

Revisiting social-mediated crisis communication model: The Lancôme regenerative crisis after the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Communication dynamics
Crisis communication
Hong Kong Umbrella Movement
Regenerative crisis
Social media publics
Social media influencer

ABSTRACT

The widespread use of social media has stimulated the number of crises on a global scale and given rise to regenerative crises which involve multiple crisis stages and publics. Using the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication model and the regenerative crisis model, this study explores a real-life organizational crisis related to Lancôme Hong Kong, which was driven by the socio-political environment after the Umbrella Movement. It aims to examine the engagement strategies by different publics, and also the influence of information forms and sources on the trends of emotion among social media publics. Results also provided an empirical evaluation of the regenerative crisis model driven by a socio-political environment. An online content analysis of selected 10% sample with an online data acquisition and analysis tool (3902 Facebook posts and comments, 1178 forum posts and comments, and 244 online news articles) revealed the interlocking connection among the involved publics along with the social-mediated regenerative crisis life cycle. Followers' emotional responses were not only attached to Lancôme, but also to third parties as information sources. Four subcategories of influential social media creators were identified. Refinement on the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication model and practical implications are suggested.

1. Introduction

Crisis communication has become one of the central topics in public relations research, particularly with the rise of dialogic communication on social media and online news media (Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010). The number of crises on a global scale escalates due to the widespread use of social media. Further crises appear as *regenerative crises* with trigger events amplified by heated discussion on social media (Coombs, 2017). Publics may also start to criticize an organization for its attitudes and behavior toward existing social issues. For example, given the publics' concern with a social issue, an organization may have to align its behavior with the issue; otherwise, it may lose its reputation for misalignment (Coombs, 2010).

Cheng and Cameron (2017) conducted a systematic review of current crisis communication literature on social media and identified several research gaps. First, most studies stem from a narrow content of research perspectives (i.e. organization types, social media features, and the public) and sampling frames, with less diversified demographic information. Second, not many studies highlighted crisis stages or extended models and theories. Third, some carried biased measures of crisis communication evaluation

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.101812>

Received 18 February 2019; Received in revised form 20 June 2019; Accepted 20 June 2019

Available online 22 July 2019

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(Huang, 2012). Fourth, there is a serious lack of the variety of contextual approaches to crisis communication research. Hence, there is a need to understand both the Western and non-Western contextual dimensions, including cultural values, political system, media landscape, and the level of public dependency on the Internet (Cheng, 2014).

Drawing upon past crisis communication literature and using the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model (Austin, Liu, & Jin, 2012; Liu, Jin, Briones, & Kuch, 2012), this study aims to address the above research gaps through exploring a real-life organizational regenerative crisis—Lancôme Hong Kong's cancellation of activist-singer Denise Ho's concert, which was regarded as the most controversial social-mediated crisis in 2016 after the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong (Lancôme *qu xiao*, 2016). In short, the crisis began with Lancôme cooperating with Denise Ho, a local activist-singer. Due to her pro-Umbrella Movement stance, she came under censure by a number of mainland Chinese media that possess a pro-Central Government stance. Facing such a situation, Lancôme announced that the company had no endorsement relationship with Denise Ho. This decision angered those who shared a similar political stance with Denise Ho's. Some other people were also offended as they believed that issues within Hong Kong should not be intervened by mainland China. More and more organizations, influencers, and Internet users participated in the discussion and contributed to a regenerative crisis on social media.

Through the lens of the SMCC model, this study examines the engagement strategies adopted by Lancôme and third parties. It also explores the influence of information forms and sources on the trends of emotion among different social media publics. The results provide an empirical evaluation of the regenerative crisis model (Coombs, 2017) to understand the process of a social-mediated crisis driven by a socio-political environment. Special attention is paid to highlight the roles and strategies used by social media influencers (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011) alongside the regenerative crisis life cycle. By analyzing a larger construct with the case, findings of this study help extend the SMCC model and regenerative model in a non-Western social-mediated context.

2. Literature review

2.1. Crisis and its regenerative nature

Fearn-Banks (2002) defined *crisis* as “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name (p. 2)”. Coombs explained that a crisis can create three related threats: public safety, financial loss, or reputation loss (2007). When a crisis is social-mediated, its potentially negative outcomes might be amplified to an unconceivable extent. Therefore, public relations professionals are required to have a clear understanding of this crisis type that emerges in a new context (Coombs, 2017). During the crisis, Lancôme has been the subject of boycotts by netizens in Hong Kong and mainland China, as well as politicians in Hong Kong. With Lancôme, threats related to both reputation and financial loss, including declining product sales or loss of Hong Kong and Chinese markets.

One vital feature of social-mediated crisis communication is that its processes are dynamic rather than static. For example, in a social-mediated crisis, information is processed through different social media publics in circles rather than simply from the organization to publics (Austin et al., 2012). This dynamic feature influences our definitions and models of crisis life cycle. Traditionally, a crisis has a clearly defined structure that often involves five stages identified by Fearn-Banks (2011), which include detection, prevention and preparation, containment, recovery, and learning, or three stages developed and discussed by various crisis communication textbooks (i.e. Coombs, 1999; Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 1998), namely, pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis.

The regenerative crisis model is considered as a descriptive model about multiple secondary crises along a crisis life cycle in the context of social media which is undeniably different from traditional crisis life cycle and it provides indicators for practitioners to cope with the dynamic crisis nature by different organizational response strategies (Coombs and Holladay, 2012, 2017). The regenerative crisis life cycle indicates that each crisis has its own trigger event but some factors (i.e. response misconduct or social media users' negative comments) might be influential enough to change how publics perceive the crisis (i.e. crisis situation) and can create new crises (or “secondary crises”) in the original crisis (Zheng, Liu, & Davison, 2018). When the crisis situation is changed, a new “sub-crisis” occurs and starts with new trigger events and different discussed topics in a new life cycle. The trigger events of new sub-crises are named as “turning points” by Coombs (2017). The life cycle of a sub-crisis usually overlaps with the original crisis and other sub-crises. Coombs and Holladay (2012) adopted the concept of paracrisis to illustrate why such “double crisis” will happen, especially on social media. They explain that it is an organizational risk that can be seen on social media rather than a real crisis because the risk has not been manifested to become an immediate crisis. The regenerative crisis model requires organizations to pay full attention on monitoring public discussion to identify the changing and overlapping crisis situations and modify their response strategies accordingly (Coombs, 2017). Coombs (2017) proposed six communicative strategies (i.e. refusal, refutation, repression, recognition, revision and reform) which can be used by organizations to cope with different sub-crises in different situations. Failing to identify the crisis situation change and respond with correct strategies will be recognized by stakeholders and can easily cause a new crisis trigger event on social media or even other negative outcomes (e.g. reputation damage) (Coombs, 2017).

The regenerative model offers us a novel perspective to investigate the dynamic processes of social-mediated crises and it explains why such crises sustain for a long time. Nevertheless, very few studies provide empirical evidence to verify the regenerative crisis life cycle. Thus, the Lancôme's PR crisis offers us timely data to examine how the regenerative crisis model (Coombs, 2017) can be used to explain the development of a real-life social-mediated crisis. We particularly consider the crisis as a dynamic process continuously affected by organizational responses, stakeholders' voices, and situational factors. To study the explanatory power of the model, we raise the first research question as:

RQ1. Using Lancôme's PR crisis as an example, to what extent does the regenerative model explicate a real-life social-mediated crisis?

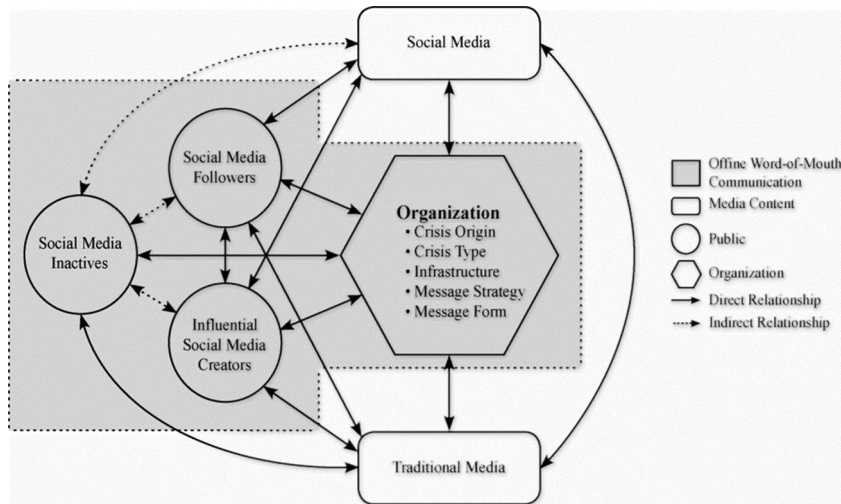


Fig. 1. The Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model (Austin et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2012).

2.2. Social-mediated crisis communication model

Dominant crisis communication theories such as Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs & Holladay, 2012) and Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 2004) do not fully address how information form (e.g. traditional media, social media, or offline word-of-mouth communication) can influence publics' crisis communication behaviors (Austin et al., 2012). Research suggests that information form (i.e. through traditional or social media) is equally important to the actual crisis response message, or may be even more imperative (Jin & Liu, 2010; Schultz, Utz, & Görtitz, 2011).

With the rise of digital natives in crisis communication, the SMCC model (Austin et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2012) equips crisis managers with guidance built on best practices and knowledge related to social media's role as a channel, information source, or origin of information and rumor, engagement, opinion, or emotional expression (Liu et al., 2012). The model describes the communication dynamics between an organization in crisis and three types of publics who create and consume information before, during, and after crisis (Austin et al., 2012): 1) *influential social media creators*, "who create crisis information for others to consume (p. 192)" and their influential posted content will initiate and/or amplify a crisis for an organization; 2) *social media followers* "who consume the influential social media creators' crisis information (p. 192)" based on three motivations: (a) issue relevance, (b) information seeking and sharing, and (c) 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 (p. 192)." The model description can be seen in Fig. 1.

2.3. SMCC and publics' emotions

Publics have various ways to engage in the information diffusion processes: they can read, quote, share, and re-frame information provided by organizations or news media, and some of their followers will do the same activities (Wei, Bu, & Liang, 2012). Among various engagement behaviors, emotional responses have been discussed in the research of crisis communication and the SMCC model. For instance, how publics emotionally respond to crisis information is affected by information forms, sources, and crisis origins (Jin et al., 2016). Their significance is caused by publics' tendency to use social media for expressing emotions or seeking emotional support from others during a crisis (Jin & Liu, 2010). Besides, most social-mediated crises contain strong emotional waves where users' emotional responses would rise and fall, evoked by crisis trigger events and crisis focuses (Pang, 2013).

Emotions in this study are categorized by the attribution theory. Emotions are associated with attribution (Weiner, 1985) and determined by perceived outcomes. Applying the attribution theory to the crisis context, emotions can be caused by people's attribution of an organization's responsibility to the crisis, which was formed by locus of control, intentionality, and controllability (Coombs, 2007). Different emotions are associated with different levels of attribution of responsibility. Referring to this assumption, Choi and Lin (2009) divided crisis-related emotions into two groups: attribution-dependent emotions (i.e. anger, surprise, worry, fear, contempt, alert, disgust, and relief) and attribution-independent emotions (i.e. confusion, shame, and sympathy). Attribution-dependent emotions, such as anger, were found to be associated with negative relational outcomes, people's information processing, and disclosing behaviors (Jin, Fraustino, & Liu, 2016; Kim & Niederdepppe, 2014). Attribution-independent emotions, such as sympathy, may lead to supportive behaviors and positive relational outcomes (Jeong, 2010; Kim & Niederdepppe, 2014).

Adopting the SMCC model, Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2011 empirically investigated how two types of social media creators, namely, organizations and third parties (e.g. news media), influenced followers' emotions. Their findings indicated that social media followers felt more disgusted, contemptuous, and angry toward organizations when they attributed responsibility to these organizations and

received crisis information from third parties via social media. These emotions are defined as attribution-dependent emotions resulting from causes of the crisis situation (e.g. involved organizations and responsible individuals) rather than the crisis itself (Choi & Lin, 2009).

Jin et al.'s study (2011) clearly identified how organizations and influential social media creators can affect social media followers' emotions and provided us with an information diffusion perspective to investigate followers' emotions. As stated by Wei, Bu and Liang (2012), information diffusion patterns in crisis can be either confined to one or two days when valuable information is released, or the patterns can sustain for a long period. Followers' emotions might also change corresponding to these information diffusion patterns such as information seeking and sharing behaviors (Jin, Fraustino, & Liu, 2016). Hence, information and emotion can be generated, diffused, and resonated among individuals on social media during a crisis (Wang, Sutcliffe, & Zeng, 2011). Understanding people's emotional engagement helps scholars and practitioners to address publics' responses and how such responses affect others. Unlike in a lab environment, a crisis in real life includes a much more complicated context with multiple social media creators and it is hard to trace and identify the response strategy adopted by any individual creator (Comfort, Sungu, Johnson, & Dunn, 2001). This even causes considerable difficulty when we try to view the whole processes of publics' engagement. By using real-life data from a regenerative crisis driven by a wider socio-political context, this study aims to provide a complete picture of these dynamic processes on social media in terms of emotions.

Research suggests that people use different online platforms for various purposes (e.g. usefulness, enjoyment), and behave differently online (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989; Koufaris, 2002). For example, in Hong Kong, online forums are mostly used by local people for discussing issues related to their daily lives, some activists even consider them as an "unofficial organizing tool" for their social movements concerning Hong Kong local issues (Siu, 2014); while Facebook is more international. Furthermore, the chosen case involved more than one type of stakeholders. Besides the organization (i.e. Lancôme), individuals (e.g. Denise Ho) also provided vital information that influences the crisis situation; and the first trigger event of the regenerative crisis was a report of a mainland Chinese newspaper, *Global Times*. Through this perspective, this study attempts to investigate stakeholders' engagement in different information forms (i.e. Facebook and local online forums) and sources (i.e. Lancôme, Denise Ho, and mainland China) with our second question:

RQ2. Based on the SMCC model, how do social media publics create/consume crisis information emotionally through different information forms and sources in a regenerative crisis?

2.4. Influencers on social media

Influencers are critical in communication studies. Research has found that influencers reach over twice as many people as average consumers (Keller, Fay, & Berry, 2007). There are two distinct states of influence to consider: (a) the potential to influence and (b) observed influence (WOMMA, 2013). Both are important, but during a crisis, observed influence is what organizations need to measure while keeping an eye out for potential influencers (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2017). In the context of social media, because of their strong connections with a large number of followers, social media influencers are very powerful in shaping their followers' attitudes (Freberg et al., 2011). Zhao, Zhan, and Liu (2018) also argue that social media influencers in a crisis should have the ability and motivation to participate in crisis discussions, generate publics' engagement, and position themselves at the center of the crisis network.

The SMCC model generates a strategic approach to understand the organization and audience on social media in a crisis (Austin et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2012). For instance, influential social media creators likely engage themselves with an organizational crisis out of their issue- and self-involvement, social media followers consume influencers' crisis information out of three motivations: issue relevance, information seeking and sharing, and emotional venting and support (Jin & Liu, 2010). However, past research on studying audience responses was limited to the use of student samples, artificial experiment environments, hence failing to broaden types of publics. Jin, Liu, & Austin (2014) suggested that future studies on SMCC should pay more attention to classifying sub-categories of the three main publics types. Zhao, Zhan, Wong et al. (2018) responded to this call by developing the fourth type of social media publics, broadcasters, who share and re-produce information from the influential social media creators for some followers to rely on and interpret the relevance or authenticity of the information.

It is crucial to study influencers in a regenerative crisis since information created by them is able to influence a large number of followers, trigger discussion and even become "turning points" (Coombs, 2017). Blending the SMCC constructs into examining the regenerative crisis model (Coombs, 2017), our interest in understanding influencers' behaviors can be summarized in the third question:

RQ3. Using Lancôme's PR crisis as an example, what types of influencers can be observed in a regenerative crisis with reference to the SMCC model?

3. Method

3.1. About the Lancôme-Denise Ho controversy and its subsequent PR crisis

In the context of Hong Kong, among different social issues that may negatively affect organizational reputation, the most influential one is the Mainland-Hong Kong conflict. Ortmann (2015) indicated that multiple reasons contribute to this issue, including

negative news of mainland China, Chinese government's policies, and the increasing number of tourists and immigrants from mainland China. Under such circumstances, the relationship between mainland China and Hong Kong is getting more and more intense. A major outbreak of the tension is the Umbrella Movement in 2014 where more than 200,000 people took to the street calling for "real universal suffrage" for 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.

The international beauty brand called off a concert cooperating with Hong Kong activist-singer Denise Ho after receiving massive criticism from netizens in mainland China about her controversial political stance (i.e. pro-Democracy, participant and strong supporter of the Umbrella Movement). *Global Times*, a mainland Chinese news agency, issued an editorial affirming Lancôme's decision about cooperating with Denise Ho: "anyone who would like to get benefit from Chinese market must not harm China's interest (She ping, 2016)". Meanwhile, the discussion spread among different fields in Hong Kong. To draw a line between the company and the singer to avoid a boycott for using her as a brand ambassador, Lancôme gave in and clarified that Denise Ho was not involved in any endorsement of Lancôme's products. However, Lancôme's statements issued by the headquarters in France not only failed to pacify the critics, but also angered Hong Kong netizens especially supporters of the Umbrella Movement who appealed for boycotting the brand. The crisis heated up when more influencers joined the argument. Lancôme then quickly announced that Denise Ho was not its brand ambassador and removed all the promotional materials related to her. Such reaction led Hong Kong people to believe that Denise Ho was persecuted by mainland China because of her dissenting political stance and to reinforce the authoritarian image of the Chinese government in their mind. 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 the whole 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 her concert. In the end, the concert was packed out with 3000 audience members (HOCC, 2016). Fig. 2 summarizes the key events of the crisis.

The Lancôme's PR crisis provides a unique and multi-dimensional perspective in testing the current models in social-mediated crisis research in a non-Western context across multiple crisis stages and publics involved. First, the crisis has been sustained for over a month with a jump in conversations and news stories surrounding it. Second, the Lancôme-Denise Ho controversy was intensified by two opposing groups, namely, the pro-establishment camp (commonly labeled by locals as 'blue ribbons') and the pro-democracy / anti-establishment camp (labeled as 'yellow ribbons'). Third, high-profile celebrities and politicians also joined the discussion. Fourth, activist-singer Denise Ho is an outspoken advocate for the Umbrella Movement and Lancôme headquarters in France were also involved in the crisis response. Fifth, social media influencers have played a critical role in contributing to the spikes in discussion during the crisis.

3.2. Data and sample

A total of 834 posts and 57,880 comments from Facebook, 116 posts, and 13,305 comments from six influential online forums in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Discuss Forum, HKGolden, CYBERCTM, Uwants, Hong Kong Fail Forum, and DiVoMiner Baby-Kingdom) and 1073 online news reports concerning the Lancôme's PR crisis were captured by using an online data acquisition and analysis tool to plot a generative crisis model to answer RQ1, and provide examples to illustrate social media influencers' roles and strategies to answer RQ3.

Researchers first inputted keywords such as "Lancôme" and "Denise Ho" and the time period "from June 2 to December 31, 2016" for the system to automatically extract relevant posts and comments from online platforms. The system would subsequently identify

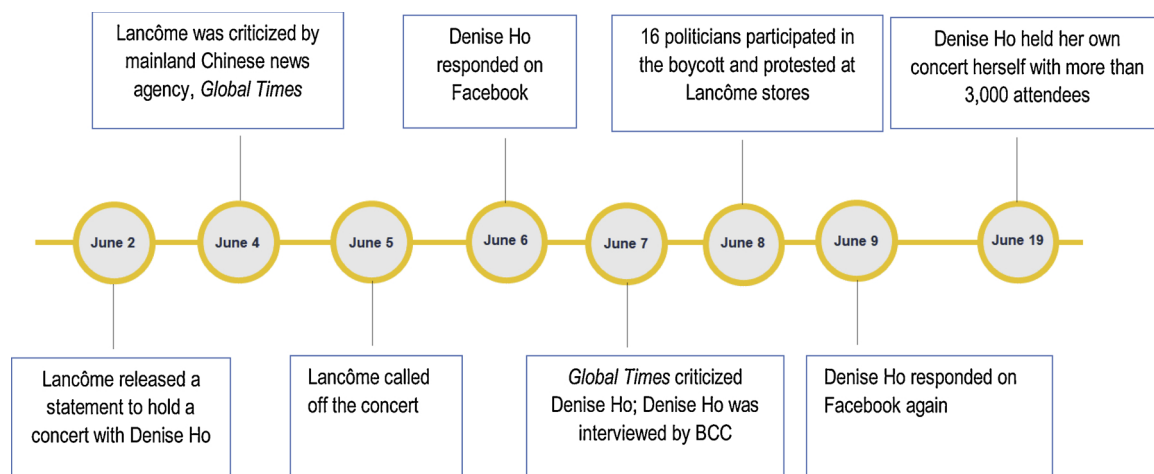


Fig. 2. Timeline and key events of the Lancôme–Denise Ho controversy.

Table 1
Examples of emotions expressed.

Emotions	Examples
Anger	“Lancôme 這樣做真是氣死我了。” “I am really mad at what Lancôme has done.”
Alert	“對於她這種人一定要小心。” “Be cautious with people like her (Denise Ho).”
Surprise	“OMG, 我真的想不到。” “OMG, I haven't imagined this would happen.”
Worry	“Lancôme 呢舖真係dead end?” “Is Lancôme coming to a dead end this time?”
Fear	“我真係好怕強國人。” “I am really scared about those mainland Chinese.”
Confusion	“不知道佢既總公司如何說?” “Not sure how the Lancôme headquarters in France respond to this?”
Relief	“好彩我不用Lancôme。” “I am so lucky that I'm not using Lancôme.”
Contempt	“恭喜俾人取消, 笑, 抵能死。” “Congratulations for being fired! LOL She well deserves it.”
Disgust	“她on9的嗎?” “Is she fxxking crazy?”
Shame	“好丟臉。” “Shame on it.”
Sympathy	“其實Lancôme都幾慘。” “Actually I think Lancôme is just so unfortunate.”

both simplified and traditional Chinese text relevant for this study. The system also provided a user-friendly interface for coding and helped identify key social media influencers. Posts and comments which were not related to the crisis (e.g. advertising posts and blank posts) were considered as invalid and removed from our analysis. The data cleaning was done by two researchers manually after the automatic data extraction.

3.3. Coding procedure

Because of the large amount of posts and comments on this crisis, especially in forums and on Facebook, we adopted a simple random sampling, selecting 10% of total valid posts and comments as a sample for coding and analysis from June 2 (when Lancôme invited Denise Ho to co-organize a concert) to August 31 (the last day when Facebook and forum users mentioned the controversy in 2016). During this two-month period, we selected 3902 posts and comments from Facebook, 1178 posts from forums and 244 posts from online news for analysis. We enlisted three coders with training using a codebook with our coding guidelines and adopted quantitative content analysis to determine how online users emotionally react to this crisis in different stages (RQ2).

To reveal the emotions expressed by social media and forum users, all selected posts and comments (including textual data and emoji) were coded for their expressions of 11 predominated emotions in online crisis responses. There are eight attribution-dependent emotions: (anger, surprise, worry, fear, contempt, alert, disgust, and relief) and three attribution-independent emotions (confusion, shame, and sympathy) which are generated from the interpretation of crisis (Choi & Lin, 2009). However, during the coding processes, we found that only five emotions were frequently expressed while the other six were only mentioned less than ten times within our sample. Hence, only five frequently occurred emotions remained in the codebook: anger, confusion, disgust, contempt and sympathy. Emotional responses in this study were coded separately by different themes, i.e., emotions toward Lancôme, Denise Ho, and mainland China. Mainland China in this study represents both mainland Chinese and mainland Chinese government. Table 1 lists examples of the coded responses expressing these negative emotions. All posts and comments are in Chinese (simplified or traditional) and all researchers and coders are native Cantonese speakers, so they can fully capture the meanings of those posts and comments. Examples of emotions are translated into English and listed in Table 1.

3.4. Reliability tests

In our reliability tests, approximately 20% of coded posts and comments on Facebook mainland for ensuring the internal consistency. Krippendorff's Alphas for emotions toward Lancôme were: anger (.76), confusion (.72), contempt (.72), disgust (.78), and sympathy (1). Relevant reliability coefficients of emotions toward Denise Ho were: anger (.80), confusion (1), contempt (.84), disgust (.84), and sympathy (.78). Coefficients of emotions related to mainland China were: anger (.86), confusion (.70), contempt (.94), disgust (.85), and sympathy (1). Coefficients between the two coders are listed in Table 2. According to Landis and Koch (1977), these reliability coefficients have reached or almost reached substantial or perfect levels.

Table 2

Reliability coefficients between each two coders.

	Coder A & B	Coder B & C	Coder A & C
Lancôme - anger	.79	.79	.75
Lancôme - confusion	.68	1	.68
Lancôme - contempt	.79	.68	.69
Lancôme - disgust	.70	.67	.93
Lancôme - sympathy	1	1	1
Denise Ho - anger	1	.80	.80
Denise Ho - confusion	1	1	1
Denise Ho - contempt	.87	.80	.84
Denise Ho - disgust	.86	.78	.84
Denise Ho - sympathy	.86	.75	.79
Mainland China - anger	.68	.68	1
Mainland China - confusion	.75	.66	.78
Mainland China - contempt	.95	.94	.94
Mainland China - disgust	.84	.81	.85
Mainland China - sympathy	1	1	1

4. Findings

4.1. Crisis regenerative model and the Lancôme-Denise Ho controversy

According to Coombs (2017), a regenerative crisis contains multiple sub-crises, each sub-crisis has its own life cycle with pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis stages. Hence, the life cycle of a regenerative crisis includes multiple waves of online discussion with different topics. In this section, the online and social media coverage of the Lancôme-Denise Ho controversy demonstrated multiple spikes in the trend lines, which can be explicated by the regenerative crisis model. Fig. 3 indicates two main trigger events in this crisis: the announcement of Lancôme on June 5, and the BBC interview with Denise Ho on June 7. The first trigger event happened when Lancôme headquarters in Paris officially announced, “Hong Kong Actress Denise Ho is not a spokesperson of LANCÔME. We are sorry for the confusion caused. Thank you for your continuous support to LANCÔME” (Lancôme, 2016a, 2016b). This official statement stimulated multiple co-occurred widely discussed topics from stakeholders in different information forms (e.g. Facebook, local online forums, and online news websites). The first crisis was mainly about the disagreement between Lancôme and Denise Ho. Then, the first spike of the trend lines came on June 6 when Denise Ho released an announcement criticizing Lancôme for “seriously misleading the public and tarnishing my person reputation” (Cheung, 2016) and she requested Lancôme’s further explanation about the decision.

The second trigger event occurred when Denise Ho was then interviewed by BBC on the night of June 7 and emphasized the issue of Mainland-Hong Kong conflict:

Nowadays, many Hong Kong entertainers monitor their own voices for pleasing the mainland Chinese market. However, I believe that as for a person or a brand, defending moral values is much more important than earning money. (100most, 2016)

The crisis response stage of the first crisis became the pre-crisis stage of the second crisis (Coombs, 2017). A “double-crisis” was formed when Denise Ho and *Apple Daily* connected this case with the Mainland-Hong Kong conflict, the crisis was immediately redefined. The second crisis was how mainland Chinese media and people (mis)treated Hong Kong entertainers (e.g. Denise Ho) with different political viewpoints by putting pressure on their business partners (i.e. Lancôme). The second spike of the trend lines came on June 8. *Apple Daily*, an influential local media in Hong Kong, released four posts on its Facebook page about this crisis with titles

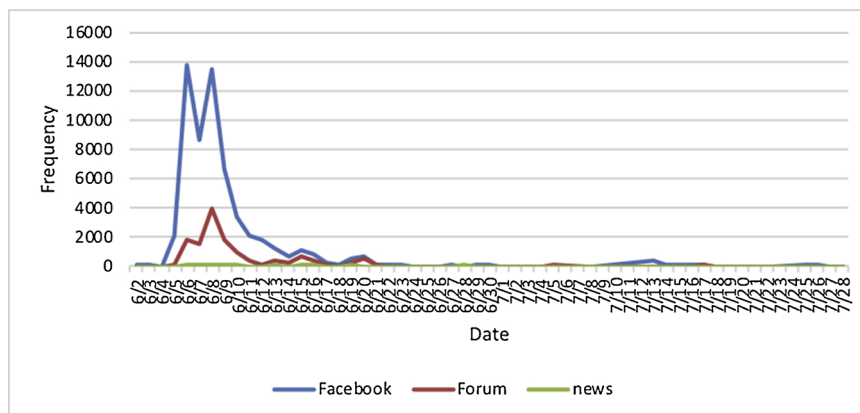


Fig. 3. Crisis life cycles of the Lancôme–Denise Ho controversy on Facebook, forums and online news websites.

such as “commercial brands were hijacked by politics” and “shareholders of Nestlé draws the line saying that its subsidiary L’Oréal is running its own business” (Apple Daily, 2016a, 2016b). A venting situation occurred, in which people used social media to express their emotions (Gregoire, Laufer, & Tripp, 2010), hoping to damage Lancôme and mainland China’s reputations online. After this, the trend lines declined and then slightly rose on June 15, June 20, and July 13 with other social media influencers involved in this controversy producing their own information consumed by followers with different political standpoints.

As shown in Fig. 3, a regenerative crisis has three main differences compared to that of a traditional crisis: First, the coverage did not follow a smooth, clear, gradually lifted, and lowered line. Instead, those three trend lines were characterized by multiple peaks and drops along with different framed messages about Lancôme, Denise Ho, and mainland China. Second, driven by prior socio-political issues (i.e., the Umbrella Movement and the Mainland-Hong Kong conflict), online users already had their own attitudes and emotions toward Denise Ho and mainland China. Therefore, it only took one day for the media and social media coverage to reach to the peak. In such a short time frame, it would be hard for organizations to conduct signal detection and preparation. Third, without a clear end, it was difficult to identify the recovery and learning stages in this crisis.

4.2. Emotions and crisis responses toward information sources and forms

This section describes how emotions expressed by Facebook and online forum users changed in terms of crisis situation and highlights the key events in the crisis timeline to explain emotion changes. According to SMCC literature (e.g. Austin et al., 2012; Jin et al., 2016), crisis information sources could be the involved organizations or third parties. In the analysis, we mainly studied publics’ emotional response toward three crisis sources: Lancôme representing the involved organization, Denise Ho representing the involved individual, and mainland China representing the third party (e.g. Global Times). Jin et al. (2016) had tested effects of information forms and sources on emotions, this study made a progress by presenting the effects in a real case, considering changes of emotions along the crisis situations of a regenerative crisis.

In total, 1178 forum posts and 3902 Facebook posts were adopted for content analysis. Besides using text, emoji have become another form of publics’ social media engagement. Frequency tests showed that there were 384 (9.8%) Facebook and 450 (38.2%) forum posts and comments including emoji to express their attitudes or emotions. According to the SMCC model, social media followers were those who consume information created by influential social media creators (Austin et al., 2012). Therefore, emotional change of creators and followers might also follow trend lines shown in Fig. 3. This study classified posts produced by creators, while comments were made by followers alongside the crisis life cycle.

Crisis information forms could be social media, traditional media and word-of-mouth (Jin et al., 2016). Within the category of social media, users act differently on different platforms. In the Hong Kong context, two most frequently used types of platforms are Facebook and online forums, so the we analyzed them separately. There were five emotions included in the codebook; four were negative emotions: anger (140), confusion (78), disgust (1739) and contempt (1761); and one with positive emotion: sympathy (105). Frequencies could be seen in Table 3.

4.3. Emotions and crisis responses on Facebook

Most Facebook followers tended to express negative emotions during an organizational crisis. Out of 76 coded Facebook posts created by influential social media creators, there were four posts containing contempt and seven containing disgust toward Lancôme; contempt (3), disgust (6), and sympathy (1) posts concerning Denise Ho; and anger (1), contempt (4), and disgust (7) posts toward mainland China. In particular, two negative emotions, contempt (550) and disgust (481), dominated Facebook followers’ feelings toward Lancôme as noted in Fig. 4. First, all emotions fell in the period from June 5 to June 10. This indicated that after June 10, although there was still Facebook coverage about this crisis, fewer Facebook followers criticized Lancôme. Second, disgust and contempt were found before June 5. It could be considered as a signal of the paracrisis which required crisis manager to detect before it became a regenerative crisis. Third, the emotion trend lines slightly declined on June 6, which was the first spike of the entire Facebook coverage. The reason might be that Facebook followers were still trying to make sense of the information produced by the influential social media creators, rather than expressing emotions through text or emoji. After the release of BBC’s interview of Denise Ho on June 7, strong negative emotions were noticed on June 7 (226 comments with contempt and 127 with disgust) and June 8 (216 comments with contempt and 140 with disgust).

Emotions toward Denise Ho were strong and sustained (see Fig. 5). The trend lines had reached three spikes (on June 5, 8 and 11) and slightly rose twice in mid- and end-June. These tendencies were corresponding to the regenerative crisis life cycle and Denise

Table 3
Frequencies of emotions expressed on Facebook and forums.

Emotions	Facebook			Forums		
	Lancôme	Denise Ho	Mainland China	Lancôme	Denise Ho	Mainland China
Anger	78	22	25	3	5	7
Confusion	30	17	9	5	9	8
Contempt	554	358	437	36	180	196
Disgust	488	562	405	21	195	68
Sympathy	27	51	3	14	10	0

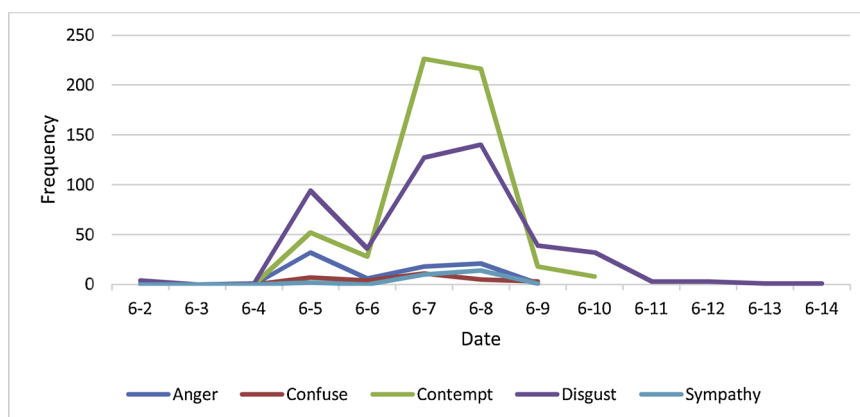


Fig. 4. Facebook followers' change in emotions toward Lancôme.

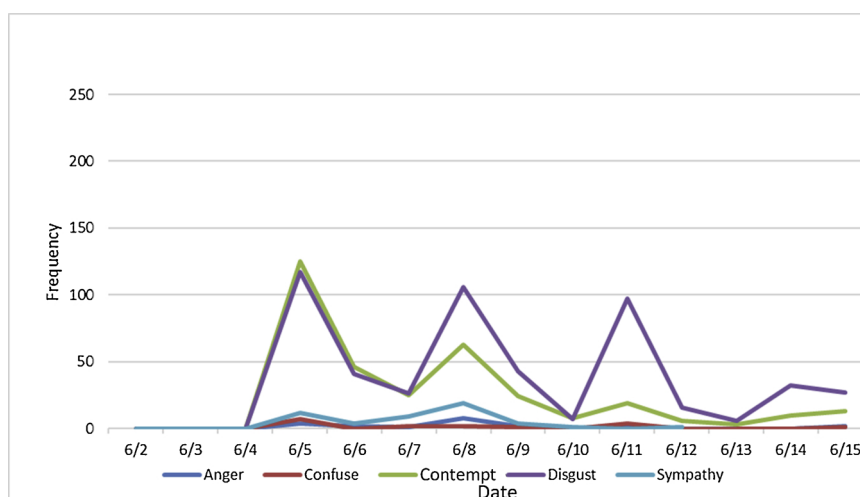


Fig. 5. Facebook followers' change in emotions toward Denise Ho.

Ho's response. On June 5, some negative comments toward Denise Ho were detected. The trend lines declined in the next two days and they quickly increased on June 8, after Denise Ho blamed mainland China in a BBC interview (HOCC, 2016) on the evening of June 7. On the next day (the second spike) some mainland Chinese users attacked Denise Ho on Facebook. The third spike was on June 10, when *Hong Kong Good News*, a local online news media, released an article criticizing Denise Ho for bringing "Cultural Revolution" into Hong Kong. This aroused a large volume of discussions. It is clear to see that although Facebook followers still expressed negative emotions toward Denise Ho on June 8 (106 comments with contempt and 63 with disgust) and 10 (97 comments with contempt and 19 with disgust), those two spikes were lower than the first one (125 comments with contempt and 119 with disgust) when there were more negative emotions toward Lancôme and mainland China after her interview on BBC.

Emotions toward mainland China shared roughly the same curve shapes as those toward Denise Ho. The only difference is its highest point was on June 8 (132 comments with contempt, 100 with disgust, and 11 with anger), which resonates with Denise Ho's strategy of triggering a crisis event (i.e. mentioning the Mainland-Hong Kong conflict in the BBC interview). In the second crisis in which mainland China was strongly involved, negative emotional comments toward mainland China were more than those toward Lancôme, the organization heavily involved in the first crisis. Evidenced in Figs. 4–6, Facebook followers mostly consumed crisis information through expressing negative emotions (i.e. contempt and disgust); Lancôme received more emotional engagement than Denise Ho and mainland China. Facebook followers' change in emotions highly depended on the information created by individuals or organizations involved in the crisis, as well as other influential social media creators.

4.4. Emotions and crisis responses in online forums

Among the 12 selected posts with hit discussion, influential social media creators expressed anger and disgust toward Lancôme in two posts, contempt and confusion in one post. Concerning Denise Ho, there are contempt (3), disgust (1) and sympathy (1). Three posts also showed contempt toward mainland China. Emotions toward Lancôme, Denise Ho, and mainland China of forum followers are plotted in Figs. 7–9. As illustrated in Fig. 7, emotional waves occurred resulting from the trigger events and Lancôme was no

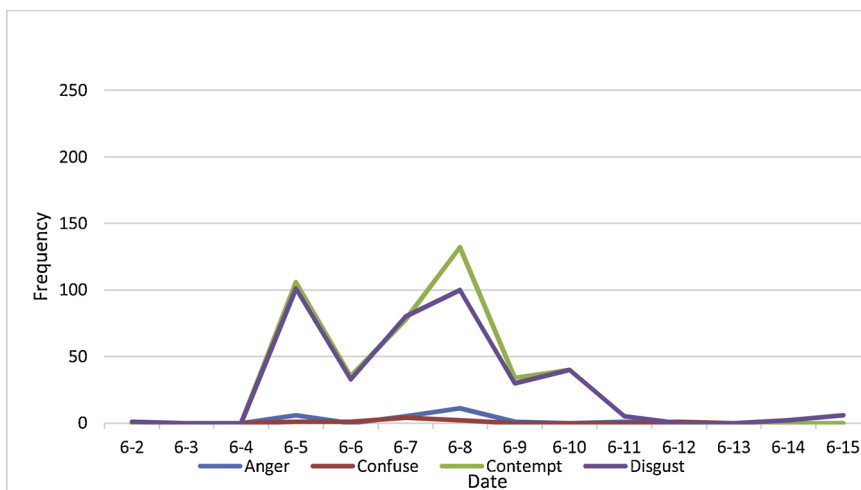


Fig. 6. Facebook followers' change in emotions toward mainland China.

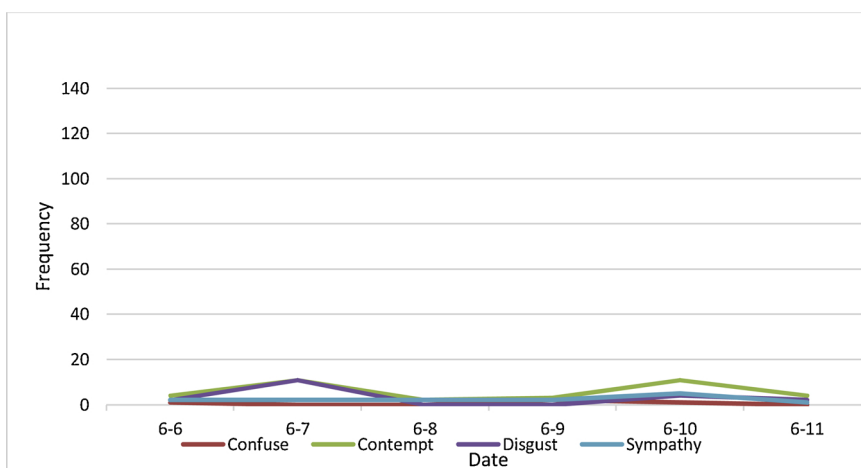


Fig. 7. Forum followers' change in emotions toward Lancôme.

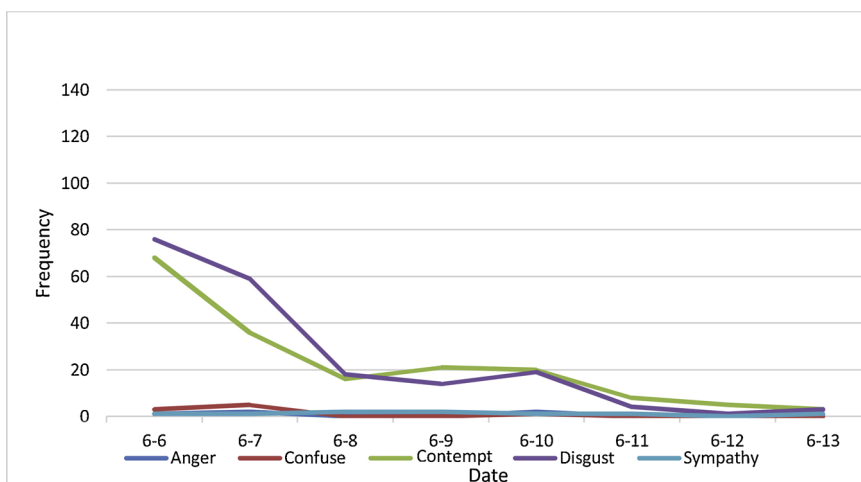


Fig. 8. Forum followers' change in emotions toward Denise Ho.

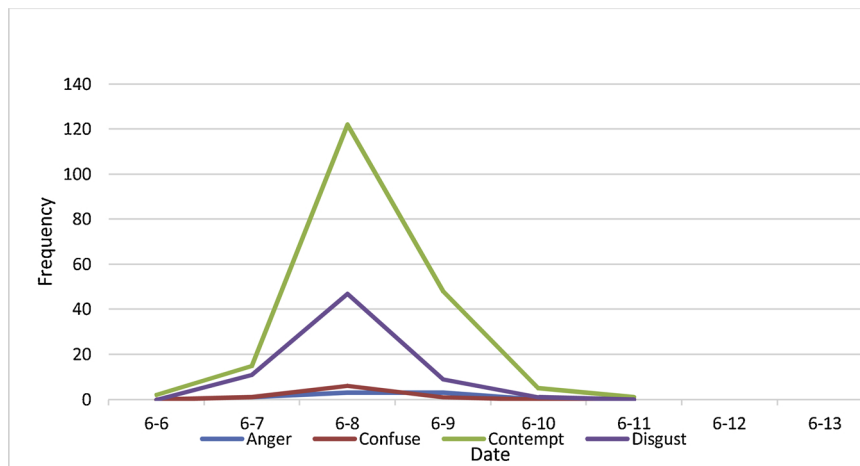


Fig. 9. Forum followers' change in emotions toward mainland China.

longer the crisis focus even though the crisis continued to generate social media coverage. Compared with the trend lines in Figs. 8 and 9, the trend lines of forum followers' emotions toward Lancôme in Fig. 7 do not fluctuate much. This means that forum followers did not emotionally engage in judging the organization. Fig. 7 indicated that forum followers' emotions toward Lancôme were not mainly driven by organizational response strategies (no official responses on June 7 and 10). Hong Kong forums mainly cover local issues, so even in the original crisis Lancôme called off the concert, forum followers still used the Mainland-Hong Kong conflict frame to view the entire situation and did not attach too much weight to Lancôme.

Evidenced in Fig. 8, Denise Ho's response strategy in the second crisis was more effective in forums rather than on Facebook. Forum followers had strong negative emotions (on June 6, 68 comments with contempt and 76 with disgust) toward Denise Ho in the beginning. Most of them stated that they were sick of Denise Ho acting as a politician rather than a celebrity. The trend lines of two negative emotions (i.e. contempt and disgust) continually declined after June 7. Then, forum followers' original negative perceptions of her were replaced by those toward mainland China. Compared with the Facebook followers' changes in emotions (Fig. 5), forum followers expressed fewer negative emotions toward Denise Ho in the second crisis (Fig. 8). This can be explained by the fact that Facebook is an international platform including proportionally more pro-mainland China users, while forums are used by more local citizens. A large proportion of negative emotions toward Denise Ho on Facebook were from those pro-mainland China users. It is noticeable that the changes in emotions toward mainland China on Facebook (Fig. 6) coincide with those toward mainland China on forums (Fig. 9). When the second crisis started on June 8, the frequencies of negative emotions quickly reached the peak, with contempt (122) climbing to the highest point. Fig. 9 shows that contempt had a much higher frequency than other emotions in the second crisis. In other words, this lifting tendency verified how a socio-political issue (i.e. the Mainland-Hong Kong conflict) fueled discussion and negative emotion in a paracrisis life cycle.

4.5. Social media influencers and regenerative crisis

We identified several influential social media users of the controversy and described their characteristics by analyzing their behaviors, content of their posts, and their followers' reactions. In the Lancôme-Denise Ho scandal, we noticed at least four sub-categories of influential social media creators based on the number of read, reply, comment and like of their posts. The first type was people who were directly involved in the crisis, such as Denise Ho herself. The second type was news media's social media accounts aiming to provide real-time information and convey different messages created by the organization involved and influential publics, known as broadcasters (Zhao, Zhan, & Liu, 2018; Zhao, Zhan, & Wong, 2018). The third type was individuals, such as traditional news commenters and key opinion leaders, who held strong attitudes and opinions toward the first sub-crisis in a regenerative life cycle and had a tendency to influence a large number of followers with their high level of issue involvement (Jin & Liu, 2010). The fourth type, which is not so common in previous SMCC studies (Austin et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2012), was self-involved social media influencers appearing in the second and third spikes of the regenerative crisis related to Lancôme.

Social media influencers engage out of self-involvement can be either organizations or people. Unlike other three types of creators, they typically engage themselves in the latter stage of the regenerative crisis. They tend to strategically create information on social media, and to frame the crisis in their own ways to take advantage of the crisis. In short, they form a distinctive type of influential social media creators that are capable of shaping a large number of followers' opinions and emotions for their own purposes in a paracrisis situation. It should be noted that since those influencers may have a hidden agenda when creating and disseminating information, it is hard for public relations practitioners to predict or detect the outcomes.

In the Lancôme's PR crisis, self-involved social media influencers tended to adopt different response strategies for different purposes. One typical influencer is corporations such as MOOV, a Hong Kong music streaming service provider. On June 6, the corporation posted a photo of Denise Ho and wrote, "Employ Denise Ho permanently!" With this statement, MOOV implied that it

was different from Lancôme as it would appreciate and support bold musicians like Denise Ho. The post received roughly 10,000 likes and hundreds of comments and shares only within one day. Followers expressed their thanks and support toward MOOV online. As MOOV did not have any connection with Denise Ho before, we presume that its support toward Denise Ho was a news hijacking strategy (What is news hijacking, 2017) for comparing its moral behavior and attitude with Lancôme's.

Another type of social media influencer is politicians. Christine Fong, a District Council member in Hong Kong, was a case in point. She uploaded a video on Facebook demonstrating how to use a Lancôme product with her verbal explanation: "Today I clean the toilet bowl with Lancôme cleanser! Flush! That's all!" (Fong, 2016). This Facebook post carried hashtags #boycottlancome and #HatePoliticalPersecution indicating that the crisis was caused by the pressure from the Chinese government on Lancôme. Until now, the video has generated over 200,000 views and 3000 reactions on Facebook. By supporting Denise Ho and debasing Lancôme, influencers such as Fong attempted to attract Ho's supporters by aligning her stance with theirs.

Fellow celebrities sharing a similar socio-political view also belong to self-involved social media influencers. Chapman To, an activist-celebrity advocating the Umbrella Movement, was blacklisted and barred from the show business in mainland China. His Facebook post on June 6 adopted Denise Ho's situation as a representation of himself, repeatedly announcing his own attitude and contention (To, 2016). Rather than discussing Lancôme's PR crisis, his post explicitly blamed mainland China and bothered on a self-promotion.

Another subcategory is news media content creator with certain stance, such as *Apple Daily*, a local newspaper with a strong political standpoint considered to have a tendency of supporting Hong Kong independence (Lee & Chu, 1998). It released four posts on June 7, when the first spike declined, to deepen Hong Kong people's tensions and conflict with the Chinese government. As shown in Fig. 3, *Apple Daily* has taken a double role by disseminating information on Facebook and acting itself a news agency, which intensified the online discussion and emotional waves of the second spike on June 8.

Overall, self-involved social media influencers tended to create information when the trend line rose (i.e. see Fig. 3 from June 6 to June 10) to gain more attention. Although not receiving as much response as other influential social media creators (i.e. Denise Ho, her most popular post generated more than 10,000 shares and 70,000 likes) and online news media (e.g. *Apple Daily*, its posts generated more than 100,000 likes and 4000 shares in total), they had significant impact on followers as well, for instance, Chapman To's Facebook post received more than 30,000 likes and 1000 shares (To, 2016).

5. Discussion

5.1. Key findings from analyzing the Lancôme–Denise Ho controversy

The Lancôme case demonstrates the uniqueness of regenerative crises, which are often initiated on online platforms. Unlike traditional crises, influencers have the social media power (Zhao, Zhan, Liu et al., 2018) to initiate sub-crises and further heat up the argument by re-framing the messages. The development of a regenerative crisis (Coombs, 2017) gets more complicated as it no longer goes along a one-direction curve with multiple stages (Fearn-Banks, 2011), but through interlocking cycles in which different publics may trigger a new concurrent crisis based on the initial one. Findings of this study have empirically validated the multifaceted situation of a social-mediated crisis in regenerative nature (Coombs, 2017). A high level of self-involvement of social media influencers on a controversial topic usually brings in myriad viewpoints by re-interpreting and elevating the discussion for their own interests, which further increases the density of a regenerative life cycle with multiple spikes. In practice, Lancôme's reaction did not help re-gain trust from either mainland Chinese or Hong Kong people (Samadi, 2016), especially when it was entangled in the deep-seated tension between mainland China and Hong Kong. Voices on online platforms create noise and are captured by offline traditional media. Traditional media coverage, in turn, provokes more online discussion.

In addition, emotional response plays an important role on how publics engage in the crisis. Results not only indicated how organizations and influential social media creators can affect social media followers' emotions (Liu, Austin, & Jin, 2011), but that emotional changes are also based on the content/information distributed by various types of influential creators in different information forms. Findings showed that social media influential creators acted as crisis information sources, which indicated different levels of credibility perceived by publics (Callison, 2001). Specifically, social media followers' emotional response was no longer attached to Lancôme in the second spike of the crisis, but to the messages framed by self-involved social media influencers (i.e. corporations, politicians, and celebrities) toward mainland China (see Figs. 7–9). Accordingly, publics would also express different emotions toward information from different sources, understanding such emotions would help organizations better develop their response strategies.

Contempt and disgust are two dominant emotions that we found from the study, which are both attribution-dependent. This finding indicates that in this crisis, most emotional social media users tend to attribute responsibility to either Lancôme, Denise Ho or mainland China. Another type of attribution-dependent emotion, anger, occurs less frequently maybe because comparing with anger, contempt and disgust are more likely to be experienced when people perceive threats but such threats are not that direct and immediate (Hutcherson & Gross, 2011); which resonates with the crisis situation of this study since not many people's benefits would be actually influenced by the controversy. Moreover, an attribution-independent emotion, sympathy, are expressed more often concerning Denise Ho rather than other parties, which means some certain strategies taken by her are effective to reduce her perceived responsibility (see Fig. 5, on June 8 after being interviewed by BBC, there were 20 Facebook posts and comments expressed sympathy towards Denise Ho, which created a small spike).

Table 4

Examples of self-involved social media influencers in a regenerative crisis.

Identity	Name	Date	Like	Share	Comment
Influencer-media content creator	Apple Daily	June 7	6623	692	723
Facebook post example: 蘭蔻好害怕~~~ 【政黨明到時代廣場 LANCÔME 抗議 母公司急通知員工放假一天】【嘆香港藝人為人民幣噤聲】何韻詩接受 BBC 訪問: 沒有後悔發聲					
[Lancôme is so scary! Political parties will go to Times Square protesting tomorrow, Lancôme employees are asked for a day off. Why Hong Kong celebrities keep silent for RMB? Denise Ho accepts BBC interview, stating she doesn't regret voicing out.]					
Influencer-corporation	MOOV	June 6	8193	597	153
Facebook post example: 永久錄用! 撐堅持信念嘅每一位, MOOV 愛音樂勇。					
[Employ Denise Ho permanently! MOOV appreciates and supports bold musicians.]					
Influencer-celebrity	Chapman To	June 6	34,000	1239	34
Facebook post example: 其實所謂的被封殺藝人, 生活大概都是這樣過的。 「就算是頭破血流, 也要咬實牙根打下去, 直到最後一個回合。」這是我做人四十多年的座右銘。					
[Actually all our so-called “banned celebrities” are suffering like Denise Ho. The motto that I live with for the past 40 years is ‘Never give up even when being dashed into pieces.’]					
Influencer-politician	Christine Fong	June 6	1500	286	193
Facebook post example: 今日我用 Lancôme 潔廁液洗廁所! 沖廁。講完!					
[Today I clean the toilet bowl with Lancôme cleanser! Flush! That's all!]					

5.2. Refining the SMCC model

Austin et al. (2012) clearly defined the role of influential social media creators in the SMCC model as those “who create crisis information for others to consume” (p. 192). They also argued that this role is taken by journalists of traditional media. However, it was not enough to include all the creators under the sole category of journalists. Scholars need to understand the purposes, behavioral patterns, and other characteristics of different creators and identify the types of creators participating alongside the crisis cycle to anticipate the perceived outcomes toward the organization involved. Given the widespread use of social media in disseminating information, this study ushers in the concept of social media influencers (Freberg et al., 2011) to distinguish those who are willing to and capable of shaping the opinions of a large number of followers online. This case study has provided some key insights into understanding the roles and strategies influential social media creators adopt along with the different sub-crises of a crisis life cycle (see examples in Table 4). Therefore, we propose a sub-class of influential social media creators, namely, “self-involved social media influencers.”

A self-involved social media influencer can be an organization, politician, or celebrity. By analyzing the Facebook posts related the Lancôme-Denise Ho controversy, we identified three main characteristics of this distinctive type of influencers. First, they rarely discuss the crisis itself; Instead, influencers have a clear standpoint (i.e. for or against the organization) with strong attitudes or emotional expressions. Second, they strategically engage in a crisis by picking opportune time and sensational rhetoric for their own purposes. An example was Chapman To's post using emotional words for generating support and sympathy. Third, they usually engage in a crisis for empathy in dialogical communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002) with the involved publics. For instance, MOOV's bold statement, “Employ Denise Ho permanently!”, not only satisfied Denise Ho's supporters' but also got significant responsiveness from the general public.

Another interesting finding about influential social media creators is that some media, which are supposed to be neutral according to the SMCC model (Austin et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2012), also have their own stances. Traditional media being neutral is rather rare nowadays, especially on social media platforms. Thus, traditional media's social media accounts may also need to be considered as a type of self-involved social media influencers. For example, *Apple Daily* itself not only served as an influential local media to report the first crisis, but also continued to produce news generating the second crisis. As a media content provider, *Apple Daily* reframed the crisis by intensifying the conflicts with mainland China. For instance, the Facebook post created on June 7 (the day before the second spike) stated: “Lancôme is so scary! Political parties will go to Times Square protesting tomorrow, Lancôme employees are asked for a

day off. Why Hong Kong celebrities keep silent for RMB?”

Researchers and public relations practitioners must know how to distinguish self-involved social media influencers from traditional influential social media creators in the SMCC model. From our observation of the Lancôme-Denise Ho controversy, we can conclude four differences. First, information influencers provide are more strategically framed, purposeful, and influential on social media users' attitudes. Second, their followers are more difficult to be persuaded by the organization involved. Third, the choice of word to express their attitudes is easy to trigger extensive debates to develop a regenerative crisis. Fourth, they are less likely to be affected by information that the organization (i.e. Lancôme) released. These differences require scholars to investigate the identity, impact, and behavioral mechanism of influencers, not only as a sub-class of influential social media creators, but also a new category of social media publics in the social-mediated crisis communication.

5.3. Limitations and future directions

Although our research contains important theoretical and practical implications, it is limited by several factors. In terms of the scope of the case chosen, it would be worthwhile to go beyond Hong Kong and cover more real-life crises in other developed or developing countries in Asia. There are also three limitations inherent in our methodology. First, although content analysis is a good method to illustrate crisis dynamics, it fails to specifically examine how information created by different influencers can emotionally affect publics' reaction. Future studies might want to use experiments to investigate the emotional impact created by influencers. Second, inferential statistics rather than descriptive statistics might be a better way to quantify emotions change with the passage of time. To achieve this objective, multivariate content analysis and network analysis are recommended for future studies.

Despite these limitations, we believe that this study contributes significantly to the study of social-mediated crisis communication and serves as a starting point for explicating regenerative crisis model (Coombs, 2017) in real cases. In addition, we generalized four sub-categories of influential social media creators to refine the SMCC model (Austin et al., 2012; Jin et al., 2016). Our future study may want to further conceptualize self-involved social media influencers as a critical stakeholder group in social-mediated crisis, and to find out more sub-categories of active publics (i.e. social media followers) identified in the SMCC model. Additionally, as “double-crisis” phenomena have become more common, it is worthwhile to investigate effective response strategies to be taken at the turning point of a “double-crisis” situation (Coombs, 2017). Moreover, since traditional media also acts as a main media content creator on social media, our attention will also turn to the double role of traditional media in the social media environment to continue to refine the SMCC model.

Funding

This work was supported by the FRGII grant of Hong Kong Baptist University [grant number FRG2/16-17/057].

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