

Research Impact Testimonial for Fu King-wa's Weiboscope

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Associate Professor Fu King-wa's Weiboscope and Wechatscope are extremely valuable tools which for the first time allows journalists, academics and analysts a tool to measure the scope and speed of Chinese censorship of social media platforms. Before their existence, it was clear that Chinese-language social media was being censored, but no yardsticks were available to quantitatively measure how the censorship process varied from day to day, or geographically in China. By designing these tools, Dr Fu has allowed us a window to further analyse the regional variations of social media censorship, the relative speed of censorship and to track which terms are being censored across time. This is very important for scholars, academics and policy analysts alike as it gives us greater clarity into the nuances of Chinese social media censorship, and it allows us to track censorship policy longitudinally.

In terms of my own newsgathering and analysis processes, first as a Beijing correspondent for NPR and then as a journalist, I have regularly used Weiboscope in particular, in order to confirm censorship and track changes. One example is [this tweet](#), written in December 2015, when I was able to draw upon Weiboscope's tracking function to show relative levels of censorship over a five-month period. This type of quantitative measure – tracking the number of permissions denied per ten thousand messages – would not have been possible before Weiboscope. The fact this was retweeted 60 times and liked 22 times shows Weiboscope's utility as a tool.



Louisa Lim

@limlouisa

Pu Zhiqiang is keeping China's censors busy.
@Weiboscope shows highest level of
censorship since Tianjin explosion



6:46 PM - 14 Dec 2015 from Ann Arbor, MI

60 Retweets 22 Likes



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Having seen the benefits of Weiboscope, I then reached out to Dr Fu to ask him whether he could generate a list of the most banned topics of the year, for a Foreign Policy piece summing up the year 2015 in Chinese censorship. The result was this piece, which as far as we are aware, was the first journalistic piece outlining the sensitivity of Winnie the Pooh/Xi Jinping comparison on the Chinese internet. This was two years before other news outlets like the BBC began writing similar stories, demonstrating Weiboscope's ability to generate news stories. Later on, I then used information from Weiboscope to write a piece for the LA Review of Books on 12 Things that are Banned on the Chinese Internet, which was also a presentation for a conference on *What Cannot be Said: Freedom of Expression in a Changing world* co-sponsored by UC Irvine, University of Southern California and UCLA on January 22-24, 2016. This was an important conference, presented by the Forum for the Academy and the Public, which included a Skype appearance by Edward Snowden, embattled Malaysian cartoonist Zunar and David Kaye, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. In this way, Weiboscope has played an important role in knowledge production, analysis and research, both journalistically and academically by serving as a tool that allows unprecedented analysis of Chinese censorship trends.