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| RGC Ref. No.: <u>UGC/FDS24(15)/H04/16</u> (please insert ref. above) |
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**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report

(for completed projects only)

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

Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)

1. Project Title

Revisiting public relations functions and values in the digital era

探討數碼年代公共關係的功能和價值

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

| Research Team | Name / Post | Unit / Department / Institution |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Principal Investigator | TONG Suk Chong, Assistant Professor | Department of Journalism and Communication, Hong Kong Shue Yan University |
| Co-Investigator(s) | CHAN Fong Yee Fanny, Associate Professor | Department of Marketing, The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong |
| Others | N/A | N/A |

3. Project Duration

| | Original | Revised | Date of RGC / Institution Approval <i>(must be quoted)</i> |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Project Start Date | 1 January 2017 | N/A | N/A |
| Project Completion Date | 31 December 2018 | 31 March 2019 | 20 Nov 2018 |
| Duration <i>(in month)</i> | 24 months | 27 months | N/A |
| Deadline for Submission of Completion Report | 31 December 2019 | 31 March 2020 | 20 Nov 2018 |

Part B: The Final Report

5. Project Objectives

5.1 Objectives as per original application

1. To revisit the theoretical conception of public relations in the academic disciplines of public relations and marketing, and advance theoretical implications by proposing the interactivity dimension of Public Relations Function Index.
2. To test the significant role of interactivity in public relations functions and public relations values.
3. To provide research implications to practitioners in public relations and marketing for effective relationship building between the organization and its stakeholders in the digital era.

5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: N/A

Reasons for the change: N/A

- 1.
- 2.
3.

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)

To what extent objective 1 & objective 2 have been achieved: 100 %

How they have been achieved:

Stage one analysis: An online survey targeting practitioners engaged in coordinating public relations activities in Hong Kong was conducted from July to November 2017. An email invitation to participate in this online survey was sent to all members of Hong Kong Public Relations Professionals' Association Limited (PRPA) and Hong Kong Digital Marketing Association (HKDMA). A total of 242 practitioners have responded to the survey. Based on the sample of public relations and marketing practitioners in Hong Kong, the interrelationships among various variables, including interactivity, public relations functions, and public relations values, have been thoroughly analyzed.

- A conference paper titled “Market-oriented relations in the digital era: A study of public relations and marketing professionals in Hong Kong” was presented at the International Public Relations Research Symposium (BledCom). BledCom is one of the well-established international conferences in the domain of public relations, and both the PI and the Co-I presented the results in this conference in Slovenia on 5th to 7th July 2018.
- A conference paper titled “The practices of market-oriented relations in Hong Kong in the digital era” was presented by the PI at The Asian Congress for Media and Communication in Taiwan on 27th to 29th October 2018.
- A peer-reviewed journal article titled “Exploring market-oriented relations in the digital era: A study of public relations and marketing practitioners in Hong Kong” submitted to the *Journal of Communication Management* has been accepted for publication on 8th January 2020. The article is now proceeding with publication. doi: 10.1108/JCOM-10-2019-0133
- Another peer-reviewed journal article titled “Exploring trust and commitment in the interplay of interactivity effects and online relational strategies: Implications for public relations in the digital era” has been submitted to the *Asian Journal of Communication*, which is a reputable peer-review journal in communication studies, for consideration.

Stage two analysis: To examine the underlying reasons for the discrepancies or agreements between public relations and marketing practitioners that were revealed in the first stage of analysis, a total of 28 in-depth interviews were carried out with practitioners, who were engaged in coordinating digital public relations activities in Hong Kong, from June to September 2018. The interviewees were selected through purposive and snowball sampling among professionals working in public relations or marketing industry in Hong Kong. In-depth discussions on the significance of interactivity, public relations functions, and public relations values in public relations practices were conducted.

- To revisit the theoretical conception of public relations in the academic disciplines of public relations and marketing and advance theoretical implications in regard to the of Public Relations Function Index, a journal article titled “Revisiting the relationship between public relations and marketing in the digital era: An exploratory coorientational study on public relations and marketing practitioners in Hong Kong” is under preparation and will be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal for consideration.
- Another peer-reviewed journal article titled “An exploratory study on the interplay of trust and dialogic communication in the digital era” is under preparation and will be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal for consideration.

To what extent objective 3 has been achieved: 100 %

How it has been achieved:

The two stages of analysis enabled the researchers (PI, Co-I and the Research Assistant) to exchange thoughts and have proactive interaction with the practitioners in public relations and marketing. Also, a simple research report for the stage one analysis has been shared with an industry association. Hong Kong Public Relations Professionals' Association Limited (PRPA) offered assistance for survey data collection by sending email invitations to ask the PRPA members to participate in the online survey. A simple research report (see Attachment 5) has been shared with the PRPA for industry overview and discussion.

5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

| Objectives <i>(as per 5.1/5.2 above)</i> | Addressed <i>(please tick)</i> | Percentage Achieved <i>(please estimate)</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. To revisit the theoretical conception of public relations in the academic disciplines of public relations and marketing, and advance theoretical implications by proposing the interactivity dimension of Public Relations Function Index. | ✓ | 100 |
| 2. To test the significant role of interactivity in public relations functions and public relations values. | ✓ | 100 |
| 3. To provide research implications to practitioners in public relations and marketing for effective relationship building between the organization and its stakeholders in the digital era. | ✓ | 100 |

6. Research Outcome

6.1 Major findings and research outcome

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

The first stage of analysis: a self-administrated online survey in 2017 targeting 242 practitioners engaged in coordinating public relations activities in Hong Kong.

A structural model was proposed to examine how market-oriented relations was simultaneously related to practitioners' perceptions of interactivity effects, value of public relations, and benefits of digital media usage. Structural equation modeling analysis showed that practitioners' involvement in market-oriented relations practices had significant positive effects on their perceptions of interactivity effects, value of public relations, and benefits of digital media usage. Practitioners' perceptions of interactivity effects and benefits of digital media usage were positively affected by their perceptions of public relations value, particularly public relations effectiveness. Clients' profitability and business intelligence, as well as interactivity effects in terms of involvement and perceived customization were practitioners' key concerns in managing market-oriented relations.

- Tong, S. C., & Chan, F. F. Y. (in press, accepted for publication on 8th January 2020). Exploring market-oriented relations in the digital era: A study of public relations and marketing practitioners in Hong Kong. *Journal of Communication Management*. doi: 10.1108/JCOM-10-2019-0133
- Tong, S. C., & Chan, F. (2018). Market-oriented relations in the digital era: A study of public relations and marketing professionals in Hong Kong. Paper presented at the International Public Relations Research Symposium (BledCom). Slovenia, July 5-7.
- Tong, S. C., & Chan, F. (2018). The practices of market-oriented relations in Hong Kong in the digital era. Paper presented at The Asian Congress for Media and Communication, Taiwan, October 27-29.

Another structural model of relationship management in the digital context, with both perceptual and behavioral variables, was proposed. Results showed that, with regard to practitioners' perceptions toward the stakeholders' relationships with the organization using digital media, the interactivity effects on the stakeholders' experiences of using the organization's digital media posed a significant positive effect to the stakeholders' trust in and commitment to that organization. There was a significant positive correlation between practitioners' use of online relational strategies and their perceptions of interactivity effects on the stakeholders' experiences of using the organization's digital media. Practitioners' perceptions of stakeholders' trust in the organization using digital media had a significant positive effect on their perceptions of stakeholders' commitment to that organization.

- Tong, S. C. (under review). Exploring trust and commitment in the interplay of interactivity effects and online relational strategies: Implications for public relations in the digital era. *Asian Journal of Communication*.

The second stage of analysis: 28 in-depth interviews conducted from June to September 2018 with practitioners engaged in coordinating digital public relations activities in Hong Kong.

A majority of the interviewees in the public relations industry described public relations in terms of relationship nature, whereas most of the interviewees in marketing described public relations in terms of media relations. Although most of the interviewees indicated explicitly that public relations and marketing were integrated functions, a large proportion of interviewees said that public relations and marketing were different functions.

- A journal article "Revisiting the relationship between public relations and marketing in the digital era: An exploratory coorientational study on public relations and marketing practitioners in Hong Kong" is under preparation and will be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal for consideration.

A majority of interviewees said that trust was established between the organization and its stakeholders in the digital context. Interviewees mainly described trust building based on both the attributes and the climate of dialogic communication. Interviewees generally discussed trust building in regard to attributes of mutuality orientation (namely responsiveness, empathy and respect) and attributes of openness climate (namely accessibility, transparency and genuineness).

- A journal article titled "An exploratory study on the interplay of trust and dialogic communication in the digital era" is under preparation and will be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal for consideration.

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

The investigation from this completed FDS research project serves as an exploratory study on digital public relations practices in the fields of public relations and marketing. Results revealed that trust building is one of the significance digital public relations practices in Hong Kong. Hence, based on the preliminary analysis on digital public relations practices in this FDS project, the PI has already submitted a new research project proposal titled “Revisiting trust in public relations in the digital era” to the Faculty Development Scheme, Competitive Research Funding Schemes for the Local Self-financing Degree Sector 2020/21, Research Grants Council.

As a continuation of this project, the work requested to be funded in 2020/21 attempts to further explore the mechanism of trust formation in public relations in the online context, in which initial online trust received limited attention in public relations theory. The PI attempts to focus on examining the significance of trust, in particular initial online trust, in public relations practices based on a well-defined two-stage model of trust in public relations in the digital era.

7. Layman’s Summary

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

For several decades, there has been confusion and conflict over the relationship between public relations and marketing, both theoretically and practically. With a two-stage research analysis, this research project examined the effects of interactivity on the functions and values of public relations in the disciplines of public relations and marketing in the digital era. Theoretically, this research project filled the knowledge gap in understanding the recent use of digital media by practitioners performing public relations in Hong Kong.

A self-administered on-line survey targeting 241 practitioners engaged in coordinating public relations activities in Hong Kong was conducted from July to October 2017. A theory-driven model was proposed to investigate the importance of interactivity, the value of public relations and the benefits of digital media usage as perceived by practitioners managing market-oriented relations in their organizations. Subsequently, a total of 28 in-depth interviews targeting public relations and marketing practitioners were conducted from June to September 2018 to examine the underlying reasons for the discrepancies or agreements between public relations and marketing practitioners.

Apart from advancing theoretical discussion in public relations, this project provided implications for public relations and marketing practitioners to more effectively perform public relations practices in the digital era.

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) <i>(denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)</i> | Title and Journal / Book <i>(with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)</i> | Submitted to RGC <i>(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)</i> | Attached to this Report <i>(Yes or No)</i> | Acknowledged the Support of RGC <i>(Yes or No)</i> | Accessible from the Institutional Repository <i>(Yes or No)</i> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Year of Publication | Year of Acceptance <i>(For paper accepted but not yet published)</i> | Under Review | Under Preparation <i>(optional)</i> | | | | | | |
| In press | January 2020 | N/A | N/A | Tong, S.C.*, Chan, F. F. Y. | “Exploring market-oriented relations in the digital era: A study of public relations and marketing practitioners in Hong Kong”, Journal of Communication Management doi: 10.1108/JCOM-10-2019-0133 | N/A | Yes (Attachment 1) | Yes | Yes |
| N/A | N/A | March 2020 | N/A | Tong, S.C. | “Exploring trust and commitment in the interplay of interactivity effects and online relational strategies: Implications for public relations in the digital era”, Asian Journal of Communication | N/A | Yes (Attachment 2) | Yes | No |
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| | | | | | | | | | |

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 <i>(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)</i> | Attached to this Report <i>(Yes or No)</i> | Acknowledged the Support of RGC <i>(Yes or No)</i> | Accessible from the Institutional Repository <i>(Yes or No)</i> |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| July / 2018 / Slovenia | Market-oriented relations in the digital era: A study of public relations and marketing professionals in Hong Kong | International Public Relations Research Symposium (BledCom) | 2017 | Yes (Attachment 3) | Yes | Yes |
| October / 2018 / Taiwan | The practices of market-oriented relations in Hong Kong in the digital era | The Asian Congress for Media and Communication | N/A | Yes (Attachment 4) | Yes | Yes |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

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

(Please elaborate)

The PI has applied the research experience from this project to her teaching. In an introductory class on public relations, the PI discussed the survey results from this research project with the students. The students were able to know about the latest picture of public relations practices in Hong Kong.

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 |
|------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------------|
| N/A | | | |

12. Other Impact

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

The PI shared a simple research report (Attachment 5) about the survey study with the Hong Kong Public Relations Professionals' Association Limited (PRPA). The PRPA members, who are active industry practitioners in public relations, were able to have an overview on the latest picture about digital media usage in public relations in Hong Kong, as well as a reflection on the current practice of public relations practices in the digital context.

13. Statistics on Research Outputs

| No. of outputs arising directly from this research project | Peer-reviewed Journal Publications | Conference Papers | Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters | Patents Awarded | Other Research Outputs (please specify) | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---|
| | Type | No. | | | | |
| 2 (1: accepted; 1: under review) | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | Research summary for industry practitioners (Attachment5) | 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 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| The full papers of Attachment 1 & 2 | Due to the copyright policies of the journal publishers. |