

## **Research Assessment Exercise 2020**

### **Impact Overview Statement**

**University: City University of Hong Kong**

**Unit of Assessment (UoA): 29**

**Total number of eligible university staff members in the UoA: 12**

#### **(1) Context**

In line with the University's strategy to enhance knowledge transfer and entrepreneurship, the UoA (COM) has made persistent efforts to produce research outputs that have significant impact on a variety of beneficiaries, predominantly practitioners and policymakers in media and communication.

Building on its solid foundation in social media, journalism, and public relations, COM engages with media industries in Hong Kong and Mainland China to develop new ways of presenting public issues through broadcast media. For example, based on his research on online journalism and visual communication, Dr. Zhou He collaborated with the Xinhua Television News Network to produce a documentary film on the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in Hong Kong, which was broadcast in 70 cities outside China in February 2014. This film was the second runner-up in China's prestigious Golden Eagle Awards in 2015.

In addition, COM's cutting-edge computational social science studies have a profound impact on policymaking. For example, Professor Jonathan Zhu, founder of COM's Web Mining Lab (WML), has actively engaged with policymakers in China. This led to his participation in the 424<sup>th</sup> Xiangshan Science Meeting in Beijing in May 2012 and his subsequent appointment to the China Computer Federation's (CCF) Task Force on Big Data in 2013. Professor Zhu plays a critical role in advising the Chinese government on its national policy on big data R&D (see point 4 for a more detailed description).

#### **(2) Approach to impact**

COM seeks to make research impacts beyond academia in three ways. First, because many COM alumni are active in media and communication, we nurture close relationships with them with the aim of disseminating our research findings more widely. COM supports this effort by organizing a variety of events such as its Professional Lecture Series, wherein media practitioners give talks and socialize with faculty members and students (264 events have been held during the assessment period). In particular, COM hosted its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary event in November 2018 to celebrate the longevity of these relationships. COM also hosted a two-day workshop with media practitioners that was open to the public in February 2019 to discuss imminent concerns over fake news in the East Asian context. In addition, based on several applied research projects that contribute to the implementation of the "One Health" approach (environmental, animal and human health) which has been a priority for the City University of Hong Kong and for the Hong Kong Government, COM's faculty members have served as consultants for local media and nongovernmental organizations such as AIDS Concern and Phoenix TV.

Second, in addition to producing conventional research outputs such as peer-reviewed journal papers, we strive to produce nonconventional research outputs such as toolkits to assist policymakers. Nonconventional research plans are less likely to be funded by conventional research grants such as the General Research Fund, especially during their infancy. COM supports these plans by providing faculty research grants as seed funding for the development of innovative ideas. For example, after receiving support from an internal grant, Dr. Fei Shen went on to develop the idea of tracking and visualizing public opinion in Hong Kong through real-time text-mining of social media data, which will enhance the potential responsiveness of policymakers to the people of Hong Kong.

Third, COM shares its research outputs with the general public via local and international media as well as through a variety of open events by actively compiling media contact information for its faculty members. As a result, our faculty members are frequently cited by major news media outlets

such as the BBC, the *Washington Post*, the *Economist*, *TIME*, the *Guardian*, and *South China Morning Post*. COM's faculty members have also served on the advisory boards of local and international organizations such as the Hong Kong Society of Behavioral Health and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's Media Program in Asia (Singapore).

### **(3) Strategy and plans**

Building upon the University's strategic plan to "enlarge capacity for knowledge transfer and entrepreneurship," COM is committed to pursuing research impact by collaborating with media practitioners and policymakers over the next five years. First, as part of its PR strategy, COM aims to provide its staff with more organized and systematic support to enable them to disseminate their research outputs to a broader public audience. More specifically, COM will send press releases to local and international media houses upon publication of research. This organized effort will attract more local and international media attention to COM's research findings and spread its research impact beyond the academic sphere. Departmental events will be open to the public and extended to cater to the specific needs of the local community; for example, persuasive health communication will be used to promote vaccination, effective public relations, and the utilization of big data.

Second, COM plans to increase its influence on practitioners in the local media industry by (a) expanding the scope and frequency of the abovementioned Professional Lecture Series, (b) maintaining close ties with our alumni in the media industry through our Distinguished Alumni Awards program launched on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of COM in 2018, and (c) reinvigorating COM's Industrial Attachment Program whereby our faculty members spend several months in local media companies to collaborate on projects with practitioners.

Third, given the University's strategic focus on a "digital society" and the expected growth in big data analysis in the fields of media and communication in the next five years, our strategy is to capitalize on this trend by strengthening our research capability in the fast-growing field of computational communication research, such as mining social media data and data journalism. More specifically, COM has subscribed to the social media database of Crimson Hexagon, which has compiled over one trillion posts from Facebook, Twitter, and many other online platforms. Crimson Hexagon is a social media analytics platform providing access to a large repository of public social data. In addition, in 2018 COM hired a junior faculty member who is an expert in computational methodologies.

### **(4) Relationship to case studies**

The focus of COM's impact strategy is excellent research and outreach to practitioners and policymakers. In light of its cutting-edge research and the diversity of its beneficiaries, the selected impact case—WML—best exemplifies COM's approach to impact. Professor Jonathan Zhu, founder of the WML, has served as an overseas member of CCF's Task Force on Big Data in China, through which he plays an active role in formulating national strategies, facilitating academic–industry collaborations, and training individuals on big data and artificial intelligence. These activities fit squarely with the University's focus on a "digital society"—one of the University's three overarching strategies to enhancing research impact. WML embodies the unit's strategy of nurturing close relationships with industry via its collaborative projects with media industry leaders such as Microsoft Research, Sina, Toutiao, CTR, CSM, and TVB. Furthermore, WML graduates work as data scientists in leading technology companies such as M Brown, AC Nielsen, Tencent, Alibaba, JD Finance, and FunPlus. WML has very recently joined the CityU–Columbia AI-driven FinTech Lab, with HKD 500 million funding from AIR@InnoHK of Innovation and Technology Commission. In summary, with a growing global need for the collection and analysis of big data, the WML provides essential research outputs that have multiple impacts on media practitioners and policymakers, and these are good examples of COM's approach to increasing its impact.