

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS14/H11/19 (please insert ref. above)
---

**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL  
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR  
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

**FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)**

**Completion Report**  
(for completed projects only)

<p><b><u>Submission Deadlines:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within <b><u>six</u></b> months of the approved project completion date.</li> <li>2. Completion report: within <b><u>12</u></b> months of the approved project completion date.</li> </ol>
--

**Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)**

**1. Project Title**

How does use of social media affect public trust in police?

**2. Investigator(s) and Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved**

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	Dr Gary TANG, Assistant Professor	Department of Social Science/ The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong
Co-Investigator(s)	Dr Lawrence K. K. HO, Assistant Professor	Department of Social Sciences/ The Education University of Hong Kong
Co-Investigator(s)	Prof Francis L. F. LEE, Professor	School of Journalism and Communication/ The Chinese University of Hong Kong

**3. Project Duration**

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval (must be quoted)
Project Start Date	1 Jan 2020	/	
Project Completion Date	31 Dec 2021	30 June 2022	Approved by HSUHK on 22 June 2021
Duration (in month)	24 months	30 months	
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	31 Dec 2022	30 June 2023	

- 4.4 Please attach photo(s) of acknowledgement of RGC-funded facilities / equipment.

## **Part B: The Final Report**

### **5. Project Objectives**

#### 5.1 Objectives as per original application

1. To compare the construction of public opinion regarding the police between mainstream media and social media by content analysis and social network analysis.
2. To conduct a quantitative survey to examine the respective impact of exposure to mainstream media and use of social media on people's trust in police.
3. To examine the environment of opinion polarization on social media on people's trust in police.
4. To examine the impact of critical event, i.e., the Umbrella Movement which was mobilized by social media in moderating the relationship between use of social media and trust in police.
5. To examine the policy implications of the project findings.

#### 5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: 22 June 2021

---

#### **Reasons for the change:**

The proposed change in Objective (4) is due to the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement that took place from 2019 to 2020. The proposal for this project was submitted before the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement occurred. Consequently, one of the reviewers pointed out that the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement might have supplanted the Umbrella Movement as the critical event when this project began. After a year, we agree that the implications of the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement are more profound than those of the Umbrella Movement in terms of bringing about a paradigm shift in Hong Kong's social and political structure. Additionally, the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement demonstrated a stronger intervention in the relationship between social media and public trust in the police compared to the Umbrella Movement.

#### Objective (4)

**Original:** To examine the impact of critical event, i.e., **the Umbrella Movement** which was mobilized by social media in moderating the relationship between the use of social media and trust in police.

**Revised:** To examine the impact of critical event, i.e., **the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement** which was mobilized by social media in moderating the relationship between the use of social media and trust in police.

### 5.3 Realisation of the objectives

*(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)*

All the research objectives stated in the proposal have been fulfilled or partly fulfilled during the research period. The findings have been analyzed, and some of them have been presented in various academic outlets.

Objective 1, 3 and 4:

To fulfill Objectives 1, 3, and 4, the following data were collected: (a) the data from LIHKG, the leading online forum, were crawled and organized; (b) the posts and user engagement of online news media, including Stand News, In-Media, Silent Majority for Hong Kong, and Speak Out Hong Kong, were crawled and organized; and (c) a coding exercise on newspapers was conducted for media reports on issues related to the police.

These data enabled our team to compare the public opinion presented on social media and newspapers (Objective 1). The atmosphere of polarization could be analyzed by examining people's engagement on social media (Objective 3). As the data were collected retrospectively, Objective 4 could be fulfilled by comparing the public opinion before and after the critical event.

Objective 2

The population survey proposed in this research proposal was not funded, but our research team managed to add questions related to this project in the surveys of other projects, including a population survey conducted in May 2020, and a track survey conducted in April and October 2020. The budget of this project supported the manpower needed for the track survey. This solution allowed us to obtain some clues to satisfy Objective 2. However, as the analyzable findings were not tailor-made for this research, this objective is stated as 70% satisfied in this report.

Objective 5

The policy implications were analyzed together with the research results. Part of the policy implications was reported in the conference papers, which have been accepted by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. One of them was awarded the top paper in the Division of Political Communication.

### 5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

<b>Objectives</b> <i>(as per 5.1/5.2 above)</i>	<b>Addressed</b> <i>(please tick)</i>	<b>Percentage Achieved</b> <i>(please estimate)</i>
1. To compare the construction of public opinion regarding the police between mainstream media and social media by content analysis and social network analysis.	√	100%
2. To conduct a quantitative survey to examine the respective impact of exposure to mainstream media and use of social media on people's trust in police.	√	70%

3. To examine the environment of opinion polarization on social media on people's trust in police.	√	100%
4. To examine the impact of critical event, i.e., the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement which was mobilized by social media in moderating the relationship between use of social media and trust in police.	√	100%
5. To examine the policy implications of the project findings.	√	100%

## 6. Research Outcome

### 6.1 Major findings and research outcome

*(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)*

The following are the major findings that we have derived from the collected data which have been published:

There has been a significant change in the media-police relationship before and after the Anti-ELAB Movement. Both conservative and adversarial media increased their coverage of police misconduct cases following the movement. This was partly due to public sentiment perceived by journalists. At the same time, the police department adopted a more defensive approach in handling media queries regarding officer misconduct.

(Output: Dennis Leung and Gary Tang. 2023. "Press-Police Relations after a Critical Political Event: Media Representations of Police Misconduct in Post-Social Movement Hong Kong". Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Conference, 7 – 10 August, Washington DC, USA.) (Appendix 1)

The police force underwent a drastic change in their approach to public communication on social media during and after the Anti-ELAB Movement. They adopted a confrontational manner on social media during the movement. This tendency declined after the movement, but it was not as low as it had been before. Additionally, the police put more effort into promoting their image as law enforcers and conveying the message about legal sanctions during the movement, and this tendency continued to grow afterward.

(Output: Gary Tang and Dennis Leung. 2023. "Facebook and Policing during a Crisis and Post-Crisis Autocratization: The Case of Hong Kong". Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Conference, 7 – 10 August, Washington DC, USA.) (Appendix 2)

Pro-government online media were found to use provocative wording, such as "black police" and "black riot," more often than adversarial online media. This served as one of the forces consolidating conservative citizens and potentially strengthening polarization.

(Output: Chi-Kit Chan, Gary Tang and Francis L. F. Lee. 2022. Hong Kong media: Interaction between Media, State and Civil Society (chapter 6). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.) (Appendix 3)

LIHKG users showed a tendency to legitimize online public opinion through the discourse of "pushing it to the press." Topics about police brutality were highly associated with this discourse. Along with other materials, the tendency among LIHKG users to be endorsed by mainstream media was observed. This tendency helped to relieve the pace of radicalization of the movement, and polarization among citizens.

(Output: Gary Tang, Francis L. F. Lee and Joseph M. Chan (forthcoming). "Media and Social Mobilisation in Hong Kong". In Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley (Ed.) Routledge Handbook of Chinese Media (2nd edition).) (Appendix 4)

Through two waves of a tracking survey conducted in April and October 2020, we found that public trust in almost all government units dropped, including the police force, with the exception of the judiciary. However, public trust in the police force was found to be associated with trust in the judiciary.

(Output: Gary Tang and Samson Yuen. 2020. "How Have Supporters of the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement Changed Before and After the Hong Kong National Security Law?" Ming Pao, P02.) (Appendix 5)

## 6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action (*Maximum half a page*)

There are two additional insights derived from this research project. These insights are still in the process of being written, and the findings can be further theorized for follow-up research projects.

First, during the Anti-ELAB Movement, people's attitudes against the movement and in support of the police were strongly aligned. However, this attitudinal alignment was occasional rather than structural. The results from a population survey showed that exposure to alternative information on social media and political discussions could weaken support for the police among citizens who were against the movement. When the polarization thesis assumes a solid alignment of attitudes towards various issues within a faction, this finding has the potential to foster a more theorized dialogue with discussions about opinion polarization.

Second, we have collected a rich dataset from the Facebook page of the Hong Kong Police. Part of the analysis will be presented at the forthcoming AEJMC Annual Conference. Additionally, our dataset allows us to identify the number of users among the number of comments for each post. Based on this information, we are analyzing the extent to which certain Facebook engagements were from a small number of hardcore pro-government citizens. We expect that this finding could contribute to a meaningful dialogue with theories about opinion polarization and state-sponsored public opinion, which is beyond the scope of this project and can be further developed.

## 7. Layman's Summary

(*Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words*)

This research project investigates the impact of social media on public trust in the Hong Kong police before, during, and after the Anti-ELAB Movement. It reveals a significant shift in media coverage of police misconduct, which has impacted public perception. The study also highlights the police force's confrontational use of social media during the movement and their increased efforts to promote their image as law enforcers afterward.

Furthermore, the research explores the role of pro-government online media in using provocative language, which potentially reinforces societal polarization and affects public trust in the police. It also examines how LIHKG users legitimize online public opinion and how their endorsement by mainstream media may have influenced the public's trust in the police during the movement.

This study also delves into examining attitudinal alignments during the Anti-ELAB Movement and analyzing Facebook engagements of hardcore pro-government citizens. These findings may contribute to discussions on opinion polarization and state-sponsored public opinion, which can further impact public trust in the police.

In conclusion, this research is valuable for understanding the complex relationship between social media and public trust in law enforcement agencies during periods of social unrest and political change. It highlights the need for effective communication strategies to maintain and rebuild public trust in the police amid a rapidly evolving media landscape.

**Part C: Research Output****8. Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project**

*(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)*

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
/	/	√ (The journal's editorial board was reformed after we had submitted the revised article. The review process, therefore, was pending for more than a year, and the article might be regarded as a new submission)	/	Lawrence K. K. HO* Gary TANG	The challenge of ensuring police accountability in a liberal authoritarian regime: The case of the Independent Police Complaints Council in Hong Kong / Chinese Public Administration Review	/	/	/	Yes
/	/	/	√	Gary TANG* Dennis KK LEUNG	Facebook and policing during a crisis and post-crisis autocratization: The case of Hong Kong	/	Yes (Appendix 2)	/	Yes
/	/	/	√	Dennis KK LEUNG Gary TANG*	Press-Police Relations after a Critical Political Event: Media Representations of Police Misconduct in Post-Social Movement Hong Kong	/	Yes (Appendix 1)	/	Yes

### 9. Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered

(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

Month / Year / Place	Title	Conference Name	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
08/2023/ Washington DC	Facebook and policing during a crisis and post-crisis autocratization: The case of Hong Kong	Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) Annual Conference	No	Yes (Appendix 2)	Yes (RGC's support was not disclosed in the submission for blind review. It will be acknowledged when we submit the finalized paper to the conference)	Yes
08/2023/ Washington DC	Press-Police Relations after a Critical Political Event: Media Representations of Police Misconduct in Post-Social Movement Hong Kong	AEJMC Annual Conference	No	Yes (Appendix 1)	Yes (RGC's support was not disclosed in the submission for blind review. It will be acknowledged when we submit the finalized paper to the conference)	Yes

### 10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning

(Please elaborate)

Part of the survey data was presented in a newspaper to inform the public about the change in political trust among Hong Kong citizens, including trust in the police force, before and after the enactment of the National Security Law. This was a preliminary account of the impact of the critical event on public trust in the police, and the article served to provide a timely reference for various sectors to make sense of the immediate social impact of the new law. This article was also cited by Kobayashi et al. (2021) to address Hong Kong's social change.

Reference:

Kobayashi, T., Song, J., & Chan, P. (2021). Does repression undermine opposition demands? The case of the Hong Kong National Security Law. *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 22(4), 268-286.

Tang, G., & Yuen, S. (27 December, 2020). How Have Supporters of the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement Changed Before and After the Hong Kong National Security Law? *Ming Pao*, P02. (In Chinese)



**11. Student(s) Trained**

*(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)*

Name	Degree Registered for	Date of Registration	Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation
/	/	/	/

**12. Other Impact**

*(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)*

The conference paper “Press-Police Relations after a Critical Political Event” has received the Top Paper Award from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Conference. There will be a special session for us to present this award-winning paper. We will have the privilege of introducing this research project to the international academic community. (Appendix 1)

We have built a search engine for our team members to analyze LIHKG’s data efficiently (Appendix 6). Its functions include daily frequency of keywords and word counts for associated keywords. The start date of the archive was April 2019, and we continue to update the database. However, due to the limited capacity of our private server, the search engine is not currently available for public use. We sometimes share it with our colleagues for research purposes upon request. Some screenshots of the search engine are attached for reference. It is a very useful infrastructure for studying online public opinion. We plan to seek funding to further develop this search engine for practitioners from research institutes.

**13. Statistics on Research Outputs**

	Peer-reviewed Journal Publications	Conference Papers	Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters	Patents Awarded	Other Research Outputs (please specify)	
No. of outputs arising directly from this research project	3	2	2	/	Type	No.
					Research database	1

**14. Public Access Of Completion Report**

*(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)*

Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access	Reasons
N/A	