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# Evaluation of Non-government Organizations' Fan Pages on Facebook

## Introduction

We are living in an Internet era. According to the Census and Statistics Department (2013), in 2012, 77.9% of households in Hong Kong possessed personal computers at home connected to the Internet, and the number of Internet service users has been increasing exponentially every year since 2000.

We are also residing in a social media city. A study in 2011 (Collins, 2011) shows that social media use in Hong Kong is of an extremely high level, even higher than that in the United States. Nearly half of the surveyed Hong Kongers believed that social media had a positive effect on their lives. The study also says that 92% of the Hong Kong respondents visited Facebook every week, and this number was much higher than the other markets in the world, with 87% in the United States, 72% in Brazil, and 58% in Germany.

In light of its interactive nature, it is not surprising to see the emergence of social media. It satisfies our basic human need of connecting with others. Social network, defined as a group of like-minded people who have come together in a common place to share thoughts, ideas, and information about themselves (Safko, 2012), has long existed. With the help of Internet development, it has been moved to computers and even to cell phones now.

It is believed that social media provide a more natural and comfortable way to sell not only products but also innovations and messages because it does not defy our way of communication. We have already seen how news and ideas spread rapidly in this day and age. Social media are also able to build a more long-lasting and trusted relationship that leads to a greater word-of-mouth influence and in a faster speed. Therefore, many companies in all corners of the world are making use of this effective tool to (1) provide better customer services, (2) build up certain images/reputations (branding), or (3) help in business-to-business or internal communications or both.

Facebook, as the classic example of social media, can work in different ways for individuals, businesses, brands, celebrities, organizations, and so forth. It can be a personal account/profile, a public or a private group, and a fan page. The different



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formats may be more useful for different parties. For example, for individuals who enjoy sending message directly to others' Facebook inboxes and some extent of engagement on their own timeline/wall from time to time, a personal account would suffice, whereas for businesses and organizations, which may seek for more discussions and engagements constantly, a page may be the right option (Golden, 2011).

In this case study, we focused on nongovernment organizations' (NGOs') Facebook fan pages.

## Background

Unlike creating a Web site, which usually involves a certain understanding of complicated programming, Facebook comes in handier by directly preparing creators with basic functions such as the About section, a wall, photo albums, and discussion tabs. Additional tabs, such as documents, polls, reviews, slides, YouTube, Twitter, and so forth, can be added into the page as applications when the creator wishes to. It is free to open Facebook fan pages, and only a few simple steps are needed to create one, yet it is not easy to manage it with success. From the start-up, the operation, to Facebook statistics, we have a few aspects of attributes to look into for page evaluation.

### The Start-up

According to Susan Gunelius, featured blogger for Forbes in the marketing and social media strategy aspect, there are some start-up tactics for creating a nice Facebook fan page, and that includes a great choice of name, a discrete selection of content for both previewed and full About sections, an appropriate profile photo and an attention-seeking cover, useful and interesting page contents, and page promotion (**Gunelius, 2013**).

When running a business, we understand how essential it is to choose a great name. It is the same for running a page. A recognizable and relevant name not only helps with getting spotted and leaving a strong impression but also provides a sense of authenticity when it comes to a Facebook fan page. Given that Facebook only verifies pages and profiles with a vast amount of visitors, and users cannot proactively request the verification, a right username serves very importantly for identification. A username also determines how a page's link (URL) looks like, and hence the ease for the page being searched. Therefore, it is suggested that a fan page should have an appropriate and memorable page name as soon as the organization is established even when the page itself is not ready.



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Second, both the brief and the detailed About sections serve importantly as background information to visitors, but the selection of content should be different. Only key information should be placed on the brief About section, whereas the full About section should be as detailed as possible. It is because when visitors click into the full About page out of their own will, they must be expecting a rather comprehensive introduction than merely a handshake (the brief About section).

Another important thing to note is the significant pictures used on page. As the window to the page, a proper profile picture helps people associate it with the organization, and a visually dynamic cover catches people's attention. All the images used have to be related to the organization or its key message, and they should be visually attractive as well.

When everything is ready and established, the content design and promotion for the page will then become a big concern in the operation.

### The Operation

When it comes to fan page operation, there are some more specific attributes that are worth looking into. While managing their page, the administrators should ask themselves questions, such as the following: How many times do you post per week? What types and how long are these posts? When is the best time to share them? Are the post contents able to foster readers' curiosity and to call to action? Did they make good use of Facebook-embedded features such as tags and hash tags?

### The Quantitative Outcome

Facebook provides pages with their own statistics (Facebook Insights) to basically tell how popular their pages are. These statistics provide owners a general picture of their page's performance. Measurements include number of fans, likes growth for the previous month, engagement rate for the previous month (people talking about this / fan base), and posts by fans for the previous month.



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Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)

[About](#) – [Suggest an Edit](#)

In this case study, we have reviewed and analyzed 55 NGOs' Facebook fan pages based on some of the above evaluation approaches to see how well they are performing. This case study aimed to provide a general evaluation of these organizations' page management and operation so as to find out some directions to improve.

## Key Findings

Based on the results we found from the research, we have concluded seven key findings, as follows:

1. Most of the NGOs have their basic information covered.

In general, subjects understand the importance of having their background details prepared, and in a right way.

### Appropriate Username

They know how to equip their fan pages with meaningful usernames, most of which are the abbreviated organization names, and some are even the organization's widely known slogan. Not only can a special and relevant fan page username leave a great impression to fans, it also helps others find the organization easier on Facebook and provides a better result in search engines.

### Key Details in the About Section

It is reckoned that when it comes to promotional messages, three seconds is all it can take to capture the audience's attention, and therefore, the About section of a fan page takes the role of making people stay. Most of the observed fan pages put



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up only the key information for visitors to understand in a snap about who they are and what they do.

### Detailed Full Description

When visitors become interested enough to find out more in the full About section, they are expecting to gain a more in-depth understanding from the full description, and that is why it is important for the clicked-in full About page to be as detailed as possible, which our studied fan pages have done.

The information provided by our observed pages includes the organization's background or history or both, contact methods, and links to Web site(s) and other pages or social media platforms.

### Appropriate and Attractive Profile and Cover Pictures

As mentioned above, it takes merely three seconds for one message to capture attention; it also works in the same way for fan pages. The profile and cover pictures mostly attract attention first because they are displayed on the top of the page (the profile picture is even the only graphic shown in Facebook search); they are like the display windows of a store that are used to attract visitors to come in. Many fan pages contain both profile and cover pictures. Using the organization logo as the profile picture is the mainstream, whereas photos from events are very commonly chosen as cover. Most of the images are of high resolution, and some even show a high level of creativity.

Fan page profile and cover pictures not only serve as “window dressing,” but they also provide a sign of activeness. The majority of fan pages nowadays decorate their pages with images, and it seems that the only reason for one to lack either/any is simply that it is no longer in use.

2. Multiple types of sharing are common to see, and image sharing is the most popular.

Posts can be of different forms in Facebook. They can be shares of photos, videos, links, or simply status updates. This miscellany of posts can arouse a greater interest from visitors and lead to a better understanding of the message for them. With lots of content from different media such as photos, posts, videos, and surveys updated on



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a consistent basis, visitors are attracted and they will expect more fresh and fun news coming from the page and hence pay more attention to future updates.

Status updates with merely words could be plain and dull, whereas other types of posts, such as videos, may take up time to be sought out and released. Posting photos, which are easier to prepare and are able to boost the visual excitement of readers immediately, is unsurprisingly the most common way of sharing among our studied pages. As a matter of fact, 31% of them almost rely on images only. Although sometimes a picture says a thousand words, posts with a little more variety may be even better.

### 3. Around four posts a week is the average.

Wall posts are the main channel of communication between the page administrator/creator and the fans. Apart from the forms of posts, the frequency of post publication also matters in attracting visitors to stick around and even interact. It is tricky to say what the right frequency is: if it is too low, visitors may rarely feel the page's existence and eventually neglect it, yet if it is too high, they will be annoyed by the post bombs, then lose their interest and intention to engage with the page. Moreover, for different page backgrounds, the expected frequency of posts may vary as well. For instance, while brands/companies' pages tend to contain more promotional messages and are suggested to avoid overwhelming posts, media/entertaining pages that aim to deliver information of fans' use and interest are expected to update more often. There is no exact number to suggest; however, it is generally believed that one post every day or at least every second day is usually desirable.

Among our studied pages, the average number of posts they published is 4.23 per week; in other words, it generally takes them around 1.65 days to make a post, which is supposed to be acceptable. Nevertheless, this average number actually comes from an extreme distribution; 31% of the studied fan pages share less than one time a week, whereas a few of them share up to 35 times a week, and neither way seems preferable.

### 4. Message design still has room to improve.

The distribution and content of messages should also be considered when operating a page. These can be evaluated by looking into the sharing schedule, length of





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posts, content stickiness, use of Facebook’s labeling functions, and use of call-to-action notes. However, the majority of our subjects fail to find the right design for their own targets.

Sharing schedule means the publish time for posts. In general, some believe that posts should be published at the time when people are not at work, which is at night on weekdays and weekends, so that more attention may be drawn.

Length of posts, content stickiness, labeling, and call-to-action elements are all about how the message is packaged. With the overwhelming information on the Internet and social media, the audience’s attention span is much shorter nowadays, and therefore, short yet striking messages are in demand. When it comes to content, we prefer a “sticky” one—one that can raise fans’ curiosity as well as engage them to interact. Sometimes direct encouragement on comment exchanges or discussions would help with that.

In addition to the content itself, Facebook functions such as tags and hashtags also help in capturing attention by involving the audience directly and by grouping different sets of messages. Last but not least, a call-to-action concept is needed as a final reminder to ask for response from the audience. A call-to-action command could be “Act now!” “Stay tuned!” “Like it!” and so forth, which actively strive for the audience to act further.

Those mentioned above are only general standards; after all, an understanding on the specific target audience group is needed to determine the exact approach and strategies. Nevertheless, it is always true that the message should be designed FOR the audience. As common social media etiquette, the page messages should be designed as reader centric. It is suggested that the “Other:You” ratio, in other words, the proportion of interesting content for the audience to content your organization wants to share, should be a minimum of 7:1 (Golden, 2011).

5. The average number of fans is 1661, and the average engagement rate is 4.92%.

From our studied fan pages, although their average number of fans is 1661, again, the difference between those popular and those less popular fan pages is large. In fact, the one with the fewest fans has only 12 likes, whereas the one with the largest fan base contains 11,584 likes.



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The number of responses per post, which includes “like,” “comment,” and “share,” ranges from 0 to 586. It is usually correlated to the number of fans a fan page has—that is, the more fans a page possesses, the more responses one can usually receive.

Also is that, the average engagement rate—in other words, the level of engagement from each fan on average—is 4.92%.

6. Wall is “closed” on a few studied fan pages.

Wall posts are the main and most popular communication channels on Facebook fan pages; however, several pages have blocked their walls from their fans. Fans are still able to react by commenting, liking, or sharing the posts created by owner, but they cannot generate any discussion on the wall directly.

The wall post function is sometimes regarded as the soul of a fan page because it makes a fan page a boundless platform for visitors to connect and interact. However, some say that the free-to-post freedom also brings forth drawbacks: When the wall is open for fans, it may be hard to control what will be posted on it—the content may be inappropriate or too sensitive to be left public. Even when the post content is all right, there may be too many posts out there waiting for responses, which, in turn, increases the operation time and cost.

Many people believe that an open wall allows better networking, communication, and even word-of-mouth effect, despite that it may be a double-edged sword; the function is suggested to stay open because that is what social media are for.

7. A very few of them respond to their fans fast.

As mentioned above, when the wall is open for fans to put their thoughts on, operation, that is, response to the posts, is necessary. However, only three of the studied pages respond fast to their fans.

Putting ourselves in the fans’ place, when we send out an e-mail or leave a voice message, we would expect someone to reply to us, and they better be quick as well. Even when it is not an answer that we are looking for, a feedback or simply an acknowledgment to show that our message has been read and processed would be good enough.





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## Recommendations

There are many tactics to make a page successful. But Facebook, being only one type of the social media tools and a part of the promotional platform used by many organizations, should be integrated with other media or strategies to enlarge its influence.

Lon Safko, author of *The Social Media Bible*, suggested a few tactics in his book on how to gain the most from social media success. He believed that beyond all steps, we should first realize that the power of media has now been shifting from the message senders to the customers or the audience, that the (both good and bad) word-of-mouth impact is now at the speed of light (Safko, 2012).

Then analysis would be needed. In this case study, we analyzed 55 NGOs' fan pages as a group of subjects to bring out the common problems and whatnot in terms of their page behavior. However, it is still suggested that some individual analyses should be done to find out the specific gap between a page's performance and its target audience's preference. As we mentioned above in the key findings, what approach one should opt for would after all be depending on its service target and the NGO's position as well.



To do so, organizations should identify their current existing media strategy(ies) and what tools have been used other than fan pages. They should also study their targets' different demographic groups and try to figure out who they are and what they do. Last but not least, the organization's own persona—that is, what content that one has been creating and what kind of image has been established, should be identified. These analyses would provide a clearer picture on how effective they are doing currently and where the mismatch may be.

After the analyses and retrospect, plans and actions would be needed accordingly, integration in particular. It is essential for organizations to always link their conventional media with their new digital platforms to gain the most from the exposure and word-of-



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mouth effect, in other words, cross-referencing. For instance, put all the social media's site address in everything the organization has published, including print ads, videos, and even Web sites and their e-mail signature. Call-to-action messages can be placed beside the links, such as "Follow us at..." or "Give us a thumbs-up at..." It is also suggested that the relevant social media sites should sometimes refer to each other as well.

When the plans are eventually implemented and the traditional way has been integrated with the new one, it is time to measure the results. In a world with Internet development changing continuously and swiftly, it is a must for the organizations to always keep track of the results and feedbacks of their strategies. One of the most common ways to measure them would be looking at the statistics and traffic data, for instance, from Facebook Insights or other analytic tools.

## Summary

This case study portrayed seven key findings on NGOs' general Facebook fan page performance in Hong Kong based on the page's setting, the operational approach, and the Facebook statistics.

Most of the studied pages contain adequate and appropriate basic information, comprising a relevant username and hence the URL, proper key and full About sections, and well-prepared profile and cover pictures. Not only does a nice setting gain the audience's attention, it also provides a sense of authenticity and activeness.

From the operational side, it is good to see that different forms of posts are shared, and sharing images is the most common way. However, Facebook page administrators should be reminded that instead of relying on pictures solely, it is the variety of posts that matters.

We also found that results in terms of the pages' posts per week are quite extreme, although the average number is 4.23; we have seen pages that post less than 1 time a week and those that post 35 times a week. Both insufficient and excessive posts are not preferred. It is suggested that around one post every one to two days would be adequate, subject to the preference of the organizations' different targets.

Based on the results, we realized that there is room for improvement when it comes to the pages' message design. Most of the subjects fail to share posts with a desired



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length and time of sharing, content stickiness, appropriate Facebook tools, and call-to-action reminders.

As for the statistics on Facebook, the number of fans for the studied pages is more than a thousand in average, and their engagement rate is 4.92%.

In addition, some of the pages shut their walls down from fans. Although wall management is very time consuming and uncontrollable, it is suggested that the fan page should set it open and make use of its unique advantage on encouraging communication and interaction. With that being said, many of those studied pages with public walls do not respond fast enough or do not respond at all to wall posts from friends.

Apart from the findings and the corresponding recommendations, we have also included some social media tactics on analysis, integration, and measurement at the end for reference. In brief, an understanding of the service targets and the organization's own position, careful planning and cross-referencing, and evaluation are necessary to improve not only one's Facebook page but also one's whole media strategy.

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