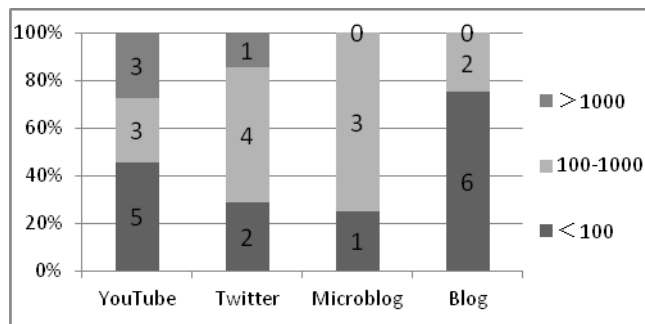


Figure 4. Cross analysis of amount of posts and social media types.

#### 4.7 Posting Frequency

Posting frequency is calculated as follows:  $P(\text{frequency}) = \frac{\text{the total number of days from the established date to April 20, 2011}}{\text{Amount of posts}}$ . The authors have classified the calculation result as follows: (0-1) represents that on average, posting one piece of information costs less than one day. (1-7) represents that on average, posting one piece of information requires one to seven days. (7-30) represents that on average, posting one piece of information costs more than one week (7 days) but less than a month; (30-50) represents that the average posting frequency is more than one month but within two months. Figure 5 shows that more than half of government accounts post information every one week. The average highest posting frequency is nine times a day while the slowest is every 40 days.

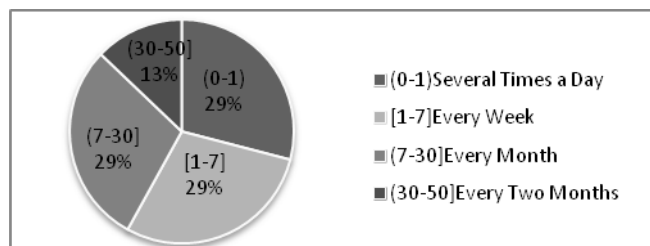


Figure 5. Posting frequency of HK social media accounts.

#### 4.8 Content of Posts

Based on observation, most information released by government accounts is related to the work of agencies and officials. Government official accounts release information not only related to their own work but also related to their after-work life and personal points of view. However, government agencies only release information related to the agencies themselves.

#### 4.9 Language

Figure 6 shows traditional Chinese is the most widely used language in Hong Kong Government social media accounts. The study also finds that some government agencies (such as Hong Kong Observatory) launched one Chinese version account and one English version account on the same social media platform. Those two accounts update synchronously and the content of the posts are almost the same. Tracing back to the origin of those two accounts, the information is released in both Chinese and English in one account. After a period of time, this account is separated into two accounts, Chinese one and English one.

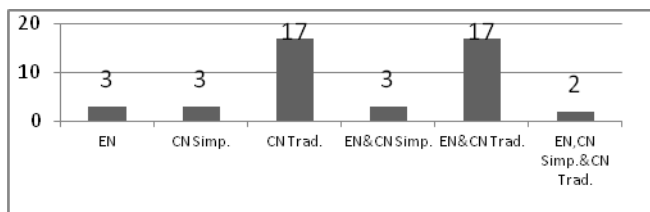


Figure 6. Language used in Hong Kong social media accounts.

## 5. INSPIRATION AND SUGGESTIONS

### 5.1 Government Social Media Applications and Effects are Influenced by the Characteristics of Social Media Platforms

Based on the different characteristics of different social media platforms, the amount of posts, posting frequency and posting forms on different social media platforms vary a lot. Both the amount of posts and posting frequency on Blog are the lowest, compared with Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In addition, the social media openness to the public has influence on the government social media applications. The study indicates that even though the established date of SinaMicroblog is later than other social media platforms, the amount of followers on SinaMicroblog is larger than that on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. One possible reason is that SinaMicroblog mainly targets Chinese which have the largest population in the world. At the mean time, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are blocked in Mainland China.

Each social media platform has its own characteristics which would attract different user groups. Government agencies should choose suitable platform to provide service to its target citizens.

### 5.2 Government Social Media Applications and Effects are Influenced by the Characteristics of Government Agencies and Officials

This study has shown that the functional difference of government agencies and officials would affect their performance on social media applications. For example, Government Information Service and Hong Kong Observatory are two different agencies. They vary in the command of information resources, posting techniques, and allocation of human resources and funds. As a result, their performance on social media applications differs a lot.

Furthermore, the study has shown that government agencies open more social media accounts than government officials. Government agencies have professionals to manage accounts and funds to support the daily account maintenance. On the contrast, most government officials have to manage account by themselves. Each additional account would put extra burden on the officials. That may be the reason why government agencies seem to open more accounts than government officials.

In general, different government agencies and officials have different command of posting techniques, human resources and funding, which would result in the performance difference.

Government should match their own characteristics with the social media platform to achieve the best results.

### 5.3 The Normalization of Government Social Media Application Should be Strengthened

This study has found out that there are still five percent government accounts not identify themselves. In addition, half of the government social media accounts, which open more than two accounts on different social media platforms, don't share the same image or photo. Account identification and the same image would help to enhance the authority of government accounts and make it easier for citizens to recognize the government accounts.

### 5.4 Followings Amount Should be Enlarged

Compared with the great amount of followers of government accounts, the followings should be enlarged. It would help the government agencies and officials get close to the ordinary people and know what the people are thinking.

## 6. CONCLUSION

With the social media playing a more and more important role in public affairs, government using social media has become inevitable. Mainland china can learn from the experience of social media applications by HK government. First, mainland china can take advantage of different types of social media platforms to reach different netizens and realize the equalization of services supply. Second, mainland government agencies and officials should choose one or more suitable social media platforms and maximize the advantages of the platform. Third, government agencies and officials should follow more non-government agency accounts in order to hear the voice of the people. Finally, multiple languages should be used in social media applications to meet the needs of different people working or traveling in China.

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