Public Opinion Programme, The University of Hong Kong

**Survey on Local NGOs' Use of
Internet Communication Tools for Youth Service 2013**

Executive Summary

12 August 2013

<u>**Research Background**</u>

1. In February 2013, Microsoft Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) commissioned the Public Opinion Programme (POP) at the University of Hong Kong to conduct this "Survey on Local NGOs' Use of Internet Communication Tools for Youth Service". The target population of this survey was representatives of local NGOs that provide service to the youth (of age 15-24). The contact list was provided by HKCSS.

2. HKCSS invited 172 agency members to participate in this survey via email, end up 64 organizations were interested and their contacts were passed to HKUPOP for telephone interviews. The survey was conducted during the period of **6 to 27 May 2013**. **Representatives of 53 out of the 64 organizations** were successfully interviewed, the overall cooperative rate was **91.4%**, amounting to 30.8% of the total agency members qualified for this study. Assuming no response bias, at 95% confidence level, the sampling error for all percentages was less than plus/minus 11.5 percentage points.

<u>**Summary of Key Findings**</u>

3. Concerning the current situation of youth service provision, social workers in 70% of the NGOs interviewed in this survey used "social networking websites" to communicate with the youth, followed by "telephone" and "face-to-face interviews / home visits", "email", and "instant messaging apps", which accounted for 60%, 58%, 49% and 42% respectively. Meanwhile, 15% each communicated with the youth through "SMS" and "websites". Those who used "publications / letters", "online instant messengers" and "blogs" constituted 13%, 9% and 9% of the sample. Other less commonly adopted methods included "activities" (6%), "online forums" (2%) and "street outreach" (2%).

4. When asked to compare Internet communication tools with those traditional

methods, "fast / instant response" (62%) was the most well recognized advantage of using the former to reach the youth as cited by the interviewed organizations. Followed at a distance, nearly two-fifths of the representatives thought Internet communication tools were "easy to be accepted by the youth" (38%) and a quarter of the sample found them "convenient" (25%). Besides, 17% of the NGOs thought using these "could reach the youth proactively" and around one-tenth said "easy to keep in touch with the youth" (11%) and "made the youth more willing to voice their feelings and difficulties" (9%). Those who cited "free from geographical constraints", "able to reach a wider scope of teenagers" and "low cost" accounted for 8% each of the sample. Other less commonly named advantages included "leaving record for analysis" (6%), "one-to-one interaction to enhance privacy" (4%), "increasing the youth's sense of security" (2%), "reaching the youth who always stay at home" (2%) and "easy to establish relationships based on mutual trust" (2%). Merely 2% of respondents thought these tools had "no advantage" at all.

5. Nonetheless, "inability to obtain instant responses" (17%) was also the chief constraint or difficulty mentioned by the NGOs, followed closely by the concern that "the youth may not have / use these tools" (15%) and "inability to pay attention to the youth's facial expressions and gestures" (13%). Meanwhile, 11% each said they had concerns over the "need to conduct counseling at night or after midnight" and "insufficient resources or manpower", while 9% each said it would be difficult to "keep in touch with the youth", "identify the youth's problem", "ensure information reliability" and "express thoroughly by words", followed by the concern that "social workers might not be familiar with latest devices / Internet tools" (8%). Moreover, 6% each felt that using these tools "seemed unreal", was "difficult to seek out the youth in need through the Internet" and could not guarantee "privacy protection". Just 2% each thought it was "difficult to understand the youth" with these tools and that "social workers could not keep track of online information / topics". On the other hand, 8% of respondents thought using these tools had "no restriction / difficulty" at all. Lastly, nearly one-tenth could not give a definite answer (9%).

6. Results also indicated that social workers in half of the NGOs interviewed used "multiple accounts" (51%) to handle youth services whereas one-third used "one account" (34%) and 6% had "no account" at all. The remaining 9% of representatives opted for "don't know / hard to say" when asked about the social workers' practice in this regard in his / her organization. As for the provision of guidelines to social workers on the disclosure of their identities, more than half of the NGOs surveyed did not provide any guidelines to their social workers as to

under what circumstances they should disclose their social workers' identities when using Internet communication tools to reach youths (53%). On the contrary, slightly more than two-fifths said they did (42%). The remaining 6% were unsure about the answer to this question.

7. The following questions presupposed there was an "organization cloud" system and asked respondents to appraise the usefulness of some functions. Assuming the system allowed users to use a single login name to handle multiple Internet communication accounts, on a scale of 0-10, with 0 representing not helpful at all, 5 representing half-half and 10 representing very helpful, an average rating of 6.6 was registered. As for the system's ability to enable users to set up different discussion groups for the youth to share content, and social workers to monitor the information access control and content in the discussion groups, a mean score of 6.0 was obtained. Lastly, an average rating of 6.5 was given by the NGO representatives to a cloud-based system that enabled multimedia communication with the youth, such as text messages, voice messages and videos. These meant that the interviewed NGOs generally agreed that the aforementioned system with these particular functions was useful to the social workers' daily work.

8. With regards to the directions for youth service development, one-third of the NGO representatives said "content and information of online platforms should match the youth's taste or interest" (32%) so as to encourage youngsters to use Internet communication tools more to contact social workers, followed at a distance by "promotion" (15%) and "easy / convenient for the youth to use" (11%). Other less commonly cited suggestions included "having social workers / staff to always provide instant response" (9%), "setting up discussion forums" (8%), "setting up chat rooms" (4%), "launching Internet games" (2%), "regular activities for creative exchanges" (2%), "setting up Internet radio" (2%) and "setting up schemes that encourage frequent browsing" (2%). Meanwhile, over a quarter of the sample did not know how to encourage the youth to use Internet communication tools more (26%) while 8% believed there were no possible method.

9. Would the interviewed NGOs increase resources in further promoting the use of Internet communication tools in youth service in the coming year? Positive responses slightly outnumbered that of the negative ones with 47% answering "yes" and 43% claiming "no". Meanwhile, just less than one-tenth opted for "don't know / hard to say" (9%).

10. "Well-equipped computer facilities" topped the list of NGOs' most needed IT support when using Internet communication tools to provide youth services, as cited by two-fifths of the sample (40%). Slightly over one-fifth of the NGO

representatives said they needed "IT training" most (21%). Next, 17% each thought that "professionals to develop websites" and "a stable mobile communications network" were most needed for their organizations and around one-tenth needed "professionals to develop mobile apps" most (11%). Besides, 9% and 8% respectively were in need of "professionals to monitor the server" and "a service management system", whereas 6% each needed "simple and easy-to-use online interactive platforms", "a stable fixed communications network" and "privacy protection for online communication" most. Just 4% claimed that "an online donation system" was most needed and 2% said "archive / backup copy for online communication". At the same time, 13% of the NGO representatives said their organizations did not need any IT support and the remaining 8% did not give a definite response.

11. A landslide majority agreed that the Government should provide support to youth servicing organizations in using Internet communication tools (91%), among these representatives, 40% and 38% said the Government should provide "subsidies for purchasing hardware" and "training" respectively. More than a quarter would like "subsidies for purchasing software" (28%), while another 23% suggested "setting up a regular subsidy mode". Moreover, 15% each suggested the support should be "through one-off specified subsidy" and in the form of "providing relevant guidelines, e.g. privacy protection". Meanwhile, one-tenth suggested Government to provide "assistance in network service, e.g. public wifi" (11%), and some other suggested "assistance in promotion" (8%) and "communication record" (2%). There were 2% who agreed the Government should provide assistance but did not specify what they wanted. 6% did not think the Government should provide support to youth servicing organization and 4% opted for "don't know / hard to say".

12. Almost two-thirds of respondents had provided guidelines to staff on security measures in using Internet communication tools (64%), in contrast to 30% who said "no". Those who had opted for "don't know / hard to say" accounted for 6%.

13. Last but not least, one-third of the interviewed NGOs would consider switching from "public cloud" to "private cloud" (32%) while over 60% (62%) said otherwise. The remaining 6% did not offer a definite answer. Among the 17 NGO representatives who answered "yes", "better protected information security" was the chief reason (82%, i.e. 14 NGOs). Two respondents each said they would consider because they were "more confident in the systems of their organizations" and "the systems of their organizations were more stable" respectively. Moreover, one representative would consider so after taking "advice from the IT departments" of his/her organization while another respondent was unsure about

the reasons behind. On the other hand, regarding the 33 respondents who hesitated to change, "lack of resources to set up a 'private cloud' system" topped their list of concerns (64%, i.e. 21 NGOs). Six representatives hesitated owing to "security issues" and 4 each attributed their decision to "the absence of an IT department in their organizations to manage a 'private cloud' system" and "being unsure about its advantages". Only one said that "the systems of their organizations were not very stable" and 2 representatives was unable to provide the deterring factors.