

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Overview Statement

University: The University of Hong Kong (HKU)

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 29 – Communications and Media Studies

Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 5

(1) Context

Professional engagement, innovation, and immediate practical impact are the core research strategy of the Journalism and Media Studies Centre (JMSC). Its aims to address current needs of journalists, educators, and the community. Its key news literacy project has been internationally acclaimed as a world leader in combating “fake news.” Its research on Chinese social media censorship has informed journalists and policymakers in their understanding of contemporary China. Local capacity building has been developed via the digital media entrepreneurship project, creating alternative media platforms, and the Hong Kong Documentary Initiative, fostering a new generation of local filmmakers.

(2) Approach to Impact

The establishment of the Professor of Practice track has allowed for the appointment of leading journalists whose ongoing professional work enriches the total output of the Centre’s staff. Employing media practitioners has ensured the JMSC’s research carries real-world impact.

2.1 Research support and infrastructure:

2.1.1 Research Quality: The Centre’s staff have expertise in qualitative and quantitative methods, including open social media, big data analytics and visualisations. Its groundbreaking WeChatscope allows monitoring social media content using JMSC’s innovative “App crawling” technique.

2.1.2 Investment: The JMSC actively seeks government and industry partners as “force multipliers” to aid its research, and this has allowed expansion in key areas. Dr. Fu has been awarded more than HK \$3 million to support over a dozen full-time researchers. Prof. Kajimoto has been awarded HK \$7.2 million by Google to map the misinformation ecosystem in Asia. The Documentary Initiative has received over HK \$9.9 million in funding.

2.2 Staff Training and Support:

The JMSC supports staff to attend international conferences worldwide, and staff have been keynote speakers at conferences and symposia. JMSC experts have served as consultants on new literacy, free expression, investigative journalism and digital media start-ups. JMSC also supports staff to attend skills building workshops, courses and sabbaticals, like at the M.I.T. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) Media Lab.

2.3 Research Partnerships, Knowledge Exchange, Professional Practice:

2.3.1 Academic Practice/Exchange: The Centre’s practice professors bring experience from leading international news organisations, i.e., The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, and others to help ensure impact and relevance. The JMSC also brings in top international journalists as “Journalists-in-Residence” to work on specific projects and books.

2.3.2 Knowledge Exchange Events: JMSC staff regularly interact with media practitioners and policymakers. The Centre organised the HKU Media Law and Policy in Asia workshop, jointly with the Faculty of Law, to provide practical training for media defence lawyers and journalists. Its

documentary masterclass workshops and mentorships have provided training to over 200 documentary filmmakers, building a documentary filmmaking capacity in Hong Kong.

2.3.3 Partnerships with Stakeholders: The JMSC has developed a diverse network of partnerships for cross-sectoral collaboration, such as in the area of fact checking and disinformation identification. Its partners include Google News Lab and First Draft News.

2.3.4 Formal Advisory Roles: The JMSC is the formal advisor to the Society of Publishers in Asia, the Foreign Correspondents' Club. JMSC staff also carry out formal advisory roles for journalism schools in Hong Kong, and provide media training.

2.3.5 Knowledge Exchange and Commissioned Research: The JMSC seeks commissioned research projects. For example, it was asked to lead a three-country, year-long news literacy education campaign in Southeast Asia funded by Google News Initiative. Prof. Kajimoto has been commissioned by UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) to lead a research project on news literacy in five Asian countries.

2.3.6 Transforming Research into Professional Training: JMSC's research, combined with the real-world experience of its professors of practice, enhances professional journalism training in Hong Kong and internationally. In the critical area of journalists' safety, Prof. Sites created a safety seminar presented online and in person, and JMSC has designed legal and safety workshops following the outbreak of the Hong Kong protests.

2.4 Public Engagement and Innovation Leading to Impact

2.4.1 Media Engagement: JMSC staff regularly engage with the media on current issues, and have been interviewed and cited hundreds of times. Its social media research has been cited internationally. Its Open data and Application Program Interface (API) has become a one-of-a-kind resource for global China-watchers.

2.4.2 Community Engagement: The JMSC proactively uses its expertise in media training to assist NGOs in building their communications skills and has also contributed to developing a Chinese language version of the Agence France-Presse Journalism Code of Ethics.

(3) Strategy and Plans

The Centre is currently launching several new initiatives and plans including:

3.1 Enhancing media innovation/training future media entrepreneurs, e.g., with the creation of the new Media-X programme, promoting media innovation and the development of new media.

3.2 Expanding professional training, i.e., expanding its documentary filmmaking programme to include a new Master of Documentary – the Asian region's first and only such advanced programme.

3.3 Deepening community engagement through media training, e.g., with support from charitable foundations, increasing capacity in non-fiction storytelling for local non-profit organisations..

(4) Relationship to Case Studies

The case study on Chinese censorship patterns illustrates the immediacy of the JMSC's research and its real-world applications for those interested in understanding contemporary China and the online discussion despite censorship controls.