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Regenerative crisis, social media publics and Internet trolling: A cultural discourse approach

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ABSTRACT

Given that a regenerative crisis life cycle is no longer static, communication dynamics have extended beyond organization-receiver relationship to receiver-receiver relationship in the social media environment. This paper analyzes and explicates the socio-cultural meanings in the interaction processes of the crisis publics with a specific socio-political context by blending the concept of Internet trolling into predominant crisis communication theories (i.e. social-mediated crisis communication and regenerative crisis model).

Using cultural discourse analysis (CuDA), we analyzed the top influential posts, comments and responses created by both influential social media users and general followers based on the five discourse hubs or radiants of identity, relation, action, dwelling, and emotion in the Lancôme case, which was regarded as the most heated crisis in Hong Kong after and influenced by the Umbrella Movement. The findings suggest that the motivations and behaviors found within each of the crisis publics—influencers and followers—are fundamentally different from each other by nature along the situated regenerative crisis. Two types of social media influencers (i.e. primary and secondary influencers) were identified. We propose a regenerative crisis model of publics to highlight their roles, purposes, behaviors, interaction processes, and emotions within a situated socio-political tension. This paper also discusses the theoretical implications for social-mediated crisis communication literature and the practical implications that take contextual factors into consideration.

1. Introduction

Public relations research interested in crisis communication dynamics has increasingly focused on the digital natives and their behavior on social media (Coombs, 2017; Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011; Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). During crisis situations, social media are in fact convenient, interactive, and multifunctional platforms on which organizations and publics interact and engage each other, which may *enhance* the effectiveness of crisis communication (Veil et al., 2011) or *amplify* the crisis situation due to their capacity for greater speed and volume of exchanges (Noguti, 2016). *Social-mediated crises* thus differ from traditional crises due to the characteristics of the publics, which implies that crisis-related information created by both organizations and stakeholders can be seen, shared, and responded to by others on social media (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). As shown by the recent movements #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter and by the collective push of the hyper-online investors of GameStop, social media posts can proliferate and generate massive critical responses toward the crisis-affected organizations and individuals.

Crisis situations and life cycles are thus diverse in the social media context. Coombs and Holladay (2012) propose the concepts of "para-crisis", the crisis signal on social media, and "regenerative model", a specific crisis life cycle with different crisis focuses, to illustrate that unlike a traditional crisis, a social-mediated crisis may have a different life cycle with multiple "sub-crises" and each sub-crisis has a trigger event and different crisis situations. Similarly, Pang (2013) argues that a crisis spreading among the digital naturals (Young & Åkerström, 2015) may act as a social media hype, which is generated by social media users and triggered by certain events, sustained discussion, and debates across multiple platforms that cause widespread public interest.

Crises that strike and are discussed and developed on social media are thus generally considered as a *secondary* crisis. Publics of these crisis-affected organizations are regarded as senders of information, which show activism in posting negative comments on social media (Zheng,

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Liu, & Davison, 2018). Scholars have developed some approaches to define and segment social media publics such as the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model (Austin, Fisher Liu, & Jin, 2012) and some recent network analysis studies on social media publics (e.g., Zhao, Zhan, & Liu, 2018; Zhao, Zhan, & Wong, 2018). However, the detailed, dynamic, and longitudinal communication processes among those publics in a regenerative crisis life cycle are still underexplored (Coombs, 2017). More importantly, as many regenerative crises are closely associated with the *situated* social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions, it has become vital to take contextual factors into consideration to identify social media publics during a crisis. Even so, socio-cultural meanings and their influence on publics' behaviors and interactions in the situated crisis context still deserve our further investigation.

For a deeper understanding of the roles of social media influential creators, the concept of social media influencers (SMIs) is often cited. It is defined as a type of independent social media endorsers who shape followers' attitudes through their posted content, mainly for branding or promotions (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). Studies of SMIs have mostly concentrated on how SMIs can help organizations by providing advice, telling a story in multiple ways to reach consumers, and building relationships (Archer & Harrigan, 2016; Pang, Tan, Lim, Kwan, & Lakhanpal, 2016), rather than on investigating issue management or crisis communication situations.

To uncover how social media influencers and followers impact each other to change the crisis situation along with the regenerative crisis life cycle in a complex multi-cultural context, we introduce the concept of Internet trolling (Bishop, 2013; Hardaker, 2013). The adoption of this concept is to study the various character types and behaviors of crisis publics in posting provocative remarks or false accusations that are provocative or offensive ("Internet troll", 2011), promoting a certain cause, or harassing the organization involved in a social-mediated crisis. This is particularly imperative in social-mediated crisis communication research. Publics in fact can easily turn to be active content/opinion creators through the use of the technology and forward or post negative comments about an organization to spontaneously facilitate communication diffusion in a regenerative crisis (Shi, Rui, & Whinston, 2013; Zheng et al., 2018). Through a cultural discourse approach, we focus on the socio-cultural meanings of crisis communication and engagement of situated social media influencers and followers (i.e., supporters vs. haters) in shaping a regenerated crisis.

1.1. Purposes of the study

This paper intends to achieve three objectives. First, by using cultural discourse analysis (CuDA) (Carbaugh, 2007), this paper aims to analyze the socio-cultural meanings in the interaction processes of social media publics in a situation with social and political tension within a significant regenerative crisis case in Hong Kong. Second, by integrating the concept of Internet trolling (Hardaker, 2013) into existing research that advances the concept of "hot-issue" publics (Kim, Ni, Kim, & Kim, 2012), our CuDA commits to demonstrate the dynamic communication process in a regenerative social-mediated crisis. Third, by combining the preceding two objectives, this paper attempts to propose a regenerative crisis model of publics to highlight their roles, purposes, communication dynamics, trolling strategies, and emotions, with some recommendations for future crisis communication research within *situated* socio-cultural contexts.

2. Literature review

2.1. Regenerative crisis model

Coombs (2012, 2017) used a regenerative approach and the concept of paracrisis to describe the crisis life cycle in the context of social media. In doing that, he claimed that each crisis has its own trigger event but some factors (e.g., response misconduct and stakeholders' emotions) can create new crises within the original crisis. Some crises are triggered by the misdeeds of organizational risks that can be seen on social media, which is defined as *paracrisis* (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Therefore, a regenerative crisis is a crisis that includes multiple "sub-crises," each of them having a trigger event and different crisis situations. The life cycles of sub-crises overlap and a "double crisis" may happen.

The regenerative crisis communication is also understood as "secondary crisis communication," which is a unique phenomenon in the digital era. Without traditional gatekeepers, social media users can directly forward, create, and spread their own versions of crisis information to general publics, and, in most cases, organizations do not have control over the diffusion processes of such information (Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013). The "Occupy Central" or "Umbrella Movement", a Hong Kong political protest campaign that occurred in 2014, is an example of regenerative crisis that attracted plentiful negative comments and emotions on both Hong Kong and mainland Chinese social media platforms. As Chinese Internet users got increasingly involved in the debate around this movement (i.e., "anti-government" vs. "anti-Beijing"), the crisis focus shifted from a political event to the conflict between mainland and Hong Kong, and eventually led to a tourism boycott (Luo & Zhai, 2017).

The regenerative crisis model explains why it is difficult for organizations to control *paracrises* using a traditional approach such as releasing crisis information. This is so because social media users can generate new information and present it to their followers in their own ways and with different purposes (Coombs, 2017). Secondary crises are therefore not mere extensions of the original crises, but crises with different situations and focuses. They are in fact mostly caused by the actions of social media publics, including responding, forwarding, and discussing crisis information released by organizations, which may cause negative word-of-mouth if the organizations fail to address the secondary crises (Schultz et al., 2011). Previous studies have investigated factors that influence publics' secondary crisis communication intentions and found that social media publics were more likely to communicate about information released by credible newspapers, discuss the intentional type of a crisis, and react with negative emotions such as anger (Schultz et al., 2011; Utz et al., 2013).

A paracrisis is mostly executed and spread on social media platforms and it would only become a real crisis when it concerns and comes to be discussed by a wide range of stakeholders. This means that the crisis situation can be seen and re-shaped by potential publics during the whole life cycle (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Publics' attention, attitudes, and emotions affected by crisis information could also influence the organizational response and the crisis situation (Kim & Cameron, 2011). The regenerative crisis model suggests that sometimes crisis situations would change over time (Coombs, 2017). When such a condition occurs, organizations need to recognize the change and modify their response strategies quickly to handle different situations. Response strategies like "reform" and "recognition" are proposed by Coombs (2017) to handle different crisis situations.

2.2. Social-mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC)

With the rise of technologies and digital communication, the social-mediated crisis communication (SMCC) model has been applied to various social media channels (Austin et al., 2012; Liu, Jin, Briones, & Kuch, 2012). The SMCC model acts as the first theoretical framework about the crisis information processing among organizations, social media publics, and offline publics (Cheng, 2020). The model equips crisis managers with guidance built on best practices and knowledge related to social media's role in online crisis information diffusion and emotional expression (Liu et al., 2012), and provides understandings of the types of publics in terms of how they process information. The model describes communication dynamics between a crisis-affected organization and the types of publics that create and consume information

before, during, and after the crisis itself (Jin & Liu, 2010).

The SMCC model contains two main components concerning the crisis information processing: *information sources*, which refers to the individual(s) who send out and consumes crisis information, and *information forms*, which considers the channels (i.e., social media and traditional media) through which the crisis information is processed (Austin, Fraustino, Jin, & Fisher Liu, 2017; Hung-Baesecke & Bowen, 2017). The "information sources" component contains both organizations and publics. This reflects a paradigm shift from organization-centric to organization-public co-creation in crisis communication research, by emphasizing the value of information created and shared by publics as word-of-mouth communication (Austin et al., 2017).

The model categorizes three types of publics in social-mediated crisis communication: 1) Influential social media creators "who create crisis information for others to consume" and their influential posted content that may initiate and/or amplify a crisis for an organization; 2) social media followers "who consume the influential social media creators' crisis information" based on the three motivations of "issue relevance," "information seeking and sharing," and "emotional venting and support;" and 3) social media inactives "who may consume influential social media creators' crisis information indirectly through word-of-mouth communication with social media followers and/or traditional media who follow influential social media creators and/or social media followers" (Austin et al., 2012;).

Studies adopting the SMCC model mostly focus on two topics. First, they investigate how the SMCC factors, including crisis information sources, forms, crisis origin, crisis type, organizational infrastructure, message content, and message form influence the way publics respond to the crisis (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2012; Liu et al., 2012; Liu, Xu, Lim, & Egnoto, 2019; Lu & Jin, 2020). Second, they focus on how organizations may develop effective strategies to respond to publics in a social-mediated crisis (Liu et al., 2012; Liu, Fraustino, & Jin, 2015; Liu, Jin, & Austin, 2013).

Among the three types of publics, social media creators (or influencers) are considered highly influential because they are crisis information providers and have strong impacts on both followers and inactives (Austin et al., 2012; Chapman, 2013; Freberg et al., 2011; Gillin, 2009). Previous studies have primarily investigated both positive and negative impacts created by influencers in crisis communication. Influencers help organizations to effectively spread crisis information and persuade followers (Freberg, Palenchar, & Veil, 2013; Mei, Bansal, & Pang, 2010). Yet, their misdeeds may affect their endorsed organizations via social media hype to become a potential paracrisis threat (Mak & Ao, 2019; Pang, 2013; Sng, Au, & Pang, 2019). Some influencers may actively engage in crises for their personal purposes (e.g., organizational benefits, reputation, support), thereby potentially influencing followers' attitudes and the whole crisis processes (Kirkwood, Payne, & Mazer, 2019; Mak & Ao, 2019).

The SMCC model provides a useful theoretical lens to understand influencer-follower relationships, influencer-issue relationships, and follower-issue relationships (Jin & Liu, 2010). However, past research on studying publics' response has primarily worked with student samples, drawn observations in artificial experiment environments, and failed to broaden the types of considered publics (Austin et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2012). Guided by these shortcomings, we introduce the concept of Internet trolling (Bishop, 2013) and consider a real-life case to better understand the actions of social media creators and followers in the SMCC model. This conceptual integration allows in fact to further analyze their roles and behaviors in a regenerative crisis, including: 1) What purposes they intend to achieve (e.g., perceive the importance of the issue vs. self-involvement for self-confirmation); 2) how they influence followers; 3) how their behaviors affect the crisis processes; and 4) how followers respond to influencers' posts.

2.3. Internet trolling

A preliminary assumption of some traditional crisis communication theories such as Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOP) is that most stakeholders tend to respond to a crisis by considering the crisis situation through cognitive processes. However, in the context of social media, publics are more emotional, polarized, and aggressive. Thus, regardless of the type of crisis, they are more likely to spread negative word-of-mouth and attack others holding different viewpoints (Lee, Kim, & Coe, 2018; Mak & Ao, 2019; Pang, 2013; Spohr, 2017). Most traditional theories fail to understand the role of this type of publics. The Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) model suggests the importance of emotions but it does not reveal the behaviors and impacts of emotional publics (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007). To understand a crisis influenced by such publics, this study introduces the concept of *trolling*.

The word *troll* originally describes a fishing technique "by trailing a lure or baited hook from a moving boat" ("Troll", n.d.). It was later borrowed as a slang to describe people who attempt to provoke others in the U.S. military (Elward, Laurier, & Wyllie, 2001). The anonymity of the Internet leads to disinhibition, which enables people to behave in ways of flaming and harassment (Griffiths, 2014; Widyanto & Griffiths, 2011). More recently, the concept of trolling has been rapidly used in the Internet context referring to posting provocative and offensive messages (Bishop, 2013), with an aim to lure victims into unproductive conflicts and cause harm to them, by using impoliteness, aggression, deception, and manipulation (Coles & West, 2016; Hardaker, 2013; Ortiz, 2020). By proposing the concept of collective trolling, Kirkwood et al. (2019) suggested that trolling could not only be malicious actions aiming to provoke individuals, but also sets of well-designed collective strategies to resist organizations. The concept of Internet trolling also has its counterparts in the Chinese context. Some Chinese research articles in fact discuss the antecedents, underlying mechanisms, and intervention paths of *Penzis* and point out that *Penzis* tends to shift the focus of public discussion and disrupt the online public sphere (e.g., Dou, Luo, & Liu, 2017 [in Chinese])

Previous studies have investigated the motivations, strategies, and outcomes of trolling. In contexts of crime, collective resistance, and online dating, Internet trolls have been found to be triggered by complex motivations (e.g., identity construction, impulsivity, psychopathy, sadism, and social reward) creating chaotic, emotional, and even foolish online environments, which would impact stability and civilization of communities, political behaviors, and public opinions (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014; Buckels, Trapnell, Andjelovic, & Paulhus, 2019; King, Pan, & Roberts, 2017; Kirkwood et al., 2019; Lopes & Yu, 2017; March, Grieve, Marrington, & Jonason, 2017; Synnott, Coulias, & Ioannou, 2017). Trolling strategies are amplified by digressing topics of online discussion, using subtle cues to involve neutral third parties to inform other trolls that they have identified crucial roles, and by using language to create internal group cohesion and external group association (Maltby et al., 2016; Synnott et al., 2017).

The concept of trolling can further explore some complicated social-mediated crisis communication issues in organizations that are hard to explain by traditional crisis communication theories. Specifically, trolling practices connect with crisis communication through five aspects. First, SMCC indicates that communication of social-mediated crises is not limited between the organization and publics, and those interactions developing among publics are also important. Trolling studies are also effective in understanding how publics can influence each other by creating crisis information, involving more individuals in online debates, and developing influential hypes (Hardaker, 2013; Pang, 2013). Previous studies have found that several actions, such as digression, criticizing, antipathizing, providing endanger examples, using insensitive, inflammatory, and threatening language, and being aggressive, could be used by trolls to trigger influential conflicts between individuals (Hardaker, 2010, 2013).

Second, social media help disseminate negative comments provided by publics to larger numbers of people who are not directly connected with the crisis. In fact, they may not be involved nor have a clear background information of the crisis, but they would still be triggered by some stimuli to actively participate in the crisis (Zheng et al., 2018). Trolling can address how inactive publics in the SMCC model get involved and further explain how irrelevant individuals are lured into crisis discussions (Hardaker, 2010). Third, collective trolling includes the behaviors of stakeholders gathering together to conduct conative boycott, attack supporters of an organization, and express negative emotions and comments toward the organization during a crisis (Kirkwood et al., 2019; Synnott et al., 2017). Some coping strategies, especially the one about attacking supporters of the crisis-affected organization, have been underestimated by previous crisis communication studies (e.g., Jin, 2009; Jin & Cameron, 2007).

Fourth, trolling studies have adopted both behaviors and motivations to categorize online trolls (e.g., Bishop, 2013), which could offer insights to identify types of publics. For example, individuals driven by vengeance following negative experiences with the crisis-involved organization could be identified as haters, whose goals are to inflame the situation, disrupt the organization or community, and attack organizational members during a crisis (Bishop, 2013). Fifth, many regenerative crises involve issues of identity or ideology, especially those relevant to political or social issues, such as the Hong Kong-Mainland conflict, #BlackLivesMatter, and #MeToo (e.g., Ciszek & Logan, 2018; Luo & Zhai, 2017; Xiong, Cho, & Boatwright, 2019), which require organizations to deal with publics with different identities. Sometimes, debates between publics with different identities are not about the crisis itself, but the relevant social or political issues (Luo & Zhai, 2017; Mak & Ao, 2019, 2020).

Current crisis communication theories have not fully revealed how and why publics engage in secondary crisis communication on social media. Most trolling scholars found trolling to be identity-based and revealed that trolling actions are conducted for individuals to reinforce their social identity, enhance internal cohesion, and facilitate distance with outgroups (Ortiz, 2020; Synnott et al., 2017). Hence, this paper adopts Internet trolling to better understand the roles of influencers and followers and fill the existing gaps in social-mediated crisis communication through a cultural discourse approach. Therefore, two research questions are developed:

RQ1. What types of social media publics engaged in the studied crisis along the regenerative crisis life cycle?

RQ2. How did each type of social media influencers make sense of their engagement in the crisis with regard to trolling behaviors, emotions, and motivations?

3. The case background: Mainland-Hong Kong conflict

The cultural context of Hong Kong is mixed and complicated. As a part of the Greater China region, some Hong Kong people are influenced by Chinese traditions such as the Confucian ethics or family-oriented thoughts (Lin & Ho, 2009). The colonial history has shaped the local culture and identity and has further laid the foundation of localism (Erni, 2001). At the same time, the occidental background has also nurtured a democratic culture among Hong Kong people (Morris, Kan, & Morris, 2000). In recent years, influenced by the emerging pro-Beijing political forces and the growing inequalities in wealth and class, localism has become a salient political stance in Hong Kong that proclaims universal values and cosmopolitanism. This ideology aims to rebuild the local communities through the ideals of progressive democracy and diversity cultivation (Chen & Szeto, 2015; Kaeding, 2017; Veg, 2017).

Coombs (2012) points out that an organization's actions that align or misalign with social issues would have impact on its effectiveness in crisis communication. In Hong Kong, the Mainland-Hong Kong conflict

has constituted the most influential crisis among the recent critical episodes situated in socio-political issues and with negative effects to organizations' reputations. Ortmann (2015) indicates that multiple reasons contribute to this issue, including negative news of mainland China, Chinese government's influence on Hong Kong policies, and the influx of mainland Chinese tourists and immigrants after the SARS outbreak.

For our case background, a major trigger of the social-political tension is the Umbrella Movement in 2014. More than 200,000 people poured around the streets calling for "real universal suffrage" during the chief executive election and some prominent activists were jailed. Supporting the Umbrella Movement is considered as a political stance that is unfavored by both mainland Chinese government and pro-government groups in Hong Kong. The Mainland-Hong Kong conflict involves both Hong Kong and mainland people. Studies have analyzed how mainland Chinese netizens reacted to the secondary crisis of the Umbrella Movement (named "Occupy Central"). They expressed increasingly negative emotions toward all events in Hong Kong, and the focus of the crisis changed from a political event to actual tourism boycott (Luo & Zhai, 2017; Zhai & Luo, 2018).

3.1. Lancôme Hong Kong controversy (2016)

Lancôme called off a concert organized with Hong Kong activist-singer Denise Ho, a strong supporter of the Umbrella Movement, after receiving massive criticism from netizens in mainland China about her controversial political stance. To draw a line between the company and the singer, Lancôme clarified that Denise Ho was not involved in any endorsement of Lancôme's products. However, Lancôme's statements issued by the headquarters (HQ) office in France not only failed to pacify the critics, but also angered Hong Kong netizens, who appealed for boycotting the brand. The crisis heated up when more influencers and followers joined the argument. Politicians participated in the boycott and protested at Lancôme stores while celebrities voiced their anger at Lancôme and mainland China. Some commercial brands supported Denise Ho and mocked Lancôme for having a "PR faux pas". For about a month, the controversy occupied local news headlines, and even attracted international media coverage by *BBC World News*, *The Guardian*, and *PR Week*. In mid-June, Denise Ho announced that she would stick with the original plan and hold the concert on her own. In the end, the concert was packed with 3000 audience members (HOCC, 2016). The timeline of this case can be seen in Fig. 1.

4. Method

After the Umbrella Movement, compound cultural factors (especially localism) have influenced how Hong Kong people react to political, economic, and social issues, including public relations crises. Such contextual factors make this scenario suitable to use a cultural discourse analysis approach to analyze social media posts and comments about the Lancôme controversy. We adopt case study as a method to define and examine case manifestation and characteristics to understand how different social media publics behave as a comprehensive applied manner to translate the work into practical recommendations (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002). Issues derived from the Lancôme social-mediated crisis in Hong Kong are studied in-depth including their narratives, contexts, and key activities to identify salient characteristics to provide lessons learned value (Veil & Husted, 2012).

We used the Cultural Discourse Analysis approach (CuDA) derived from the anthropological tradition of communication studies to understand the *situated* discourse by examining the relationships of codes and symbols in a specific cultural discourse (Carbaugh, 2007). Previous empirical studies have been conducted using cultural discourse analysis to examine distinctive situated codes and symbols in environmental communication (Carbaugh & Cerulli, 2013), organization-public communication (Witteborn & Sprain, 2009; Witteborn, 2010), and
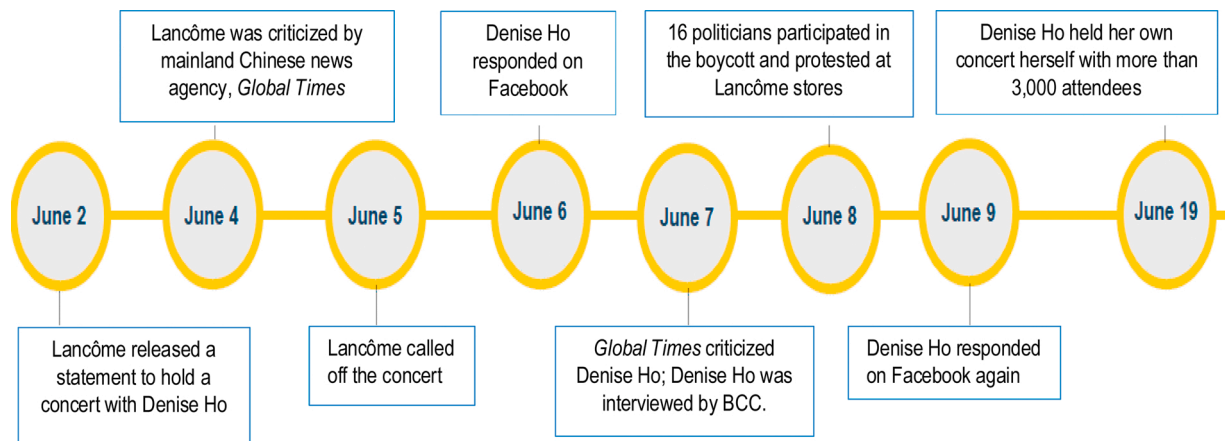
Fig. 1. Timeline and key events of the Lancôme–Denise Ho controversy.

recently in online political public relations in Hong Kong (Choy, 2018).

Carbaugh (2007) suggested analyzing meanings embedded in discourse and how such socio-cultural meanings influence human life through five hubs: self-identifying, acting, expressing emotion, relating to others, and dwelling in the making of a place. When studying the situated actors' communication in a recent Hong Kong election campaign, Choy (2018) defined the five discursive hubs (or analytical tools) as follows: (1) *Identity* is indicated by the use of pronouns and identification words that signify who an individual thinks he or she is; (2) *Action* can be examined when the actors talk about what they are doing; (3) *Emotional expression* becomes explicit when feelings are discussed; (4) *Relating* can be identified through reference to the social network linking actors among one another; (5) *Dwelling* is the local place making, which is observed when actors name a place and share stories surrounding the place (p. 755). The five discursive hubs of the CuDA approach are highly relevant here to identify the roles and relationships of the social media publics and their identities and communication dynamics in a situated socio-political crisis context (Carbaugh, 2007). Appendix A illustrates examples of how the five discursive hubs were analyzed in Facebook posts and comments.

As many discussions and conflicts generated in the Lancôme case appeared on social media, Facebook was selected as the studied platform for three reasons. First, up to 2019, Facebook remains the dominating social media platforms for Hong Kong people, with a penetration rate of 82 % in the population (Statista, 2020). Based on keyword search, the authors also found a significant larger amount of posts and comments relevant to this crisis on Facebook rather than other platforms (e.g., 834 posts on Facebook vs. 116 on forums). Second, Hong Kong people, especially youths, are more likely to use Facebook to get access to breaking news, famous people, and social movements (Davis, 2018; Lee, 2018; Ma, Lau, & Hui, 2014). Third, as an international platform, users of Facebook are very diverse and include celebrities, companies, politicians, and mainland and overseas users (Davis, 2018).

This study used DivoMiner, an online data acquisition and analysis platform that can identify simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, and English, to extract data from Facebook pages. Researchers first inputted keywords such as "Lancôme" and "Denise Ho" and chose the period "from June 2 to December 31, 2016" for the system to automatically extract relevant posts and comments from online platforms. The system subsequently identified both simplified and traditional Chinese texts for this keyword search. Posts and comments not related to the crisis (e.g., advertising and blank posts) were considered invalid and removed from analysis. Data cleaning was done by the two researchers manually after the automatic data extraction. The final dataset consisted of 834 posts and 57,880 comments on Facebook from June 2 (when Lancôme invited Denise Ho to co-organize a concert) to August 31, 2016 (the last day when Facebook and forum users mentioned the controversy in 2016).

After doing an online content analysis on Facebook, local forums, and online news, we selected the most influential posts on Facebook for discourse analysis to make sense of the social-mediated crisis communication, as well as relationships and behaviors of the influencers and followers involved in this regenerative crisis. DivoMiner helped us to determine the influential posts by an algorithm that assessed the number of reads, shares, likes, and comments of each post. Under each influential post, we sorted the comments by relevance using Facebook tools and selected the most relevant responses from the top 100 comments for the CuDA analysis. Based on previous content analysis studies (see Döring & Mohseni, 2019; Ekram, Debiec, Pumper, & Moreno, 2019; Kaiser, 2017), 100 was a widely accepted sample size for analyzing comments of each post. In addition, for most of the selected influencers in this study, we found saturation after selecting the top 100 relevant comments. Most of the comments ranked after the top 100 shared similar viewpoints or emotions with the top 100 relevant ones, and some of the comments were just emojis and simple words. Both posts and characteristics of their creators were analyzed. In total, more than 100 influential creators were identified. Based on their identity, perceived political stance, past experience of the Hong Kong-mainland conflict, and content of posts, six creators were selected as representatives for analysis. The data analysis followed the approach of thematic analysis, according to the five hubs of CuDA (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding processes were open-ended and interpretive, guided by the cultural discourse analysis approach of this study. Themes related to the five hubs were developed, reviewed, defined and named according to existing codes.

5. Key findings

5.1. RQ1: three types of social media publics

Suggested by the SMCC model, social media influential creators, followers, and inactives consume information released by crisis involved organizations together (Austin et al., 2012). However, in the Lancôme case, crisis information came not only from the organization but also from the celebrity involved in crisis, Denise Ho. To distinguish these influencers from others, our study used the term *primary influencers*, i.e., those who were directly involved in the crisis and had access to the timeliest crisis information. The interplays of the five discursive hubs in Denise Ho's crisis communication on her Facebook page situated herself as the *primary influencer* when discussing the *issue* with other actors (i.e., other influencers and followers). In most cases, the primary influencers were the most influential ones in regenerative social-mediated crisis communication. Denise Ho issued a Chinese statement (see Fig. 2) shortly after Lancôme's announcement of the cancellation of her concert, which became the most heated social media post in the Lancôme
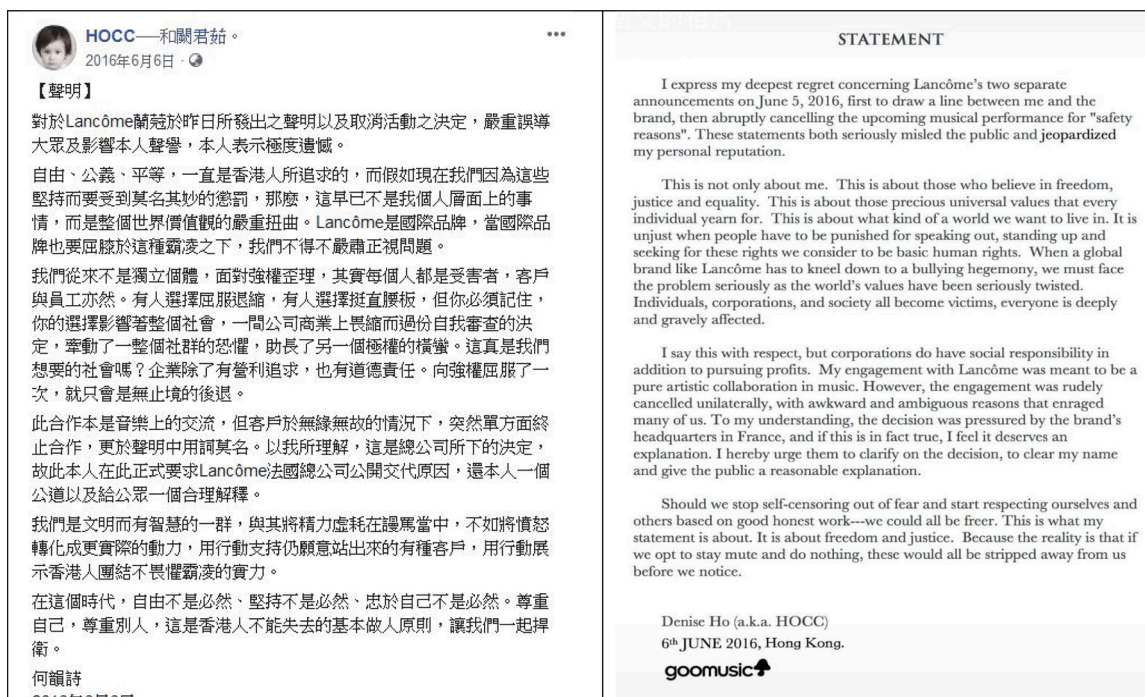
Fig. 2. Denise Ho's statement on Facebook post and the English version.

controversy. The post received over 82,000 likes, 8,865 comments, over 12,000 shares and her own comment received more than 3,346 responses.

In the studied case, other social media users re-created the information and shared it with other publics. This was done based on their own needs after receiving information released by organizations or primary influencers that fitted the definition of influential social media creators according to the SMCC. They were referred to as *secondary influencers*. Some of the secondary influencers directly responded to the organizations or primary influencers to express their opinions, such as Walter Ma, Denise Ho's makeup artist, who responded to Denise Ho's Facebook announcement and got 2,594 likes and 319 responses, which were the highest numbers among all the comments to Denise Ho's post. Some of them commented on the crisis situation, like *Apple Daily*, a news media content creator with strong political standpoints (pro-democracy and supportive of the Umbrella Movement). Its post about how Hong Kong netizens responded to the crisis received 12,000 likes, 1,823 comments, and 998 shares with many local followers leaving mocking comments about Chinese visitors. Some secondary influencers were connecting the crisis with their own experiences, like Chapman To, an activist-celebrity advocating the Umbrella Movement, which was blacklisted and barred from a business show in mainland China. His post used his own case to support Denise Ho, which got 33,000 likes, 50 comments, and 1,216 shares. Some secondary influencers took conative response, such as Christine Fong, a District Council member in Hong Kong; and MOOV, a Hong Kong music streaming service provider. Both showed supportive behaviors toward Denise Ho or opposite behaviors toward Lancôme. All their posts gained large numbers of likes, comments, and shares.

These secondary influencers can be individuals with numerous followers, famous people/organizations, or news media (Mak & Ao, 2019). They were identified based on the number of reads, replies, comments, and likes to their posts, which determined how influential they were. These secondary influencers shared the characteristic to be not directly involved in the crisis, yet they tended to engage in the crisis communication for personal purposes. Social media followers were also a type of publics engaged in the crisis. They tended to consume information created by influencers, by liking, sharing, and responding to, and their

attitudes and emotions were likely to be affected by organizations and influencers. In the next section, posts and comments from the primary influencer, secondary influencers, and their followers are further analyzed through CuDA to elaborate about their crisis communication patterns.

5.2. RQ2: behaviors, emotions, and motivations of social media publics

5.2.1. The primary influencer and her followers

An analysis of Denise Ho's Facebook post sheds light on the sociocultural meanings that radiated from the discursive hubs of *identity* and *emotion* when she proclaimed: "This is not only about me. This is about those who believe in freedom, justice, and equality" and "I express my deepest regret concerning Lancôme's two separate announcements on June 5, 2016, first to draw a line between me and the brand, then abruptly cancelling the upcoming musical performance for 'safety reasons.'" Denise Ho continued to criticize Lancôme by saying "When a global brand like Lancôme has to kneel down to a bullying hegemony, we must face the problem seriously as the world's values have been seriously twisted" (*identity, relation, dwelling*). Denise Ho publicly urged "Lancôme HQ office to clarify on the decision, to clear my name and give the public a reasonable explanation" (*action, relation, dwelling*). In her post, Denise Ho not only discussed the crisis and expressed her own attitudes, but she also used trolling words such as "we," "a bullying hegemony", and "world's value" to reinforce her identity with supports, build in-group cohesion, and create a common enemy (Synnott et al., 2017).

The responses of the followers to Denise Ho's Facebook post were divided into two camps: supporting and opposing followers. The key terms and comments that circulated on Facebook among the *supporting followers* included: "It is all about integrity in doing business regardless of political views. To consumers (of Lancôme), integrity is completely destroyed" (*relating*); "So surprised to learn that a country which experienced the French Revolution, presented the Statue of Liberty to the U.S., and showed no fear after the terrorist attack in Paris would have such a brand that is so shameful. Should write to *Le monde* or *Le Figaro* for full reporting" (*emotion, dwelling, relation*); "I just went to the (Lancôme HQ) website and studied its values and ethical principles. I am gonna email

the HQ office" (*action*, *dwelling*, *relation*); "Great! I will go and buy several bottles of Listerine (endorsed by Denise Ho). BTW, I will rally troops to support you in your concert in October at Hong Kong Coliseum!" (*action*, *dwelling*, *relation*).

The socio-cultural meaning of the situated discourse in response to Denise Ho's statement reflected the values held by the situated online followers who supported freedom and justice in line with the Umbrella Movement. By making sense of the tracked key terms, the notions of identity, socio-cultural action, relation to other social actors in the crisis, and the emotional dimension of crisis responses have become explicit. The supporters' comments mostly focused on the crisis itself, with negative emotions of anger, regret, and shame, as well as the positive emotion of support. The comment connecting France with Lancôme can be seen as the trolling action of digressing discussion topic (Synnott et al., 2017). The comment about buying products endorsed by Denise Ho was viewed as a collective trolling strategy (Kirkwood et al., 2019).

The other camp of followers includes primarily those who *opposed* Denise Ho's official response to Lancôme as well as her political stance. We observed that many comments in this camp were written in simplified Chinese, indicating that online users had a cultural propensity for mainland China, and their comments also generated massive negative responses. One example is: "You are a Canadian. How come you can represent Hong Kong people?" This expression is situated in the discourse of *identity* and *dwelling* in the interaction process. It attempts to change the discussion focus from the crisis to the dual citizenship of Denise Ho. Another example stated: "We are all free individuals in China and we have freedom to choose which products we wanna boycott! Companies like Lancôme have their own will to choose to collaborate with you or not. Everyone has his or her own choice and freedom. Mainland Chinese people dislike you, so do the brands you endorse". This post was written by a mainland Chinese Facebook user and uploaded many times under Denise Ho's post, which highlights the difference in political *identity* and *dwelling* between Denise Ho and the mainland Chinese user and in *relating* to the concept of freedom of choice in the situated discourse. Similarly, this group of followers tended to change the discussion topic to "freedom" and to build in-group cohesion of "mainland Chinese people" by dissociating themselves from Denise Ho and the brands she endorsed.

We also noticed a comment saying, "It is your own problem causing Lancôme's decision. Why did you frame it as an international issue? Why don't you raise it to level of the universe? OMG! We are "so scared". The economy of our country is "severely damaged" because your 1,000 RMB divestment." Interweaving the prominent discursive hubs of *identity* and *dwelling* among *followers* from mainland China, we also observed that *emotional expression* of contempt (e.g., "haha", "so scared") and *relation* to the incident of Denise Ho's disinvestment from her online shop in mainland China, which was previously *ridiculed* by mainland Chinese due to the small amount involved. Posts like this showed that followers used humor and sarcasm as trolling strategies not just for fun. They also expressed their negative attitudes and emotions toward the primary influencer and disrupted her reputation (Kirkwood et al., 2019; March & Marrington, 2019).

There is also a comment from a Hong Kong netizen, which stated: "Lancôme says the cancellation is due to safety reasons. Why do you think you have fallen victim to persecution? You really like to get involved in these issues such as talking about 'freedom', 'democracy' day by day." This comment mainly *related* the crisis to Denise Ho's political stance, also to digress the discussion topic. The political talk of the online followers in this camp has symbolically and meaningfully transformed the crisis into a socio-political conflict between Denise Ho and mainland China. Most followers engaged in the crisis conversation for self- rather than issue-related reasons (e.g., expressing attitudes and emotions), as very few of them indicated their experience of using Lancôme's products or knowledge about the cooperation between Lancôme and Denise Ho.

5.2.2. Secondary influencers and their followers

Posts of secondary influencers were analyzed according to how they engaged in the crisis communication. Walter Ma was an example of a secondary influencer that directly responded to the post of the primary influencer. By commenting on Denise Ho's post, he explicitly *related* to her not only as her work partner but he also constructed his new *identity* as her "new fan". Walter Ma emphasized that he would stop using Lancôme products to rally support for Denise Ho (*action*). This comment also tended to create in-group cohesion, and actively connected his own experience of being boycotted by mainland Chinese people with Denise Ho to gain support from her fans. Some secondary influencers just discussed the crisis information, but they did that with salient standpoints. For example, in one Facebook post about mainland Chinese boycotting products endorsed by Denise Ho, *Apple Daily* added a line: "Hong Kong netizens said if you (mainland Chinese) really mean it, do it (boycott) well." The post framed the boycotting news through the discursive hubs of *identity* and *emotion* by reinforcing the internal identity of Hong Kong netizens and challenging the mainland Chinese as a common enemy to intensify the Hong Kong-Mainland conflict. The Daily's followers showed aggressive attitudes and contempt emotion toward Mainland Chinese people, by stating "Please quickly ask HOCC (Denise Ho) to endorse milk powder, housing, top schools, pharmacies, skin care shops and jewelry shops!!!" (*relation*, *dwelling*) and "It would be great if HOCC would endorse other foreign brands of milk powder so that mainland Chinese continue to consume Sanlu (contaminated) milk powder (with laughing emojis)" (*relation*, *dwelling*, *emotion*). Apparently, the post digressed the topic to the Mainland-Hong Kong conflict and led the Daily's followers to attack not the organization but other people with different stances.

Some secondary influencers conducted conative responses. As we mentioned, the politician Christine Fong uploaded a video on Facebook where she showed how to use a Lancôme product with her verbal explanation: "Today I clean the toilet bowl with Lancôme cleanser! Flush! That's all!" This Facebook post carried hashtags #boycottlancome and #HatePoliticalPersecution by using the discursive hubs of *relation*, *action*, and *dwelling* to indicate that the crisis was caused by the pressure from the Chinese government on Lancôme. Her post attempted to change the crisis focus toward the Mainland-Hong Kong conflict by conducting an impolite *action*. In doing that, she also acted as a model for followers to use the boycott strategy of collective trolling. Another example is MOOV, the organization posted a photo of Denise Ho and wrote: "Employ Denise Ho permanently!" with the hashtags in Chinese "we love bold music" and "HOCC (Denise Ho) has the guts" (*emotion*, *relation*). MOOV implied that it was different from Lancôme, as it would appreciate and support bold musicians like Denise Ho. Comparing with the crisis involved organization was usually regarded as a trolling strategy to gain reputation (Kirkwood et al., 2019). MOOV did that by expressing positive rather than negative emotions. The post received 14, 000 likes, 1,892 comments, and 1,007 shares. Followers expressed their thanks and support toward MOOV online by writing: "Even people say that I am so silly to pay to listen to music. It's worth subscribing MOOV" (*emotion*, *relation*) and "Wasn't thinking to use MOOV, but now I will subscribe forever!" (*relation*, *action*). The recurring pattern of explicit emphasis from the followers indicated that MOOV successfully shifted the focus of the crisis to corporate gain as a form of news hijacking.

The third type of secondary influencers refers to those that connected the crisis with their own experience. For instance, a Facebook post of Chapman To, a celebrity, adopted the situated socio-cultural context to depict himself (*relation*) as one of the victims, repeatedly announcing his own attitude and contention (*emotion*). Chapman To ended the post by saying: "even I am beaten up, I will keep on until the endgame. This is my motto over 40 years. Keep fighting!" (*identity*) with hashtags #HOCCyouarenotalone (*identity*) and #fuckyoulancome (*emotion*). Rather than discussing Lancôme's PR crisis, his post explicitly used his own experience to blame mainland China and bother on a self-promotion, with positive emotion toward Denise Ho and negative

emotion toward Lancôme. The post showed his purpose to gain social media capital from in-group publics and did attract various local celebrities and social media users leaving comments to rally support to himself.

6. Discussion

The socio-cultural meanings derived from the five discursive hubs allow us to understand the behaviors, motivations, and relationships of social media publics in the Lancôme Hong Kong regenerative crisis case. First, by answering the call of Mak and Ao (2019) to investigate the reasons that trigger the change of crisis focus in the regenerative life cycle, this study found that the secondary crisis was generated because of the situated discourse in *identity* and *dwelling* among the followers of the primary and secondary influencers. Denise Ho and her supporters used the pronoun "we" frequently to reinforce their collective *identity* as Hong Kong people and supporters of her political values. Reinforcing the collective identity was also suggested by Synnott et al. (2017) as a strategy of trolling, mainly for maintaining in-group cohesion and out-group disassociation. Hence, Lancôme's PR crisis gradually changed to a conflict of identity with mainland China. Second, both influencers and followers explicitly *related* the crisis to other social agents and socio-political concepts (e.g., freedom, democracy, and fairness), which indicates that a social-mediated crisis may turn to a conflict between two groups of social media users with different standpoints. These groups tended to adopt socio-political message frames (*dwelling, relation*) that may not be relevant to the crisis to strengthen or challenge others' viewpoints. Third, the frequent connection of the situated discourse and symbolic conditions with political online debate (*action, relation*) attracted secondary influencers to get involved to intensify the crisis or satisfy their own needs. Last, negative *emotions* expressed by the followers and haters relating to the situated places (Hong Kong vs. mainland China) sustained and heated the crisis.

6.1. Model of social media publics in a regenerative crisis situation

By integrating crisis communication theories (i.e., SMCC and regenerative crisis model) with the concept of Internet trolling through the guidance of CuDA, we assimilate social-mediated crisis publics into regenerative crisis situations (see Table 1). The regenerative model suggests the life cycle and stages of a social-mediated crisis in which the SMCC model provides a preliminary categorization of social media publics, and how information is diffused between different types of publics. The concept of trolling helps to further segment social media publics, by explaining behaviors, emotions, and motivations of them. We mainly focus on the relationship between influential social media creators (i.e., primary and secondary influencers) and followers according to the SMCC model (Austin et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2012), because they are active publics (Grunig, 1989) and critical of any paracrisis in the social media environment.

The Lancôme case exemplified different involvement patterns and purposes of the social-mediated crisis publics identified from CuDA. Taking the trolling behaviors and motivations into account with reference to the SMCC model, influencers and followers are two main types of social media publics commonly found in regenerative crises. In particular, we differentiate primary influencers from social media creators in SMCC (Austin et al., 2012). Empowered by social media, primary influencers are able to provide influential crisis information for consuming beyond the role as influential creators, while the influential creators identified in SMCC are considered as secondary influencers in our model.

Based on the analysis of posts of Denise Ho and five secondary influencers, we observed that the primary influencers are more issue-involved. Secondary influencers, instead, even when they have direct or indirect experience with the crisis-affected parties or issues, tend to frequently engage in such crises for self-reasons. This appears to be the

Table 1
Toward an Integrated Regenerative Crisis Model of Publics.

Role of publics	Primary influencers	Secondary influencers	Followers
Purpose(s)	Personal/ organizational benefits; Gaining attention and support	Gaining attention and support; Organizational reputation; Triggering conflicts	Emotion venting; Triggering conflicts; Disrupting others; Self-expression
Behavior(s)	Discuss provocative issues about the crisis	Strategically design the messages and frame the crisis; Discuss provocative issues about the crisis; Express attitudes by connecting the crisis with their experience; Conduct actual supportive or opposite behaviors Aggressiveness; Digressing discussion topics;	Express opinions; Challenge others' opinions; Share negative word-of-mouth; Vent emotions; Conduct actual supportive or opposite behaviors Aggressiveness; Impoliteness;
Trolling strategy(ies)	Creating internal cohesion and external disassociation	Creating internal cohesion and external disassociation	Attacking others; Boycotting products of the organization; Digressing discussion topics; Humor and sarcasm
Contribution to regenerative life cycle	Stage 1 Constant intense discussion	Stage 2 Changing the crisis situation	Stages 1 and 2 Keeping the discussion in heat and changing the crisis situation
Level of involvement	Medium Issue- > self-involved	Medium Self- > issue-involved	High Self- > issue-involved
Relationship in crisis life cycle	Provide crisis information for secondary influencers and followers to consume; Influence followers' attitudes and emotions	Provide information for followers to consume; Express opinions based on crisis information released by organizations and primary influencers; Influence followers' attitudes and emotions	Influenced by primary and secondary influencers; Discuss the information provided by organizations, primary and secondary influencers
Emotions	Mostly neutral even with their own viewpoints Their emotions can create emotional change of followers	Can be both positive (e.g. support) and negative (e.g. contempt) toward different parties in the crisis;	Can be both positive (e.g. support) and negative (e.g. contempt) toward different parties in the crisis; Emotions can diffuse among followers; Collective negative emotions create conflicts, disruption, and emotional harm.

case given the fact that the impact of secondary influencers is mostly from their follower capital, which drives them to actively engage in the crisis as an opportunity to gain more attention, support, and organizational benefits (Enke & Borchers, 2019; Freberg et al., 2011; Kirkwood et al., 2019). More specifically, the primary influencer's (i.e., Denise Ho) main purpose to engage in the crisis was to protect her own benefits, while her post also showed the intention to gain support from her followers and build in-group identity. While for the secondary influencers, their intentions included gaining attention (e.g., Walter Ma), gaining support (e.g., Christine Fong and Chapman To) from pro-democracy individuals, triggering conflicts (e.g., *Apple Daily*), and attaining organizational reputation (e.g., MOOV). Compared with followers, the influencers did not post or comment frequently, but their messages were much more influential. Followers were driven by self-involvement reasons, including emotion venting, triggering conflicts, disrupting others with different stances, and self-expression. None of influencers or followers included in the analyzed data showed purposes of seeking information, which indicated that most participants were active with high level of crisis knowledge (Hallahan, 2001). The involvement level of the followers was relatively higher than the influencers, indicated by the large numbers of likes, shares, and comments.

The analysis also indicated different *behaviors*, especially trolling strategies, adopted by both influencers and followers. In the Lancôme case, the primary influencer only discussed issues about the crisis, but she did that by using proactive words and the trolling strategy of reinforcing in-group cohesion (Synnott et al., 2017). Unlike the primary influencer, secondary influencers had clear purposes, which guided them to engage in the crisis through strategically creating information on social media and framing the crisis in their own ways. Some of them discussed the crisis issue (e.g., *Apple Daily*) and expressed their attitudes by connecting with their own experience (e.g., Chapman To) or conducting actual behaviors (e.g., Walter Ma, Christine Fong, and MOOV). They would also use trolling strategies, including creating in-group cohesion and out-group disassociation (Synnott et al., 2017), being aggressive (Hardaker, 2013), and digressing the crisis focus to heating socio-political issues that could involve more irrelevant people (Hardaker, 2013). This was primarily done to gain more attention from followers and sustain the crisis conversation.

Followers are the main part of collective trolling, their communicative action included sharing negative word-of-mouth with other followers, expressing opinions, indicating the behaviors they would conduct to support or oppose the organization and the primary influencer, and emotional venting to sustain the crisis. Followers' communicative actions were supported by Jin's (2010) study for which publics cope with crisis information through cognitive, conative, and affective strategies, all of these three types of coping strategies were found from both influencers and followers. For trolling purposes, followers adopted strategies of being aggressive and impolite (Hardaker, 2013), digressing the crisis focus (Hardaker, 2013), boycotting the organization (Kirkwood et al., 2019), attacking supporters of the organization (Kirkwood et al., 2019), and using sarcasm to show contempt and disparage others (Buckels et al., 2014).

The regenerative life cycle (Coombs, 2017) suggested a social-mediated crisis may include two stages with different crisis foci. The publics may indeed actively participate 1) at the beginning of the crisis, while the crisis focus is about the organization itself (Stage 1); 2) after the crisis conversation has been heated and the situation has changed (Stage 2); and/or throughout the regenerative crisis life cycle (Stages 1 & 2). The trendlines of social media coverage indicating the stages of the Lancôme crisis can be seen in Fig. 3. Primary influencers usually appear in stage 1, since they directly relate to the crisis and their posts are the basis for heated crisis discussion (Austin et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2012). Secondary influencers who observe how the crisis conversation goes may actively engage in the crisis by digressing the crisis focus to other more self-reasoned issues and putting forward their own positions regarding those issues. Their engagement usually helps the crisis life cycle move to the second stage and attract more secondary influencers that may engage in the second stage for their own purposes. Followers' engagement includes commenting on the posts of organizations, primary influencers and secondary influencers *throughout* the regenerative life cycle (Bishop, 2013), which keeps the crisis discussion "hot" and contributes to change the crisis situation.

The SMCC model suggested that influencers and followers could influence each other but it did not clearly state how the *relationships* between them were formed (Austin et al., 2012). The model fills this gap, by clarifying that the primary influencers' posts are the information for both secondary influencers and followers to consume, while the information released by secondary influencers is mainly developed based on the posts of the crisis-affected organization or primary influencers. The attitudes and emotions contained in the posts of influencers may influence followers and trigger them to express similar/opposite attitudes and emotions.

Emotion acts as a growing actor on publics' perceptions about the crisis, attribution of responsibility, and organizational response (Kim &
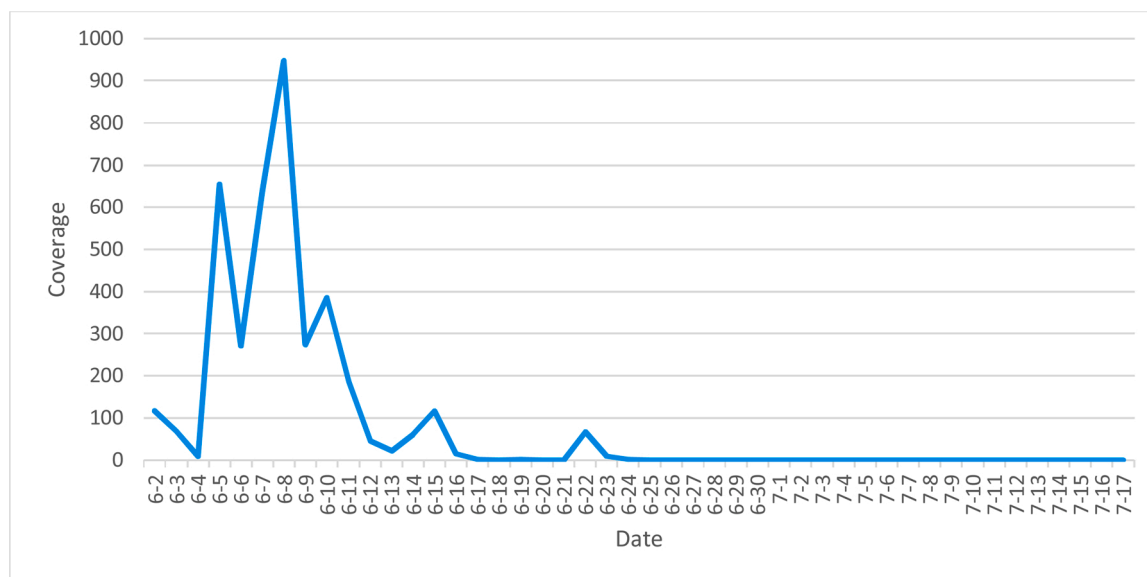
Fig. 3. Crisis life cycles of the Lancôme–Denise Ho controversy on Facebook.

Cameron, 2011). Primary influencers usually act less aggressively in emotion, even with clear standpoints and while emotional flows, which led by secondary influencers and enlarged by followers throughout the regenerative life cycle, prolonged the discussion by spreading the crisis across various online news and social media platforms. The ICM model suggests that the dominating emotions in crisis are negative emotions of anxiety, anger, fright, and sadness (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2010). Findings of this study indicated that both the organization and primary influencers have their own supporters and opponents in a social-mediated crisis, and both positive and negative emotions are salient. Positive emotions are sympathy and support, while negative emotions also include disgust and contempt (Mak & Ao, 2019). The expression of contempt and disgust are signals of trolling behaviors, since ridicule, humor, and sarcasm are always considered as important trolling strategies (Cheng, Bernstein, Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, & Leskovec, 2017; Sanfilippo, Fichman, & Yang, 2018). Although the goal of using humor in trolling is usually considered as making fun (Kirkwood et al., 2019), this study suggested that in a crisis with socio-political tension, ridicule and humor can be used for serious aims, including triggering conflicts, disrupting others, and causing emotional harms (Buckels et al., 2014; Coles & West, 2016).

6.2. Theoretical and practical implications

By using CuDA in examining the motivations, behaviors, and interactions found within and between each of the social media publics, this study contributes to the SMCC by proposing a framework that combines the key constructs of predominant crisis communication publics theories. This work of integration allows to identify influential creators and followers in the regenerative context and respond to the call of Jin, Liu, and Austin (2014) about further segmenting and defining social media publics in crisis. The proposed model makes several contributions to trolling literature in crisis communication research.

First, with the shifted power from traditional media to social media, communication dynamics are no longer limited to sender (organization)-receiver relationship, but also receiver-receiver relationship in crisis life cycles. Crisis publics not only respond to the organizations involved, they also react to each other to heat up the controversy and discussion tapping on the socio-political issues toward the organizations involved. Many traditional crisis communication theories (e.g., SCCT, image repair theory) mainly concern the communication between organizations and publics and ignore the communication between publics (Coombs & Holladay, 2009; Schultz et al., 2011). The present research is among the earliest efforts to understand the communication between crisis publics, by articulating how and why each public interacts with others. The model can broaden our understanding of relationships, communicative actions, and emotional responses across social media publics, and the role of media during a regenerative crisis.

Second, by segmenting influential creators into primary and secondary influencers and clarifying the purposes, behaviors, and relationships of the three types of publics, this study contributes to the SMCC model by providing a more detailed conceptualization and categorization of social media influential creators and followers during a crisis (Jin et al., 2014; Mak & Ao, 2019). Moreover, the motivations of publics to engage in crisis communication suggested by this study extend the proposition of Jin and Liu (2010) by illustrating that influencers (primary vs. secondary) engage in crisis communication for both issue- and self- involvement reasons.

Third, by incorporating the concept of trolling, this study explains a specific pattern for publics to deal with crisis information. Previous crisis communication theories discussed how publics cope with unsatisfactory crisis information: they would focus on opinion change, taking actions to solve the problems, seeking social support, venting emotions, negatively interpreting the crisis situation, and spreading negative word-of-mouth (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Jin et al., 2010; Xiao, Hudders, Claeys, & Cauberghe, 2018). Comparing with terms mentioned

by previous studies, trolling emphasizes some important features of how publics respond to information in the regenerative social-mediated crisis context: for instance, the intentions to attack not only organizations but also others with different opinions, the offensive and impolite verbal strategies adopted by publics, and the conflicts generated purposely (Coles & West, 2016; Hardaker, 2010, 2013). Adopting trolling in crisis studies also fills the gap that most publics coping strategies did not address how irrelevant publics involved in the crisis respond to crisis information, while findings of this study suggest that they tend to digress the topics to their interests (Mak & Ao, 2019).

Fourth, this study explicates the importance of understanding the socio-cultural meanings (Carbaugh, 2007) and potential paracrises (Coombs & Holladay, 2012) of a situated crisis context. Findings of this study provide some evidence of the situated discourse, symbolic condition, and the interaction between publics and crisis context of the dynamic communication in a regenerative crisis. This paper provides an overview of how a situated social-political tension can influence the crisis and publics' behaviors as well as how publics' crisis engagement can affect the crisis situation and the social-political context. Defining social media publics and developing crisis response strategies should take contextual factors into consideration, especially in regenerative crisis in a multi-cultural context.

From a practical viewpoint, findings reveal that publics do not work separately in a crisis. By introducing the concepts of Internet trolling in crisis communication practices, this study provides clear examples to understand the complexity of communication dynamics and emotions of active crisis publics. Organizations must understand the purposes of each crisis public in a situated socio-political context and what problems (issue- vs. self-involved) they are concerned about through analyzing the social-cultural meanings of the influential posts created by influencers (i.e., primary and secondary) and followers. This will help public relations practitioners better prepare and manage the regenerative social-mediated crises.

In addition, this study provides specific examples to support the viewpoint that trolling is not only a disruptive action conducted by individuals. It is also a set of strategies directed by desired needs and expected outcomes adopted by groups of people, which occur more frequently in online counter-institutional resistance (Kirkwood et al., 2019). Kirkwood et al. (2019) indicated several characteristics of *collective trolling*, including the diverse motivations of trolls, actively involving strangers in the crisis, conative boycott, attacking supporters of the organization, and the engagement of other organizations for their own benefits. This study provides practical insights for crisis managers to understand the patterns of collective trolling, and cautiously consider its potential impacts within a context with social-political tension. *Collective trolls* could generate interests from general social media publics by raising identity conversation. In some cases, supporters of the trolling target may want to fight back by also using trolling strategies, which may cause opposite groups of collective trolling and fuel the crisis. The study also clarifies the impact of collective trolling not only on organizational reputation and the crisis but also on the social-political environment.

The concept of trolls can provide a new perspective for practitioners to understand behavioral patterns and effects of influential social media users. Better knowledge on the behaviors of trolls would help organizations to better identify the manipulated and unproductive online debate, avoid being lured into such conflicts, and know more about how practitioners cope with the conflicts particularly in the crisis context. Understanding the roles of these publics is thus crucial because their opinion expression or emotion venting is likely to change the crisis into one which is regenerative by nature.

6.3. Limitations and future research directions

The proposed model centers on influencers and followers by analyzing a crisis case after the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, with

a focus on the socio-political context of a crisis taking place on social media (Kim et al., 2012). This model is publics-oriented in managing social-mediated crises in regenerative nature. Hence, it is not designed to generalize all types of organizational crises.

The case study was situated in the Hong Kong cultural context. Still, the recent ongoing social unrest in Hong Kong triggered similar political movements around the world. It would be worthwhile to refine the model to cover other types of "hot-issue publics" triggered by social-political issues in other countries (Kim et al., 2012). Moreover, the model can be further empirically verified by experiment, netnography, and social media analysis to examine the character and behaviors of different social media crisis publics.

The proposed model suggests that for a social-mediated crisis, beyond looking at how publics are influenced by organizations, we also need to pay attention to how publics influence each other and how their interactions affect the whole crisis. Social media analytics are quick and convenient to understand a crisis life cycle and to identify potential influencers and followers. Together with big data to generate relevant social media and online posted content from various platforms, synchronized online content analysis provides deeper understanding about the motivations and behaviors of the crisis publics in this proposed model. It also helps identifying their message framing and emotion venting strategies in attacking the organization involved and/or critiquing social issues. Finally, more cultural discourse analyses through case studies are needed to further contribute to our understanding of the influencer-follower relationships in the social media environment.

A new observation is about the multiple roles of traditional media in social-mediated crises. Increasingly, traditional media use their social media accounts to engage with readers and page followers. In the chosen case, *Apple Daily* also acted as secondary influencer, rather than merely serving the traditional media role. Therefore, it is worth investigating traditional media's changing roles, motivations, and behaviors in social-mediated regenerative crises in future studies to revisit the SMCC model and improve the proposed model.

7. Conclusion

Given that more and more social-mediated crises are regenerative by nature, the proposed model paves the way for public relations scholars to identify the publics (i.e., influencers and followers) while concomitantly explaining the interactions and dynamics of these crisis publics in shaping the crisis life cycle in the situated discourse and communication context. This helps to come up with effective organizational response strategies in relation to social-political risk exposed in the social media environment.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors whose names are listed immediately below certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Appendix A. Examples of five discursive hubs from analyzing Facebook posts and comments

Original Facebook posts and comments by Denise Ho (in traditional Chinese)	Translated version	Discursive hubs
自由、公義、平等, 一直是香港人所追求的.	This is not only about me. This is about those who believe in freedom, justice and equality.	Identity
對於Lancôme蘭蔻於昨日所發出之聲明以及取消活動之決定…本人表示極度遺憾.	I express my deepest regret concerning Lancôme's two separate announcements […] first to draw a line between me and the brand, then abruptly cancelling the upcoming musical performance for "safety reasons".	Emotion: regret
當國際品牌也要屈膝於這種霸凌之下, 我們不得不嚴需正視問題.	When a global brand like Lancôme has to kneel down to a bullying hegemony, we must face the problem seriously as the world's values have been seriously twisted.	Identity & relation & dwelling
本人在此正式要求Lancôme法國總公司公開交代原因, 還本人一個公道以及給公眾一個合理解釋.	I officially urge Lancôme HQ office to clarify on the decision, to clear my name and give the public a reasonable explanation.	Action & relation & dwelling

Original Facebook posts and comments by other users (in traditional Chinese)	Translated version	Discursive hubs
加油HOCC！作為化妝師既我, 會停用其產品黎表示支持你！你的新粉絲上	Fighting, HOCC! As a cosmetician, I will stop using Lancôme's products to support you — a new fan of you.	Action & identity
好！我即去買幾隻李詩德林… 順便提何詩詩, 十月我會集齊各路大軍去紅館撐你, 你等著瞧！	Great! I will go and buy several bottles of Listerine. BTW, I will rally troops to support you in your concert in October!	Action
一個發生French revolution改變國家命運, 送自由神像俾美國, 總理在巴黎恐襲之後話法國人絕不低頭的國家居然有呢個不爭氣之品牌, 羞家, 國恥, 應該通知Le monde or Le Figaro大事報導	So surprised to learn that a country experienced the French Revolution, presented the Statue of Liberty to the U.S., and showed no fear after the terrorist attack in Paris would have such a brand that is so shameful. Should write to Le Monde or Le Figaro for full reporting.	Emotion: shame, regret; dwelling; relation
我剛剛先上佢網睇埋佢份values and ethical, 諗住email佢headquarter	I just went to the (Lancôme HQ) website and studied its values and ethical principles. I am gonna email the HQ office	Action & dwelling & relation
我們每個大陸人都是獨立自由的個體, 我們也有抵制某種產品的自由！至於某公司當然也有它的自由。人人都有選擇的權利和自由, 大陸人不喜歡你, 順帶著不喜歡和你有關的品牌, 這些都是個人的自由。	We are all free individuals in China and we have freedom to choose which products we wanna boycott! Companies like Lancôme have their own will to choose to cooperate with you or not. Everyone has his or her own choice and freedom. Mainland Chinese people dislike you, so do the brands you endorse.	Identity & dwelling & relation
放低是黃是藍, 做生意, "誠信"好重要, 今次呢間公司咁做法, 唔理係市場planning失敗還是有什麼原因, 對顧客而言, 已經失去了信用。	It is all about integrity in doing business regardless of political views. To consumers (of Lancôme), integrity is completely destroyed.	Relation

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