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Examining the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies on Sina Weibo in relation to the acceptance of the strategies by the Chinese publics

Abstract

Characterized by its timely and interactive nature as well as wide public access, social media have brought corporate-stakeholder and inter-stakeholder communications onto a new platform where stakeholders are empowered to interact in crisis communication. In view of the importance of social media in crisis communication and the management of the stakeholders' response, this study sets out to examine crisis communication strategies and the stakeholders' emotions in a real corporate-induced crisis situation to enhance our understanding of social mediated crisis communication. The case of Asiana Airlines Flight 214 Crash has been chosen for the investigation of Sina Weibo mediated crisis communication, in which 8530 responses from the Chinese stakeholders were examined. Our findings suggest that the escalation of crisis was prevented with the integrated use of the accommodative and defense communication strategies in the early stage of post-crisis communication. However, "apology resistance" was observed in the Chinese stakeholders' response since there was an excessive use of the apology strategy in the internally induced crisis situation.

Keywords

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Crisis communication strategy, social media, Sina Weibo, Asiana Airlines, the Chinese

publics/ stakeholders

1. Introduction

Social media in general and particularly its social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook,

Twitter or Sina Weibo are becoming increasingly important for companies to interact with their

web-savvy customers and other online stakeholders. Because they build on the technological

foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan

& Haenlein, 2010), social media are more dialogic, interactive and faster instruments for

building relationships between companies and their stakeholders than classical offline media

(Schultz, Utz, & Goritz, 2011). Corporations, irrespective of their scale, capitalize on their

social media presence, so as to capture the potential opportunities of any communication

functions more than simple information transmission. Social media have indeed gained its

irreplaceable position in today's communication.

As social media are increasingly adopted by various corporations for communication purposes

owing to their unique functions, features, and utilization, researchers have investigated their

functional dimensions (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011), key driving

factors - strategy, capacity, governance and environment (Nah & Saxton, 2012), social interaction with entrepreneurs (Fischer & Reuber, 2010), and transformation on corporate disclosure (Bonsón & Flores, 2011). There are also studies on social media ecosystem (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011), personalities (Correa, Hinsley, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2010), use of emoticons (Fullwood, Orchard, & Floyd, 2012), translation behavior (Piekkari, D. Welch, L. Welch, Peltonen & Vesa, 2013) and advantages and challenges on social media platform (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) to gain insights, which could guide existing and potential users to effectively make use of this interactive channel.

Due to its timely transmission and response time, as well as wide public access and interactive nature, social media enable two-way interaction between the public and the organization in crisis communication. Similarly, the dynamism of corporate-stakeholder and inter-stakeholder communications has entered another era where stakeholders are becoming more visible in the process of communication, particularly in the process of crisis frame building (van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013). In addition, corporations are provided a platform to regain audience trust in a crisis situation (Taylor & Perry, 2005) in which social media serve not only as an information-sharing resource, but also in allaying the public's anxiety and as such, social media have the potential to prevent crisis escalation (van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013).

Having realized the importance of social media in crisis communication and management, Austin, Liu and AUTHOR (2012) proposed the social-mediated crisis communication model (SCCM) that mapped out the relationship between the organization and stakeholders on communication in social media and traditional media. Factors including origin, form, predictability, controllability of crisis and publics' acceptance of social media have been examined and identified by researchers in experimental settings (AUTHOR, 2010; AUTHOR, Liu & Austin, 2014; Austin et al., 2012). AUTHOR (2010) further suggested that organizations play an important role of a crisis coping facilitator in circumstances when the stakeholder is in need of information clarification and reduction of uncertainty and negative feelings, especially on the interactive social media platform.

Notwithstanding the establishment of SCCM, there is a need to extend the study of crisis origin, crisis communication strategies, and the publics' emotions in a real crisis situation to enhance our understanding of social mediated crisis communication in the corporate context across cultural boundaries. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the corporate management of crisis communication strategies and its relationship with the stakeholders' acceptance of the strategies and the emotions induced in an ongoing real crisis situation on a leading social media platform in China.

When referring to the stakeholders involved in a crisis situation, we have adopted the term "publics" in our study to refer to a "group of people who face a common issue" (González-Herrero & Pratt, 1996, p. 84). Various terms have been employed by different scholars to refer to the publics. For instance, Fearn-Banks (2002) used both "stakeholders" and "publics", while Ulmer, Snellnow and Seeger (2007) preferred "stakeholders" and Benoit and Pang (2008) employed the term "audiences". Rawlins (2006) has given a succinct definition of the term "publics" where he defines "publics" as "the term used for stakeholders in the public relations literature…the term has frequently been related to the recipients of messages from organizations" (2006, p.2). The term has been widely adopted in recent crisis communication studies (Author, Pang & Cameron, 2012; Author, 2010; Author, Liu & Austin, 2011; Cho & Lin, 2009; Kim & Cameron, 2011;) when referring to key stakeholders facing the same crisis situation.

We have examined whether results from previous research studies are well-grounded in an "ongoing real crisis situation" (AUTHOR, et al., 2014, p. 90) with respect to corporate-stakeholders' meditation on Sina Weibo, a China-based social media platform where corporation-stakeholder interaction in crisis situations is seen. The case of Asiana Airlines Flight 214 Crash was selected for the investigation of Sina Weibo mediated crisis communication. 8530 responses from the Chinese publics were recorded in the corporate-

induced crisis situation. This paper unfolds the mediation of the corporate-publics dynamism in a complex and natural crisis situation. Special attention is placed on the corporate crisis communication strategies adopted, the publics' acceptance of them, the emotions induced and the coping strategies adopted.

2. A Brief Review

Taylor and Perry (2005) suggested that social media, as an interactive platform, have posted new possibilities for organizations' proactive approach during a crisis, and exemplified the paradigm shift from one-way communication—where a corporation "tells" the publics what it chooses—to two-way interaction between the publics and the organization whereby the publics is given the opportunity to respond. Compared to traditional media, social media serve as channels of news distribution during crises, which also contribute to determining popular attitudes towards and opinions about the actions and responses of the protagonists (Henderson, 2003). Therefore, social media may have both a direct and an indirect impact on publics particularly when the publics view social media as an unfiltered and up-to-date line of communication (Austin, et al., 2012; C. Procopio, & S. Procopio, 2007). In other words, social media, acting as a crisis communication tool, have opened other doorways to regaining the publics' trust in the affected organizations (Taylor & Perry, 2005).

In the initial phase of a crisis, social media play a crucial role by acting as an information-sharing resource to pacify the publics, allay fears and avert crisis escalation (van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013). During the crisis, the need for timely, accurate, and effective communication is very essential. Early and prompt crisis response towards the vast majority of stakeholders is made possible, with the popularized usage of social media. An organization's proactive approach in utilizing social media for releasing information to stakeholders and communication during a crisis is integral to effective crisis communication. If the crisis information is disseminated by a third party through social media, the publics' attribution-dependent emotions, such as anger, contempt and disgust, are likely to be intensified or aggravated when the organization is actually responsible for the issue (AUTHOR et al., 2014). Organizations assume an important role of a crisis coping facilitator when the publics are in need of information clarification and reduction of uncertainty and negative feelings (AUTHOR, 2010).

Furthermore, Schultza et al. (2011) have discovered that, in crisis communication, the medium is more important than the message. Although people still refer to newspaper articles, social media have the most positive effect on secondary crisis communication (e.g., recipients hearing information and leaving messages) and reactions. Therefore, the focus of our study is placed

on how a corporation mediates with the publics on social media, an interactive and effective

communication medium in a real crisis situation. As Austin et al. (2012) suggested, having a

well-established social media presence and good relationships with social media users are

beneficial for information release during a crisis, apart from considering the audiences'

information-seeking behaviors. The sharing of user-generated content, particularly in disasters

or emergency situations, may help to spread information the organization wishes to share

(Austin, et al., 2012) and maximize the communicative effectiveness (Freberg, 2012).

Taking into account the importance of utilizing social media for prompt and effective crisis

communication, scholars have started to investigate the conceptual framework of social

mediated crisis communication with a selection of different groups of companies, crises or

stakeholders, so as to further refine the framework with a more in-depth analysis and wider

coverage of samples to cater to different social and cultural contexts (Austin et al., 2012;

AUTHOR, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Kim & Cameron, 2011; Schultza et al., 2011). For

instance, Liu, AUTHOR, Briones and Kuch proposed the social-mediated crisis

communication model (SCCM) that explored the relationship between the organization and the

publics and communication in social and traditional media (AUTHOR, et al., 2014).

Association between origin, form, predictability, controllability of crisis and the crisis response

strategies and the publics' acceptance of social media have also been examined by researchers

in experimental settings (Austin et al., 2012; AUTHOR, 2010; AUTHOR, et al., 2014).

However, a further study into crisis communication strategies and response management in an

"ongoing real crisis situation" is warranted (AUTHOR, et al., 2014, p.90).

We believe a detailed investigation into present studies especially in real crisis situations from

a socio-psychological perspective focusing on perception- and response-shaping in a specific

cultural context like the fast-growing China, would facilitate our understanding of social

mediated crisis communication in the corporate context. A number of related studies have been

done on crisis communication (e.g. Chen 2013; Liang, 2012; Jing Zhao, 2012; Jingyang Zhao,

2013), but few studies have investigated communication with the Chinese publics and the

Chinese social media platform in a real crisis situation.

Therefore, this study investigates the corporate management of crisis communication strategies

and its relationship with the publics' acceptance of the strategies and their emotions induced in

an ongoing real crisis situation on a leading social media platform in China. We aim to examine

whether results from previous studies are well-grounded in an "ongoing real crisis situation"

(AUTHOR, et al., 2014, p. 90) with corporate-stakeholders' meditation on Sina Weibo, a

China-based social media platform.

The case of Asiana Airlines Flight 214 Crash was selected for the investigation of Sina Weibo

mediated crisis communication from July 6 to 23. The Chinese publics, a group of people who

faced the same crisis and have experienced the crisis through the news media even though they

are not the victims (AUTHOR, 2010), had a high stake as the plane crash caused the death of

three Chinese students, thus making Sina Weibo the leading platform for corporate-stakeholder

communication after the crisis.

Comparing Facebook and Twitter, which are both globally used, Sina Weibo has a relatively

concentrated user population in the Greater China region. Sina Weibo is "a Twitter-like

microblogging service provided by Sina corporation… It is reported to have over 300 million

registered users and generate about 100 million posts per day" (Yuan, Feng, & Danowski,

2013, p. 1014) and its registered users reached 600 million in 2015, comparable to Twitter.

While Facebook is available in 70 languages, and Twitter is available in 29 languages, Sina

Weibo is only available in Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, and English without a

complete English interface. Despite the fact that a limited number of languages are available

on Sina Weibo, it is expected to be the "direct interface" in public relations management in

Hong Kong and China (AUTHOR & Ng, 2013, p. 577). With a range of features resembling

Facebook and Twitter, Sina Weibo has its unique positioning and characteristics that attracts

different groups of users in China (see Appendix I for a detailed comparison of Facebook, Twitter and Sina Weibo).

3. Purpose of Study and Research Questions

Given the dominance and the functional role of Sina Weibo, it became the main social media platform for crisis communication between the corporation and the Chinese publics during the Asiana Airlines Flight 214 Crash. There were 38 corporate posts from Asiana Airlines and 8350 Chinese publics' responses found on Sina Weibo in the crisis communication of Flight 214 Crash, whereas only 566 and 53 publics' responses were found on Facebook and Twitter. This paper examines the Sina Weibo mediated crisis communication for Flight 214 Crash, using content analysis and a qualitative research method to unfold the mediation of the corporate-publics dynamism in a complex and natural crisis situation. Special emphasis is placed on the corporate crisis communication strategies adopted, the publics' acceptance of the strategies, the emotions induced and the coping strategies adopted.

To begin with, we needed to identify the proposed crisis communication strategies adopted by corporations on Sina Weibo in connection to the crisis origin and cognitive appraisal

dimensions involved. Based on the National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) investigation, the cause of the crash had a close association with the pilot's control of speed in the last 2.5 minutes of the flight before the crash (Mendoza & Lowy, 2013). With the responsibility laid on the pilot's slow and low flying of Flight 214, the crash could be categorized as an internally generated crisis with low crisis predictability and low crisis controllability (AUTHOR, 2010; AUTHOR et al., 2014). Crisis predictability refers to how well the publics could predict what was going to happen in the situation, while crisis controllability is defined as how the publics viewed their own control over the crisis situation (AUTHOR, 2010).

Taking its crisis origin, predictability, and controllability into consideration, a variety of crisis response strategies ranging from accommodative (e.g. compensation and apology) to defensive strategies (e.g. attack, accuse, denial, scapegoat, excuse and justification) could be employed for post-crisis reputation building (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Huang, 2006). Out of these, the accommodative strategy is often regarded as an effective strategy for image repair, especially when the publics regard the corporation as responsible for the crisis (AUTHOR et al., 2014; Coombs, 1998; Lee, 2004; Lyon & Cameron, 2004). AUTHOR, in her study has suggested that the accommodative crisis communication strategy, in particular a full apology strategy, is expected in a situation with high crisis predictability and low crisis controllability (2010).

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However, in a crisis with low crisis predictability and controllability, like the Asiana Airlines Flight 214 Crash, a justification strategy is most preferred (2010). The organization's reputation could be preserved and their image could be restored if an appropriate crisis communication response is chosen (Heath & Coombs, 2006).

Therefore, the first research question was:

> *RQ 1* What crisis communication strategies were employed by Asiana Airlines in the Flight 214 Crash as evidenced on Sina Weibo?

For a thorough understanding of the crisis communication strategies employed, we have adopted Lukaszewski's 7-step approach in crisis communication management (Lukaszewski, 2001) to unfold the tendency and use of the accommodative and justification strategies, the two most preferred response strategies adopted in a crisis with high corporate responsibility, low predictability and controllability, as suggested by researchers (AUTHOR, 2010; AUTHOR et al., 2014; Coombs, 1998; Lee, 2004; Lyon & Cameron, 2004).

The 7-step approach in crisis communication management includes Candor (publics' acknowledgement or an apology for the problem), Explanation (promptly and briefly

explaining the reasons for the problem), Declaration (publics' commitment and discussion of positive steps taken to resolve the situation), Contrition (Taking responsibility by showing regret, empathy, and sympathy), Consultation (involving stakeholders when offering a solution), Commitment (making a commitment and promise), and Restitution (remediating promptly and unconditionally). The accommodative strategy is encapsulated in approaches like Candor, Declaration, Contrition, Consultation, Commitment and Restitution while the justification strategy is encapsulated in the Explanation approach.

The second research question focused on the publics' acceptance of the crisis communication strategies adopted by the corporation. The publics' acceptance can be revealed via 1) the change in the frequency and volume of the publics' responses; and 2) the tonality of the publics' responses towards the crisis communication strategies adopted. Public social media manifestations can allay publics' panic and speculation and as a result, have the potential to prevent crisis escalation (van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013). In addition, Fearn-Banks (2002, p. 2) remarked that the objectives of crisis communication are to restore corporations' "normalcy", influence "public perception" and repair image and reputation. The change in the frequency and volume of the publics' responses towards the crisis communication strategies presented by the corporation could explain if the crisis is prevented from escalating and whether "normalcy" is restored afterwards. This study therefore examined the effectiveness of

the specific crisis communication strategies adopted in a real crisis situation which involved

communication with Chinese stakeholders on a leading social media platform.

The tonality of the publics' responses could complement the findings on response frequency

and volume in the examination of the publics' acceptance of the adopted crisis communication

strategies. Research conducted by Coombs (1998) and Lyon and Cameron (2004) showed that

an apologetic and accommodative response is preferred in a crisis of internal origin. And a high

level of public acceptance is expected when a corporation adopts accommodative responses in

a crisis of internal origin (AUTHOR et al., 2014). On the other hand, AUTHOR found that the

publics tended to accept the corporation's use of a justification strategy in a crisis of low

predictability and low controllability (2010). Therefore, the following research questions were

posed:

RQ 2.1 What was the publics' acceptance of the crisis communication strategies in

terms of the frequency and volume of responses generated?

RQ 2.2 For each specific crisis response strategy evidenced on Sina Weibo, what was

the tonality according to the publics' response?

The third set of research questions was associated with the negative emotions evoked in the publics' responses during the crisis and the correlation between the corporate crisis communication strategies and the negative emotions induced. Previous research has identified the direct relation between corporate crisis responsibility and six predominant negative emotions in the publics including anger, sadness, anxiety, fright, contempt and disappointment (AUTHOR, Pang & Cameron, 2007; AUTHOR, 2010; AUTHOR et al., 2014; Choi & Lin, 2009; Lazarus, 1991; McDonald, Sparks & Glendon, 2010) in that specific emotions could lead to undesirable crisis outcomes. For instance, anger and fear may instigate negative word-of-mouth (Coombs, 2007; McDonald et al., 2010). AUTHOR's study further added that fright is the primary emotion observed in a crisis with low predictability and low controllability (2010).

Research also indicates that high crisis responsibility is usually correlated with negative publics emotions (Choi & Lin, 2009; McDonald et al., 2010), especially in an internally generated crisis like the Asiana Airlines Flight 214 Crash in which the publics tends to be more negative and less sympathetic (AUTHOR et al., 2014). Therefore, the third research question was:

RQ 3.1 What were the negative emotions expressed by the publics on Sina Weibo?

RQ 3.2 How did the publics' negative emotions expressed differ in relation to the communication strategies adopted by the corporation?

As noted, the study on how the publics evaluates, responds and copes with emotions is important in the field of crisis communication research (AUTHOR, 2010; AUTHOR, et al., 2007, 2012; Lazarus, 1991). Coping strategies in response to the emotions triggered in a crisis situation could provide guidance for corporations to "customize messages for publics in crisis" (AUTHOR, 2010, p.529) and determine whether action is required, and if so, what kind of action ought to be taken (AUTHOR, et al., 2007; Lazarus, 1991). For example, in a low organization engagement crisis situation, publics are expected to adopt cognitive coping (rational and positive thinking) to cope with emotions of fright and sadness (AUTHOR, et al., 2012). In this case, the corporation is advised to inform the "people affected by the crisis how they should physically react to the crisis" (Sturges, 1994, p.308).

Drawing on Duhachek's study, AUTHOR proposed a three dimensional coping strategy framework: Cognitive coping (rational thinking, positive thinking, avoidance and denial), conative coping (action and instrumental support), and emotional coping (emotional support and emotional venting), with each enacting a diverse set of strategies as the core properties of different types of crisis coping (AUTHOR, 2010). Other research suggested that coping

strategies were driven by two determinants: certainty and situational controllability (Slovic, 1987). For instance, the emotional coping strategy is preferred when emotions of fear are triggered in a low certainty and control situation (Lerner, Gonzalez, Small, & Fischhoff, 2003) whereas the conative coping strategy is preferred when anger, which is another predominant type of negative emotion, is provoked in a high certainty and control crisis situation (Lerner & Keltner, 2000, 2001). As a result, the publics' coping strategies could be unraveled based on emotions revealed in their responses. For instance, rational and positive responses could be found when the publics adopted the cognitive coping strategy while an emotional response was uncovered when the publics' employed the emotional coping strategy.

With regards to the publics' preference for a particular coping strategy in a crisis situation of low predictability and controllability like Asiana Airlines Flight 216 incident, AUTHOR confirmed that the affective coping strategy including the use of emotional venting and emotional support is most preferred by the publics to manage the crisis-induced negative emotions (AUTHOR, 2010). Therefore, the last research question is to investigate the coping strategies adopted by the publics in relation to the emotions identified:

> *RQ 4* What were the coping strategies used by the Chinese publics, as gleaned from Sina Weibo, to deal with the crisis situation?

4. Method

All Sina Weibo posts and responses in connection with the Asiana Airlines Flight 214 Crash found on the Asiana Airlines' corporate Weibo were captured for analysis in this study. The original posts on Sina Weibo from July 7 to July 23, 2013 were submitted by Asiana Airlines while the Chinese publics only provided post responses. There were in total 38 posts presented by Asiana Airlines and 8530 Chinese responses recorded and analyzed. All 38 corporate posts were coded for RQ1. Both corporate posts and 8530 publics' responses were counted for RQ 2.1. In view of the large number of responses given by the publics on Sina Weibo in the crisis communication of Flight 214 Crash (compared with 566 and 53 responses identified on Facebook and Twitter), which had to be coded and examined for RQ 2.2, RQ 3.1, 3.2 and 4, simple random sampling was adopted, with the first 5 responses per hour from July 7 to July 23 selected for coding. In total, 38 corporate posts and 1725 responses from the Chinese publics were selected for coding and examination. Using the Sample Size Calculator built and supported by the National Statistical Service (NSS) at the Australia Bureau of Statistics, the minimum sample size for 8350 responses is 615 (standard error at 0.01941) when the confidence level is set at 99%, proportion at 0.5 and confidence interval at 0.05. With the

simple random sampling of 5 responses per hour, we captured 1725 responses which reached

a confidence level of 99%, with a confidence interval at 0.02763 and standard error at 0.01073.

A codebook encompassing coding guidelines for each research question was designed and

provided to a trained coder for coding (Huang, 2006). To answer RQ1, content analysis was

adopted. All 38 corporate posts were coded based on the 7-step approach in crisis management

proposed by Lukaszewski (Lukaszewski, 2001) on a sentence basis to examine the tendency

and use of the crisis response strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Huang, 2006), especially

the accommodative and justification strategies for post-crisis reputation building. Please refer

to Table 1 for the exemplification on the coding of the 7-step approach.

INSERT TABLE 1 EXEMPLIFICATION ON THE CODING OF THE 7-STEP APPROACH

HERE

To answer RQ 2.1, both 38 corporate posts and all 8530 responses from the Chinese publics

were scrutinized to reveal the frequency and volume (the number of responses posted) of the

publics' responses. As for RQ 2.2, 1725 responses were coded to uncover the tonality (positive,

neutral and negative) of the publics' responses. Only the dominant tonality of the post was

noted. Table 2 shows the exemplification on the coding of tonality.

INSERT TABLE 2 EXEMPLIFICATION ON THE CODING OF TONALITY HERE

1725 responses from the Chinese publics were coded for their dominancy of emotions shown and the expression of six predominant negative emotions (anger, sadness, anxiety, fright, contempt and disappointment) (AUTHOR et al., 2007; AUTHOR, 2010) to reveal the negative emotions expressed in the Chinese publics' response in relation to the crisis response strategies, which was the focus of RQ 3.1 and 3.2. The examples on the coding of negative emotions are included in Table 3.

INSERT TABLE 3 EXEMPLIFICATION ON THE CODING OF NEGATIVE EMOTIONS HERE

For the coping strategies employed, i.e. RQ 4, 1725 responses from the Chinese publics were coded on a 5-point Likert scale (1= Very Emotional, 2= Rather Emotional, 3= Partly Emotional/ Partly Rational, 4= Rather Rational, 5= Very Rational) to unfold the level of emotions evoked. Only the dominant emotion was registered. As described in the section above, the publics' coping strategies could be identified based on the level of emotions revealed in their responses. For instance, rational thinking was observed in the publics' response when

the cognitive coping strategy was predominant whereas an emotional response was noted if the publics adopted the emotional coping strategy including the emotional venting and support coping strategies. Please refer to Table 4 for the coding examples of emotionality.

INSERT TABLE 4 EXEMPLIFICATION ON THE CODING OF EMOTIONALITY HERE

For pilot coding and inter-rater checking, one of the authors and a trained coder co-coded the July 7 posts and responses obtained from Sina Weibo for a pilot run to ensure that the trained coder had a thorough understanding of the codebook. When disagreements arose in the pilot run, the researcher discussed them with the coder and refined the codebook for coding discrepant items (Huang, 2006). Then the first and second coder double coded ten percent of the data collected, i.e. 4 corporate posts and 117 responses, which included the first post and related responses captured from July 8, 10, 12, 14 and 16 for inter-rater checking (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991; Neuendorf, 2002). The measurement of agreement in Cohen Kappa was 0.937 (n= 604) using SPSS for calculation (Bakeman, 2000; Dewey, 1983).

5. Findings

5.1 The adoption and operation of the crisis communication strategies by Asiana Airlines on Sina Weibo

RQ 1 inquired into the crisis communication strategies employed by Asiana Airlines for the Flight 214 Crash. Our findings suggest that Asiana Airlines adopted an integrated accommodative and justification strategy for the Flight 214 Crash. 12 (32%) out of 38 corporate posts offered a full apology and employed the justification strategy.

Utilizing the 7-step approach in crisis communication management to study the Sina Weibo posts on Flight 214 Crash collected from July 7 to July 23, our findings show that all 7 steps were adopted for the July 7 and 8 post; 5 steps were followed for the July 9 post; 4 steps were used for the July 12 and 16 post; 3 steps were followed for the July 10 and 13 post; and only 2 steps were followed for the July 23 post. There appeared to be a gradual decrease in the number of steps taken in the period studied (See Figure 1).

INSERT FIGURE 1 THE UTILIZATION OF THE 7-STEP APPROACH IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION ON ORIGINAL POSTS (BY DATE) OBTAINED FROM SINA WEIBO HERE

Of the seven steps, Explanation, with 90 sentences (40.9%) identified, was the most commonly adopted approach for corporate crisis communication on Sina Weibo followed by Declaration (n= 54, 24.5%) and Contrition (n=22, 10%). Explanation was also ranked highest out of all steps on the July 7 (n=24, 30.4%), 8 (n= 29, 47.5%), 9 (n=6, 33.3%), 10 (n= 14, 73.7%), 13 (n= 3, 60%) and 23 (n=6, 85.7%) posts. Declaration peaked on July 16 (n=10, 45.5%), while Contrition was employed on July 12 (n=5, 55.5%). Given the accommodative nature of the communication strategies encompassed in the steps of Candor, Declaration, Contrition, Consultation, Commitment and Restitution, the percentage of accommodative oriented approaches reached 59.1% whereas Explanation accounted for the other 40.9%, with justification being deployed as the major strategy. The integrated use of the accommodative and justification-oriented approaches supports the finding that a blend of strategies was employed in the crisis communication of the Asiana Airlines Flight 214 Crash.

The integrated use of accommodative and justification strategies might have resulted from the high corporate responsibility, low predictability and controllability nature of the Flight 214 Crash. In fact, a full apology strategy was preferred in this internally originated crisis with low predictability and low controllability. Table 5 shows the excerpted corporate posts and related quotations that have adopted a full apology approach. The full apology posts included

apologies made by the CEO of Asiana Airlines to the victims and their families and an apology

from Asiana Airlines to the Chinese publics.

INSERT TABLE 5 EXCERPTED POSTS AND QUOTATIONS ADOPTING A FULL

APOLOGY STRATEGY HERE

5.2 The Chinese publics' acceptance of the corporate crisis communication strategies

adopted by Asiana Airlines on Sina Weibo

RQ 2.1 looked into the publics' acceptance of the crisis communication strategies in relation

to the frequency and volume of the responses generated by the publics.

Figure 2 maps the frequency and volume of original corporate posts and the Chinese publics

responses from July 7 to 23, 2013. Despite the relatively large number of responses from the

publics, the publics' responses were synonymous with corporate posts, with respect to the

gradual decline in volume recorded from July 7 to July 13. The number of responses made by

the publics reduced drastically when Asiana Airlines adopted the accommodative strategy,

particularly on July 7 and 8 when press conferences on the flight crash were held. Asiana

Airlines decided to synchronize their messages on both traditional and new media platforms

by rendering similar messages on the July 7 and 8 press conferences and Sina Weibo. Apart from providing up-to-date information about the incident and extending their apologies to Chinese stakeholders, Weibo encouraged both the corporation and publics to have two-way communication in a timely manner. After the release of 13 and 11 original posts on July 7 and 8 respectively by Asiana Airlines, the number of responses made by the publics dropped sharply from 4626 on July 7 and 3114 on July 8 to 400 on July 9 and 49 on July 10 respectively. On the last day of corporate-initiated communication, only 82 fan responses were recorded. Figure 2 shows the corporate posts and publics' responses on Weibo and the timeline of corporate press conferences in the crisis communication of Asiana Airlines Flight 214 Crash. Our findings suggest that Asiana Airlines' crisis communication strategies have effectively prevented crisis escalation (van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013) in the initial stage of post-crisis communication.

INSERT FIGURE 2 CORPORATE POSTS AND THE PUBLICS' RESPONSES (BY DATE) IN THE CRISIS COMMUNICATION OF ASIANA AIRLINES FLIGHT 214 CRASH ON SINA WEIBO HERE

Taking the 14-day pre- and post-crisis responses on Asiana Airlines' Sina Weibo into account, the communication between the corporation and its stakeholders recorded an average number

of 13 responses and 17 responses per day before and after the Flight 214 Crash respectively,

which suggested that the publics' communication with the corporation in relation to response

frequency and volume was restored to its "normalcy" (Fearn-Banks, 2002, p. 2).

RQ 2.2 addressed the tonality of the publics' acceptance of the crisis communication strategies.

As discussed in previous studies, negativity is commonly noted in the publics' responses when

a crisis has an internal origin (AUTHOR et al., 2014) and a corporation has high crisis

responsibility (Choi & Lin, 2009; McDonald et al., 2010). Figure 3 and Table 7 show that out

of the 1725 responses in our study, Negatively toned responses (n=854, 49.5%) predominated

in all the publics' responses collected from July 7 to 23 compared to the Neutral/ Ambivalent

(n=704, 40.8%) and Positive (n=167, 9.7%) responses recorded.

INSERT FIGURE 3 TONALITY OF THE PUBLICS' RESPONSES (BY DATE) ON SINA

WEIBO HERE

However, there was a growth of positive and neutral tonality responses and a drop in the

negative tonality responses documented from July 9 to 16 in Figure 3. This trend may be

attributed to the adoption of the full apology strategy in Asiana Airlines' corporate posts on

July 8, 9, 12 and 13 (See Table 5 and 6). Table 6 displays selected quotations from the publics' positive responses in relation to corporate posts adopting an apology strategy.

INSERT TABLE 6 SELECTED QUOTATIONS FROM THE PUBLICS' POSITIVE RESPONSES HERE

The ascending number of negative tonality responses after July 16 suggested a change in the publics' perception towards Asiana Airlines. As shown in Table 7, the percentage of those expressing Anger rose again when Asiana Airlines tried to explain and justify their pilot selection and aircraft maintenance (Post 10, 18 and 27), and praised their staff for their contribution during the crisis (Post 20).

5.3 The Chinese publics' negative emotions aroused on Sina Weibo during crisis communication

RQ 3.1 explored the different types of negative emotions stirred up in the Chinese publics on Sina Weibo during the crisis. 854 (49.5%) out of 1725 posts in our study had a negative tone. Negative posts were found mainly on July 8 (n=335, 59.1%), 9 (n=98, 57%), 10 (n=25, 52.1%), 12 (n=34, 59.6%), 16 (n=52, 68.4%) and 23 (n=51, 79.7%) (see Figure 3).

The negative emotions observed in the 854 responses were further sub-categorized into Anger, Sadness, Anxiety, Fright, Contempt and Disappointment, the six commonly found negative emotions in crisis communication (AUTHOR et al., 2007; AUTHOR, 2010). As shown in Table 7, Anger (n=534, 62.5%) was found to be the predominant negative emotion expressed followed by Sadness (n=138, 16.2%), Contempt (n=112, 13.1%), Disappointment (n=31, 3.6%), Anxiety (n=21, 2.5%) and Fright (n=18, 2.1%) (see Table 7).

INSERT TABLE 7 THE NEGATIVE EMOTIONS EXPRESSED IN THE PUBLICS' RESPONSES IN CONNECTION WITH THE CORPORATE POSTS PUBLISHED HERE

RQ 3.2 examined how the crisis-induced emotions varied in relation to the crisis communication strategies adopted by the corporation. Focus was placed on the emotions induced with the use of the apology and justification strategies. Anger was the most dominant negative emotion despite the integrated use of strategies in the crisis communication of Flight 214 Crash. Table 8 exhibits the six negative emotions induced with regard to the full apology and justification strategies adopted.

INSERT TABLE 8 VARIATIONS IN THE CRISIS-INDUCED EMOTIONS WITH REFERENCE TO THE CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY THE CORPORATION HERE

The expression of Anger in the Chinese publics was mainly associated with their perception of how Asiana Airlines had handled the crisis. The use of an apology strategy in the post-crisis communication managed to lower the Anger induced (Post 15 & 16). However, the percentage of those expressing Anger soared again whenever Asiana Airlines tried to explain and justify their pilot selection and aircraft maintenance (Post 10, 18 and 27), and praised their staff for their contribution during the crisis (Post 20). With the number of deaths rising and the repetitive use of an apology strategy, the accommodative strategy had lost its appeal and impact on the publics' Anger management. The Chinese publics felt antagonized and contempt in the post of 29 and 34 even when the corporation had apologized again on Sina Weibo (see Figure 4 for the distribution of Anger, Sadness and Contempt in response to the posts using the apology and justification strategies).

Sadness in the responses was linked to the report of the death of the Chinese students. Post 9 and 11 recorded 90% and 58.7% of Sadness when Asiana Airlines provided updated information of the number of deaths and injuries. Contempt was associated with the

responsibility of the corporation in bringing about the air crash, including the appointment of

inexperienced pilots and inadequate compensation arrangement (Post 17 and 21).

INSERT FIGURE 4 VARIATIONS IN THE PREDOMIANT CRISIS-INDUCED

EMOTIONS (ANGER, SADNESS, CONTEMPT) (BY POST) HERE

5.4 Coping strategies of the Chinese publics in times of crisis

RQ 4 examined the coping strategies employed by the Chinese publics to manage their negative

emotions induced in the crisis situation. 75% of the publics' responses indicated "Very

Emotional"(VE), "Rather Emotional" (RE) and "Partly Rational/Emotional" (PRE), which

reflected the use of the affective coping strategy.

Figure 5 displays the emotionality of fan responses on Sina Weibo in the Asiana Airlines Crash

in which the emotionality of 1725 responses made by the publics was coded using a Likert

Scale on a five-point scale ranging from 1 - Very Rational to 5 - Very Emotional. The mean of

all responses was 2.89, indicating that the publics were likely to give Partly Rational and Partly

Emotional responses (n=879, 51%). However, responses indicating a certain degree of "Rather

Emotional" (RE) and "Very Emotional" (VE) were also observed on July 8 (RE: n=122, 21.5%; VE: n=68, 12%), July 12 (RE: n=18, 31.6%) and July 23 (RE: n=21, 32.8%; VE: n=2, 3.1%).

INSERT FIGURE 5 EMOTIONALITY OF FAN RESPONSES (BY DATE) ON SINA WEIBO IN THE ASIANA AIRLINES FLIGHT 214 CRASH HERE

As highlighted in the Literature Review and Research Questions sections, the publics' coping strategies could be uncovered based on the level of emotions revealed in their responses. For instance, responses that demonstrate rational and positive thinking are associated with the cognitive coping strategy while emotional responses coincide with the emotional coping strategy. In our findings, the relatively high percentage of emotional responses (RE: n=293, 17%; VE: n=120, 7%) reflects the strong use of an affective coping strategy including emotional venting and emotional support coping strategies. Emotional venting coping strategy refers to publics' "attempts to recognize and express one's emotions" (Duhachek, 2005, p.46) while emotional support coping could be defined as publics' "attempt to marshal social resources to improve one's emotional and/or mental state" (Duhachek, 2005, p.44).

The use of an affective coping strategy is observed in the publics' responses when Asiana Airlines utilized the apology and justification crisis communication strategies in its original

posts. Table 9 lists the excerpt quotations from the publics' responses that illustrate a strong use of emotional venting and support coping strategy in response to the apology and justification strategy adopted by the corporation on July 8 and 12. It is seen that both emotional venting and support coping strategies were observed when Asiana Airlines adopted the apology strategy in crisis communication while the emotional venting coping strategy was usually connected with corporate posts adopting the justification strategy.

INSERT TABLE 9 EXCERPT QUOTATIONS FROM THE PUBLICS' RESPONSES THAT HAVE EXHIBITED A HIGH LEVEL OF EMOTIONAL VENTING AND SUPPORT HERE

6. Discussion

6.1 An integrated use of the apology and justification strategies in crisis communication on Sina Weibo

It has long been debated which crisis communication strategies should be adopted in times of crisis. In most of the crisis communication studies (AUTHOR et al., 2014; Coombs, 1998; Lee, 2004; Lyon & Cameron, 2004), the accommodative strategy (apology, commitment) is mostly preferred, particularly in a crisis of high predictability and low controllability. Research has

also shown that the justification strategy is preferred by the publics when encountering a crisis of low predictability and low controllability (AUTHOR, 2010). It is suggested that the impact of the crisis and negative visibility of the organization will be greatly reduced if the appropriate crisis communication management approaches and strategies are executed promptly (Lukaszewski, 2001), and the appropriate response strategy is adopted for post-crisis reputation building (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Huang, 2006).

Our study suggests that with regard to a real crisis situation of low predictability and controllability, an integrated use of the accommodative and justification strategy on social media is most often preferred. Asiana Airlines has adopted both the apology and explanation strategies to communicate with the Chinese publics on Sina Weibo from July 7 to 23, 2013. Multiple approaches (Candor, Declaration, Contrition, Consultation, Commitment and Restitution) on crisis communication utilizing the accommodative strategy were observed throughout the period of our study while the use of explanation peaked in the early stage of post-crisis communication on Sina Weibo. The regression of responses recorded in Figure 2 and a decrease in negative tonality responses shown in Figure 3 are indicative of the effectivenss of multiple approaches.

6.2 High level of publics' acceptance reflected in the decline in volume of responses and negative tonality responses

Based on AUTHOR, Liu and Austin's study, a high level of publics' acceptance is expected when a corporation adopts the accommodative strategy in a crisis of internal origin (2014, p.88). In her study, AUTHOR has suggested that publics' acceptance would be greater towards corporations' use of the accommodative communication strategy in a crisis of high predictability and low controllability, whereas the justification strategy is expected in a crisis of low crisis predictability and controllability (AUTHOR, 2010). As a result, a gradual decline in the number of responses would be expected if the publics' acceptance of Asiana Airlines' crisis response was favorable and negative visibility would be reduced when both the accommodative and justification strategies were adopted by Asiana Airlines.

Although a huge number of responses from the publics were recorded, the publics' responses matched well with the corporate posts with respect to the gradual decline in volume recorded from July 7 to July 13. Our findings indicate that Asiana Airlines' crisis communication strategies effectively averted crisis escalation (van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013) on the interactive social media platform in China in the early stage of post-crisis communication. The frequency and volume of responses recorded after July 23 also suggest that the communication

between the corporation and its stakeholders has been restored to "normalcy," a key objective of effective crisis communication (Fearn-Banks, 2002, p. 2).

Apart from the decline in the volume of responses, we have noted a growth of positive and neutral tonality responses and a decline in the negative tonality responses documented from July 9 to 16 in Figure 3 in connection with the adoption of the full apology strategy in Asiana Airlines' corporate posts on July 8, 9, 12 and 13 (See Table 5 and 6). These findings indicate that a higher level of acceptance was observed in the publics' responses as suggested in AUTHOR et al.'s study (2014).

The shift of tonality from negative to more neutral and even positive in the publics' responses seen in our study suggests that there may have been changes in publics' perception towards the corporation in line with the specific crisis communication strategies adopted. The change in publics' perception reflects the effectiveness of the accommodative and justification strategies (Fearn-Banks, 2002).

6.3 The dominance of anger resulting from the high crisis responsibility borne by the corporation and the development of "apology resistance"

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Our study is congruent with previous studies (AUTHOR et al., 2014; Choi & Lin, 2009; McDonald et al., 2010), which found that the negative emotions aroused in crisis communication have a close connection with the publics' perception of crisis origin and the responsibility of the corporation. However, departing from previous research findings where Fright should have been the primary emotion and the justification strategy preferred in a crisis of low predictability and controllability (AUTHOR, 2010), our findings uncovered that Anger was the predominant negative emotion aroused in the publics' response and both accommodative and justification strategies were witnessed in the crisis communication of Asiana Airlines Flight 214 Crash. Furthermore, we have observed that the negative emotions expressed in this real crisis situation may not have a direct relationship with the corporate crisis communication strategies adopted and the predictability and controllability of the crisis.

The predominance of anger among all negative responses is mainly associated with how the Chinese publics view Asiana Airlines' responsibility for the crisis. The use of an apology strategy in post-crisis communication managed to slightly reduce the anger provoked as shown in Table 7. Nonetheless, the rising negative tonality after July 16 suggested a change in the publics' responses and perception towards Asiana Airlines which could have resulted from a loss of trust owing to the repetitive use of the accommodative strategy and the publics exposure

to negative reports from traditional media, which directly transmitted crisis information to social media followers (Austin et al., 2012).

The ascending number of negative tonality messages after July 16 in Figure 3, the high percentage of people exhibiting Anger recorded in Table 8 when Asiana Airlines adopted the justification strategy in conjunction with the publics' responses in Table 9 suggest that the Chinese publics have developed "resistance" to the corporation's apology strategy. With the number of deaths escalating and the repetitive use of the apology strategy, the accommodative strategy seemed to have lost its appeal and impact on the publics' Anger management. The publics began to develop an "apology resistance", an effect closely associated with "apology fatigue", as suggested by Michael Green on the Japanese' frustration in their attempt at apologizing for wars (Hanami, 2010, p. 5; Miller, 2005/06, p. 41; Nagashima, 2006, p. 117). The Japanese have reached "apology fatigue" when they tried to apologize for their war actions for years and "nothing good has come of it" (Hanami, 2010, p. 5). It has to be stated that Green's observation was based mainly on the "fatigue" experienced by the sender. In our study, we have observed a "resistance" effect from the receivers' perspective stemming from the overuse of the apology strategy by the sender. The Chinese publics have developed an "apology resistance" since they have been exposed to a repetitive apology made by the corporate senior

management including the CEO without gaining commitment and restitution from the corporation.

A noteworthy finding is that the employment of solid responses and actions on commitment and restitution coupled with the apology and justification strategies via Weibo are critical in corporate crisis communication management. Repetitive use of the apology strategy may help pacify the publics in the short term but lead to "apology resistance" over time.

6.4 High level of emotional venting triggered by the use of the apology and justification strategies associated with the collectivistic and high context culture of Chinese society

Our findings resonate with a previous study on the use of the affective coping strategy by the publics in a crisis of low predictability and controllability (AUTHOR, 2010). 75% of the publics' responses reported in our study were emotionally embedded. The responses posted on July 8 (RE: n=122, 21.5%; VE: n=68, 12%) are typical examples illustrating the use of the affective communication style. Despite the corporation's effort in explaining the causes of the crisis and Asiana Airline's (AA) position from a rational perspective, the publics' response was rather emotional with many questioning the deployment of an inexperienced pilot and indicating their refusal to travel on AA in future. Keywords like "痛心" (distressed), "惡心"

(disgust), "鄙視" (despise), "垃圾" (rubbish), and "去死" (go to hell) were noted in the publics' responses, venting their anger and sadness at AA, while lexical items such as "加油" (shoulder on), "挺" (hold up), "支持" (support), "辛苦了" (thanks for your hard work), "祈福" (bless you), and "堅強" (be strong) were identified in their responses, supporting the victims and the affected in Flight 214 Crash.

Emotional venting and the support coping strategies were made salient when the Chinese publics had to manage their negative emotions provoked by this crisis, especially when Asiana Airlines' adopted the apology and justification crisis communication strategies. The reliance on emotional venting and support coping strategies in the Chinese publics' responses could be attributed to the affective communication style of the Chinese.

As noted in previous studies, the Chinese are more affective in communication (Becker, 1986; Neuliep, 2012). Domino and Hannah's (1987) study supports the notion that Chinese narratives tend to demonstrate more expressions of sorrow. The above studies conclude that emotional and affective styles of communication are expected in a highly collectivistic society like China. In our study, negative affectivity (Watson & Clark, 1984) triggered by the publics' perception of the high crisis responsibility of AA, and resistance to the apology strategy developed and

escalated in the rapid process of mass self-communication by the Chinese publics led to a high level of emotional venting in the publics' response.

The affective communication style of the Chinese publics could also be revealed from their responses regarding similar crisis situations on Weibo. For instance, the use of the affective communication style was observed in the Chinese publics' responses on Sina Weibo in the Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 (MH17) Crash where a total of 1062 responses were generated in response to the 10 corporate posts published. The Chinese publics were expressive and emotional when they were commenting on the MH17 Flight Crash although there was no casualty from the Chinese community. Identical keywords like "痛心" (distressed) (fan's response to Post 1 at 12:58 on 18/7/2014), "惡心" (disgust) (fan's response to Post 1 at 13:06 on 18/7/2014), "鄙視" (despise) (fan's response to Post 15 at 16:24 on 19/7/2014) , "垃圾" (rubbish) (fan's response to Post 1 at 21:11 on 10/10/2014), "去死" (go to hell) (fan's response to Post 3 at 17:00 on 18/7/2014), "加油" (shoulder on) (fan's response to Post 2 at 13:13 on 18/7/2014), "挺" (hold up) (fan's response to Post 2 at 13:13 on 18/7/2014), "支持" (support) (fan's response to Post 1 at 09:33 on 19/7/2014), "辛苦了" (thanks for your hard work) (fan's response to Post 10 at 17:40 on 28/7/2014), "祈福" (bless you) (fan's response to Post 1 at 01:33 on 19/7/2014), and "堅強" (be strong) (fan's response to Post 2 at 13:31 on 18/7/2014)

were observed in the Chinese publics' responses. Their emotional venting towards Malaysian Airlines and support for the victms and their families in the MH17 Crash were demonstrated.

7. Limitations

Although a huge number of responses were investigated in this study, one limitation of this study is that the analysis of effective crisis communication strategies, their origin and the Chinese publics' emotions on Sina Weibo have only focused on the Asiana Airlines Flight 214 Crash. Comparative analysis on crisis communication via Weibo for other flight crashes could be conducted for cross comparison and further examination.

Another limitation pertains to the content analysis of a solitary media (in this case, Weibo post, which is one type of social media content). Additional content analyses of traditional news media content can provide a more in-depth analysis of how this crisis was framed and sensationalized by reporters, combining content from both traditional media and social media, and reflecting the views of both the corporation and the publics.

8. Implications and Further Study

Further research can be conducted to explore the role of the news media and other forms of social media platforms in other cultural contexts (e.g., Weibo and its users in the Chinese culture vs. Twitter and its users in the Western culture). This can be done by examining how the media systems function in different social and situational contexts of the crisis communication process.

The implications of our study for communication management practitioners are that the integrated use of the apology and justification strategies followed by responses indicating corporate commitment and restitution are highly preferred in a crisis situation of low predictability and controllability, and in a collectivistic and high context culture like China. More importantly, an overuse of the apology strategy may lead to "apology resistance" in that the publics may change their perception of the corporation's repetitive apology, even if the apology comes from the CEO or top management.

In conclusion, this study suggests an integrated crisis communication response approach to manage an emotional and uncontrollable crisis. The findings shed light on how crisis managers should effectively connect with the publics and resolve a situation, with more mindful consideration of the publics' emotions. An array of factors such as crisis origin, corporate responsibility and engagement, crisis certainty and controllability, and cultural values of the

publics have to be given weight in order for a corporation to strategically position itself in a

crisis situation and manage its crisis communication strategies well.

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Appendix I: Comparison of Facebook, Twitter and Sina Weibo

	Facebook	**Twitter**	**Sina Weibo**
Alexa Rank	2 (February 2015)	8 (February 2015)	15 (February 2015)
Number of Users	1.4 billion	645 million	600 million
Languages	Available in 70 languages	Available in 29 languages	Website (Simplified Chinese ,Traditional Chinese and English without complete English interface)
Character limit for wall post/ thread	420	140	Unlimited (post) 140 (response)
Features	The Wall, Photos, Status, Pokes, Gifts, Messaging, Classified section, upload options and Personalized homepage	Tweet, retweet, direct messaging, photo uploading	Threaded Comments, Emoticons, Micro Topics, Trend Categorization, Verified Account, Hall of Celebrity, Medal Reward System, Templates for personal homepage and Sina Weibo event
Registration	Required	Required	Required
Private Message	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instant Messaging	Yes	No	Yes
Games	Yes	No	Yes
Photograph Uploading	Yes	Yes	Yes
Follow Trending Topics	No	Yes	Yes
Current Status	Active	Active	Active
Post Updates	Yes	Yes	Yes
Users express approval of content by	Like and Share	Retweet	Like and Share
Share links	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reblog posts	Yes	Yes	Yes
Private Setting	Can use different settings for various groups	Either public or private	Can use different settings for various groups
Add Friends	Yes	Yes	Yes
Recommendation of Friends	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 1 Exemplification on the coding of the 7-step approach

7-step approach	Example (on sentence basis)
Candor	此次事故航班為 OZ214 航班，於韓國時間 7 月 6 日 16 時 35 分先韓國仁川機場出發前往美國舊金山機場，客機於韓國時間 7 月 7 日凌晨 03 時 27 分(美國當地時間 7 月 6 日 11 時 27 分)在舊金山機場 28 號跑道著陸時發生事故。 (Extract of Post 7 on 7/7/2013) Literal Translation: The flight of this accident is OZ214. It departed from Korea Incheon International Airport to the US San Francisco International Airport at 16:35 on 6 July (Korean Time). The accident happened when the aircraft was landing on 28 runway in San Francisco International Airport.
Explanation	目前對事故發生的原因正在確認中。此飛機在著陸過程中機尾部分觸碰了跑道而發生了事故，造成了起火。具體跑道的使用方面，是在接到塔台許可後實施的著陸。 (Extract of Post 10 on 7/7/2013) Literal Translation: The reasons for the cause of the accident are pending for confirmation in the meantime. The tail of the flight touched the runway. Then, the accident happened and caused the outbreak of fire. The use of the runway is permitted by the tower.
Declaration	最新更新: 因中國家屬之前未持有護照，所以在市政府和其他相關部門的幫助下昨晚新拿到護照，韓亞航空協助辦理家屬的美國簽證，預計今早會出簽證，一切如果順利的話，今天可以安排家屬赴美。 (Extract of Post 14 on 8/7/2013) Literal Translation: The latest update: Since the Chinese family members of the passengers did not have valid passports, the city government and related departments decided to help them to get the passport last night. Asiana Airlines (AA) will assist the family members to acquire their US visa this morning. If things go well, AA would be able to fly the families to the US today.
Contrition	韓亞航空全體員工向此次事故中的遇難者表示深深的哀悼，向遇難者家屬表達最深切的慰問，全力幫助此次事故中受傷的中國乘客早康復。 (Extract of Post 29 on 12/7/2013) Literal Translation: All staff of Asiana Airlines expressed their deepest condolences to the victims and sincere regards to victims' families. We will do our best to help the injured passengers in this accident to recover as soon as possible.
Consultation	同時，(社長)將會見美國政府機關相關人員及中國駐舊金山總領事館相關人員等，繼續開展事故處理和調查工作。 (Extract of Post 25 on 9/7/2013) Literal Translation: At the same time, the CEO will meet the officers of the US government and the Chinese Consulate General in San Francisco to manage and investigate the accident.

Table 2 Exemplification on the coding of tonality

Tonality	Examples
Negative	不用道歉，永遠不坐貴公司的飛機。 (Fan response of Post 15 on 8/7/2013) Literal Translation: No need to say sorry. I will never ever fly with Asiana Airlines.
Neutral	這對韓亞影響應該比較大吧…好好處理 (Fan response of Post 1 on7/7/2013) Literal Translation: It does affect Asiana …Handle with care
Positive	佩服。。責任感和勇氣 (Fan response of Post 25 on 9/7/2013) Literal Translation: Admirable…for being responsible and brave

Table 3 Exemplification on the coding of negative emotions

Negative Emotions	Examples
Anger	…垃圾 (Fan response of Post 2 on 7/7/2013) Literal Translation: …Rubbish
Sadness	不知道說甚麼，每次看到這種新聞心情總是會跟著一起難受!希望天堂一切安好! (Fan response of Post 1 on 7/7/2013) Literal Translation: Don't know what to say. Whenever I heard this kind of news, I feel sad. Hope that the victims will rest in peace!
Anxiety	希望盡快調查出事故原因。每個月都得坐你們的飛機出差。 (Fan response of Post 12 on 7/7/2013) Literal Translation: Hope you will find the cause of accident as soon as possible as I need to travel on your flights for business trips every month.
Fright	真嚇人啊!過幾天還要坐飛機回家呢…還是不敢坐飛機，竟然又出現空難了…今年再讓我丟個大件兒也沒關係，讓我破財免災恩恩~ (Fan response of Post 1 on 7/7/2013) Literal Translation: It is really scary! I have to take a flight to go home in the next few days… I do not dare to fly. The crash happened again. It is totally fine for me to lose something valuable to escape from the bad luck.
Contempt	那不叫援助好吧!而是你們的責任，不要說的跟得到你們甚麼好處似的。 (Fan response of Post 11 on 7/7/2013) Literal Translation: That is not 'help'. It is your responsibility. Don't make it sound like we have gained benefits from you.
Disappointment	如果是飛行員的問題 我就對韓亞徹底失望了 (Fan response of Post 7 on7/7/2013) Literal Translation: If it is the problem of the pilot, I am totally disappointed in Asiana.

Table 4 Exemplification on the coding of emotionality

Emotions	Examples
5 Very rational	好好善後!安撫乘客，高層道歉取得原諒為止。該賠償的一定要賠償。不要拖延和錯誤信息，有哪裡出問題，哪裡即使補正。事故誰都不想的，第一時間出事故報告，甚麼原因導致飛機失事的?才不會影響貴公司股價和聲譽。 (Fan response of Post 1 on 7/7/2013) Literal Translation: Handling the accident properly! Pacify the passengers. The senior management needs to apologize until the victims forgive them. Compensate when needed. Do not drag on and release wrong information. If there are problems, resolve them immediately. No one wishes for the accident. Release the accident investigation report promptly to avoid damage to your reputation and minimize the impact on your stock price.
4 Rather rational	這對韓亞航空影響比較大吧…好好處理 (Fan response of Post 1 on 7/7/2013) Literal Translation: It does affect Asiana …Handle with care
3 Partly rational and partly emotional	"該航班飛行員有豐富的飛行經驗，機組人員都嚴格按照規定執飛。飛機未發現機械和技術缺憾。"韓亞航空想表達的是，這就是命對嗎? (Fan response of Post 1 on 7/7/2013) Literal Translation: The pilot of that flight has extensive experience in flying. The crew operated the flight based on strict guidance. The aircraft does not have any mechanical and technical defects. So what does Asiana Airlines wish to express? This is destiny?
2 Rather emotional	兩個年輕的生命，就這樣… (Fan response of Post 1 on 7/7/2013) Literal Translation: It is a pity that two young girls…
1 Very emotional	777 都能飛到墜機，棒子那滿口蹩腳英語，以前沒出事，只是運氣而己，這次典型的人為事故，搭上卻是無辜乘客的性命，堅決抵制棒子航空!!! (Fan response of Post 1 on 8/7/2013) Literal Translation: The pilot could even crash Boeing 777. It is just pure luck that no accident has happened before. Bangzi's (a deprecatory ethnic slur for Koreans) English is awful. This is a typical man-induced accident and it costs innocent passengers' lives. I insist on boycotting Bangzi's Airlines!!!

Table 5 Excerpted posts and quotations adopting the full apology strategy

Date & Time	Post No	Strategy	Full apology embodied in the Contrition approach
8-7-2013 09:43	15	Apology	韓亞航空社長向中國人民的致歉信： 對於此次事故給所有乘客和家屬及中國人民帶來的極大悲傷和憂慮，我們深感愧疚，並對所有中國人民表達最深刻的歉意。......再一次向全體中國人民表達最深刻的歉意。 Literal Translation: The apology letter to Chinese citizens from Asiana Airlines' CEO We feel deep regret that the accident has caused tremendous sorrow and anxiety to Chinese citizens. We would like to express our sincere apology to all Chinese citizens. …… Once again, we would like to express our sincere apology to all Chinese citizens.
9-7-2013 14:16	25	Apology	尹永斗社長向遇難者家屬鞠躬致歉 7月8日晚，韓亞航空尹永斗社長在仁川機場轉機登機口向因此次飛機失事遇難的中國少女家屬鞠躬並連聲道歉:"非常抱歉，非常抱歉。"表示道歉和哀悼。尹永斗社長還稱: "非常抱歉，我們會徹底查清此次事故原因，*給遇難者家屬一個交代並盡快確定解決對策。*"......到達目的地後，尹永斗社長第一時間去慰問受傷乘客並表達歉意。 Literal Translation: CEO, Young-Doo Yoon bowed to apologize to the victims' family members Asiana Airlines' CEO Young-Doo Yoon bowed to apologize to the family members of the dead girls of this air accident at the boarding gate of connecting flights. "I am really sorry. I am really sorry," said Asiana Airlines' CEO Young-Doo Yoon to express apology and regret. " I am really sorry. We will definitely find out the actual reasons behind this accident and come up with an appropriate strategy to solve the problems as soon as possible for the victims' family members," continued CEO Young-Doo Yoon. …… After arrival, CEO Young-Doo Yoon went to visit the injured passengers immediately and apologized to them.
12-7-2013 08:32	29	Apology	韓亞航空向中國人民致歉 韓亞航空對此次事故給中國人民及政府造成的傷痛和憂慮深感愧疚，向因此次事故沉浸在悲痛中的乘客家屬、親人、傷者及所有乘客深深鞠躬，致以我們最深刻的歉意。......最後，再次對乘客及家屬、所有中國人民鞠躬，致以最深刻的歉意。 Literal Translation: Asiana Airlines apologize to Chinese citizens

			Asiana Airlines feels deep regret that this accident has caused Chinese citizens and government tremendous pain and anxiety. We would like to bow to express our deepest apology to the family members of the victims, the injured passengers and all passengers. …… Lastly, we would like to bow again to express our deepest apology to the passengers, family members and all Chinese citizens.
13-7-2013 09:13	30	Apology	韓亞航空社長尹永斗致歉: "向遇難者及其家屬表示深深的哀悼，向因此次事故造成的傷痛和憂慮深感愧疚。" Literal Translation: "I would like to express my sorrow to the victims and their family members. I feel deep regret about the pain and anxiety caused by this accident," apologized Asiana Airlines' CEO Young-Doo Yoon.

Table 6 Selected quotations from the publics' positive responses

Date/ Post no	Strategy adopted	Quotations of positively toned responses
July 8/ 15	Apology	20:25 on 9 July 2013 (Post 15) 及時道歉，很好! Literal Translation: Apologize at the right time. Very good!
July 8/ 16	Apology	14:35 on 9 July 2013(Post 16) 處理得不錯 Literal Translation: The crisis is handled in a nice way.
July 9/ 25	Apology	14:23 佩服。。責任感和勇氣 Literal Translation: I admire Asiana Airlines' sense of responsibility and bravery.
July 9/ 26	Apology	21:07 希望能面試上韓亞，加油 Literal Translation: I hope that I could become the staff of Asiana Airlines. Cheer up, Asiana!
July 12/ 29	Apology	10:07 態度值得肯定!有錯就認!比國內航空公司好多了!以後還是會選擇韓亞! Literal Translation: The attitude is good! Being able to admit the wrongs is a lot better than the airlines in China! Asiana will still be my choice!
July 13/ 30	Apology	17:15 on 15 July 2013(Post 30) 韓亞很棒，這次意外讓人很心痛，這種事情能發生在韓亞上也很驚訝~這樣韓亞甚麼時候才能招乘務員呢? Literal Translation: Asiana is great. The accident is painful and I am surprised that Asiana had this kind of accident. In this case, when can Asiana recruit new flight attendants?
July 16/ 34	Apology	16:39 on 17 July 2013(Post 34) 擔當很重要 Literal Translation: Shouldering the responsibility is very important

Table 7 The negative emotions expressed in the publics' responses in connection with the corporate posts published

Original Post	Anger	Sadness	Anxiety	Fright	Contempt	Disappointment	Total Count (n of response)
Post 1	8	12	1	5	9	0	35
Post 2	11	0	1	0	1	0	13
Post 3	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
Post4	1	0	0	0	1	1	3
Post5	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Post6	6	3	0	0	0	0	9
Post7*	3	1	0	1	2	1	8
Post8	3	0	1	0	1	0	5
Post9	3	27	0	0	0	0	30
Post10*#	5	1	0	0	0	0	6
Post11	31	54	0	4	2	1	92
Post12	4	0	1	0	1	0	6
Post13	26	7	1	0	2	0	36
Post14	13	0	1	1	3	0	18
Post15*	108	13	3	1	19	9	153
Post16*	10	0	0	0	2	1	13
Post17	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
Post18#	34	1	1	0	8	4	48
Post19	7	0	0	0	1	0	8
Post20	13	0	0	0	2	0	15
Post21	1	0	0	0	3	1	5
Post22#	10	2	0	0	1	1	14
Post23	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
Post24	35	5	6	3	4	2	55
Post25*	53	10	0	1	13	5	82
Post26*	13	0	2	0	1	0	16
Post27#	15	0	0	0	2	0	17
Post28	6	0	0	0	2	0	8
Post29*	30	0	1	0	1	2	34
Post30*	5	2	0	0	4	0	11
Post32	1	0	0	0	4	0	5
Post34*	6	0	1	0	1	1	9
Post37	25	0	0	1	1	1	38
Post38	38	0	1	1	10	1	51

Remarks

* post adopting apology strategy

post adopting justification strategy

Table 8 Variations in the crisis-induced emotions with reference to the crisis communication strategies adopted by the corporation

Date and Post No.	Anger	Sadness	Anxiety	Fright	Contempt	Disappointment
7(Apology)	3 (37.5%)	1 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (25%)	1 (12.5%)
10(Apology & Justification)	5 (83.3%)	1 (16.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
15(Apology)	108 (70.6%)	13 (8.5%)	3 (2.0%)	1 (0.7%)	19 (12.4%)	9 (5.9%)
16(Apology)	10 (76.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (15.4%)	1 (7.7%)
18(Justification)	34 (70.8%)	1 (2.1%)	1 (2.1%)	0 (0%)	8 (16.7%)	4 (8.3%)
22(Justification)	10 (71.4%)	2 (14.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)
25(Apology)	53 (64.6%)	10 (12.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.2%)	13 (15.9%)	5 (6.1%)
26(Apology)	13 (81.3%)	0 (0%)	2 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0%)
27(Justification)	15 (88.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (11.8%)	0 (0%)
29(Apology)	30 (88.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.9%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.9%)	2 (5.9%)
30(Apology)	5 (45.5%)	2 (18.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (36.4%)	0 (0%)
34(Apology)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)

Table 9 Excerpt quotations from the publics' responses that have exhibited a high level of emotional venting and support

Date/ Post no.	Crisis communication strategy adopted by AA	Coping strategy adopted by the Chinese publics	Excerpt quotations from the publics' responses
8 July/ 15	Apology	Venting	不用道歉，永遠不坐貴公司的飛機。 Literal Translation: You do not have to say sorry. I will never ever choose Asiana Airlines when traveling.
8 July/ 15	Apology	Support	希望孩紙們能安息!也希望你們別出類似的事件啦，損害顧客的生命安全，也損害你們的名聲…… Literal Translation: I hope that the children will rest in peace! Also, I hope that you would not have this kind of accident again since it is about the safety of passengers and the reputation of Asiana…
8 July/16	Apology	Venting	逝者已矣 道歉有何用? 痛定思痛有何用? 那兩個家庭的痛苦是無法彌補的 Literal Translation: The girls are dead. What is the point of apologizing? What is the point of correcting the wrongs? You cannot make compensation to the two families since the pain of them is tremendous.
8 July/ 16	Apology	Support	希望傷者們早日康復，不要發生更多的傷亡者 Literal Translation: I hope that the injured will recover soon and there are no more injuries and deaths.
8 July/ 18	Justification	Venting	飛行時間管甚麼用，我騎了七年的自行車，你一下子讓我開汽車，這能行嗎? Literal Translation: What is the point of the flying time? I have ridden a bicycle for seven years. Suddenly, you ask me to drive a car. Would it be alright?
8 July/ 22	Justification	Venting	飛機也沒有問題，連副駕駛都是飛行時間超過一萬小時，為甚麼還會發生空難，你還是客觀面對錯誤，找出缺點，一味的回應質疑，不作出檢

			討，是五星級航空公司應有的回應嗎? 公關也真是 LOU 到爆!
			Literal Translation: There was no problem with the plane. The flying time of the co-pilot is also over 10 thousand hours. How can this kind of accident happen then? You should face the truth and find the reasons behind this accident instead of responding to the queries. Is it the right attitude of the five-star airlines? The PR of your company sucks!
12 July/ 29	Apology	Venting	不要光口頭道歉，做點實事...不要光表面做文章好嘛 Literal Translation: Don't just say sorry. Do something practical. It is not about how good your explanation is.
12 July/ 29	Apology	Support	先查清事故原因吧。空姐的職業精神還是值得讚揚的。為死者哀悼...希望所有傷者盡快康復。 Literal Translation: You should look into the reasons behind the accident first. The attitude of flight attendants is good. Mourn over the girls' death… I hope that all the injured passengers will recover soon.

Figure 1 The utilization of 7-Step approach in crisis communication on original posts (day date) obtained from Sina Weibo
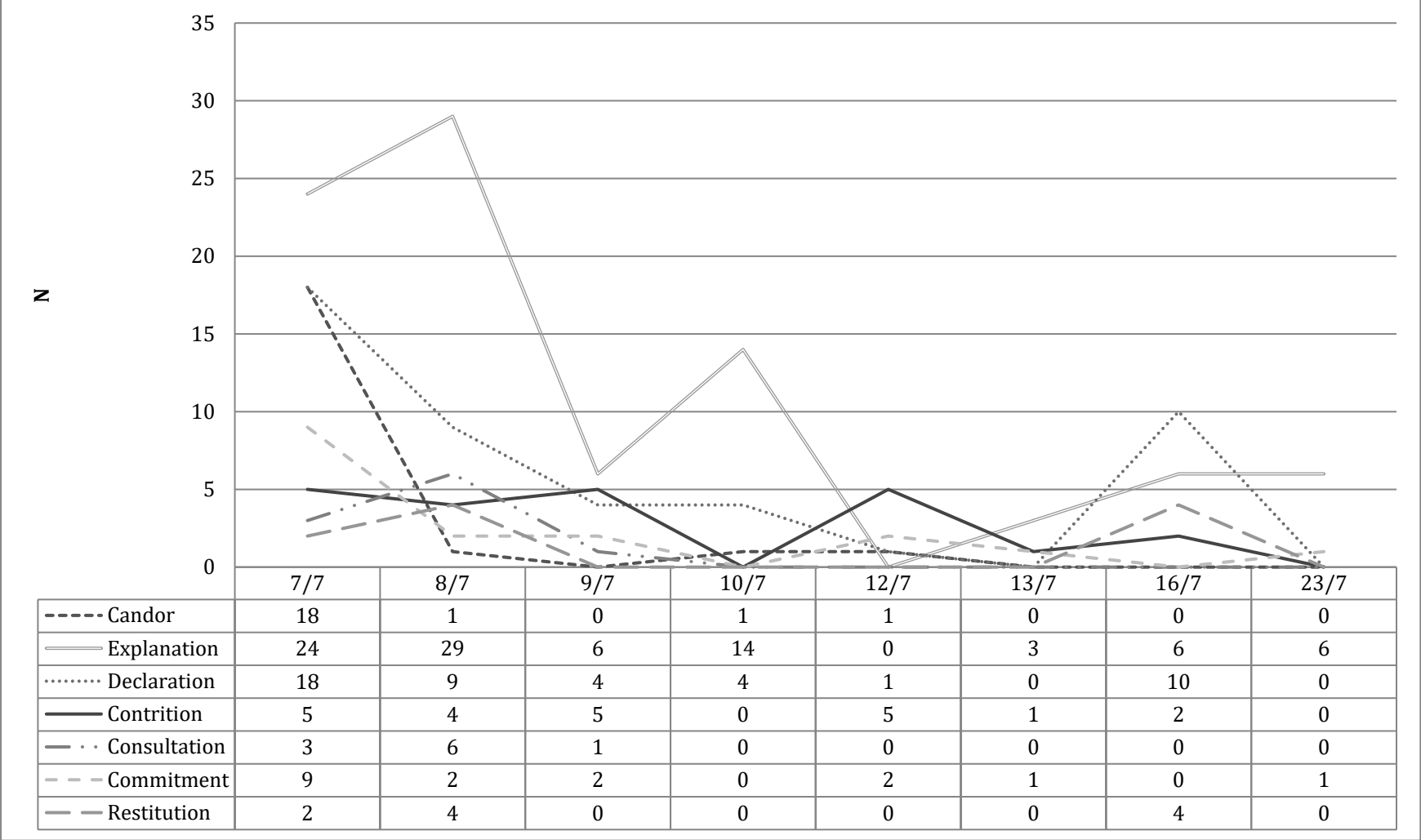

	7/7	8/7	9/7	10/7	12/7	13/7	16/7	23/7
- - - - Candor	18	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
——— Explanation	24	29	6	14	0	3	6	6
·········· Declaration	18	9	4	4	1	0	10	0
——— Contrition	5	4	5	0	5	1	2	0
— ·· Consultation	3	6	1	0	0	0	0	0
– – – Commitment	9	2	2	0	2	1	0	1
— — Restitution	2	4	0	0	0	0	4	0

Figure 2 Corporate posts and the publics' responses (by date) in the crisis communication of Asiana Airlines Flight 214 Crash on Sina Weibo
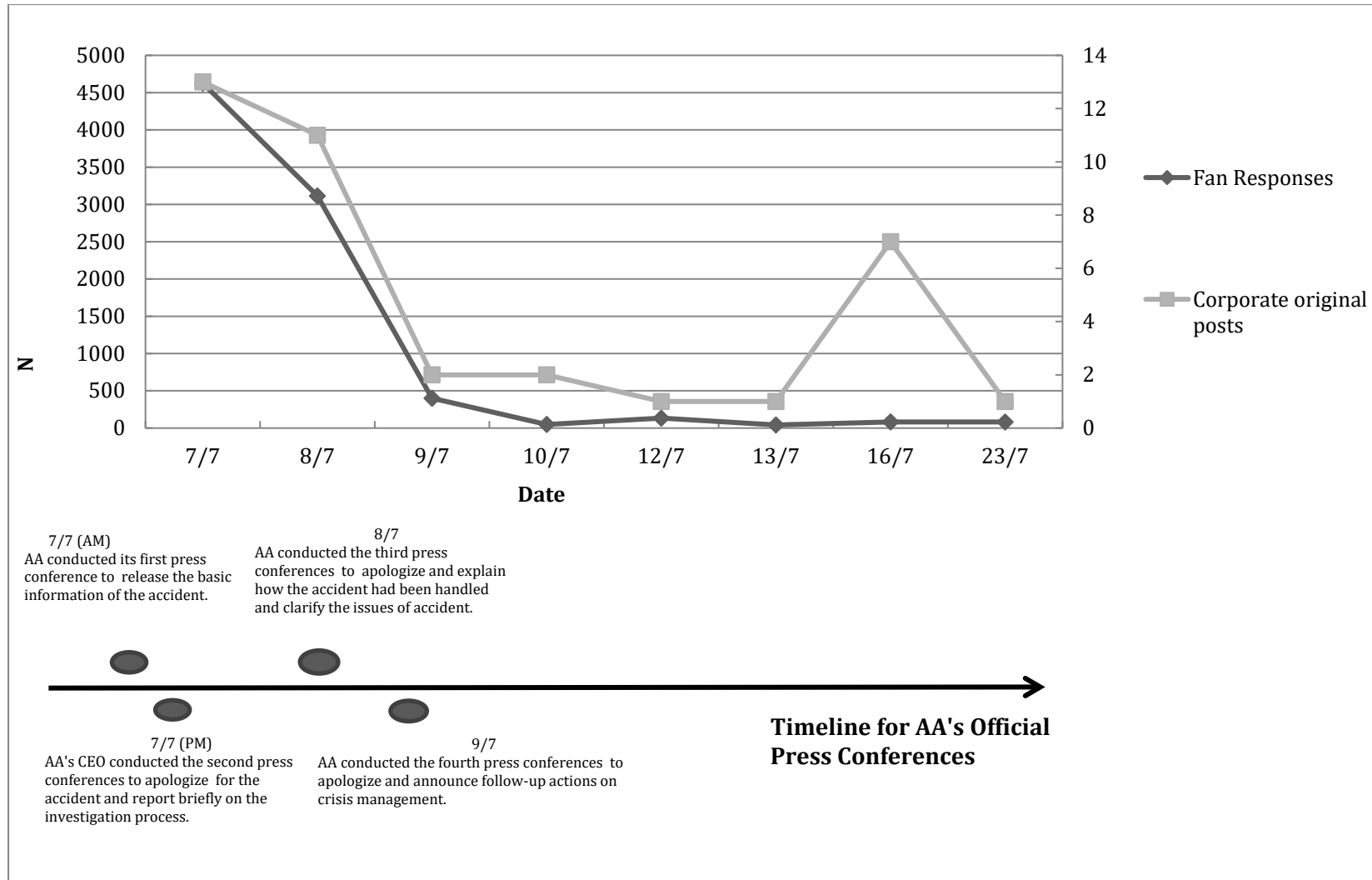

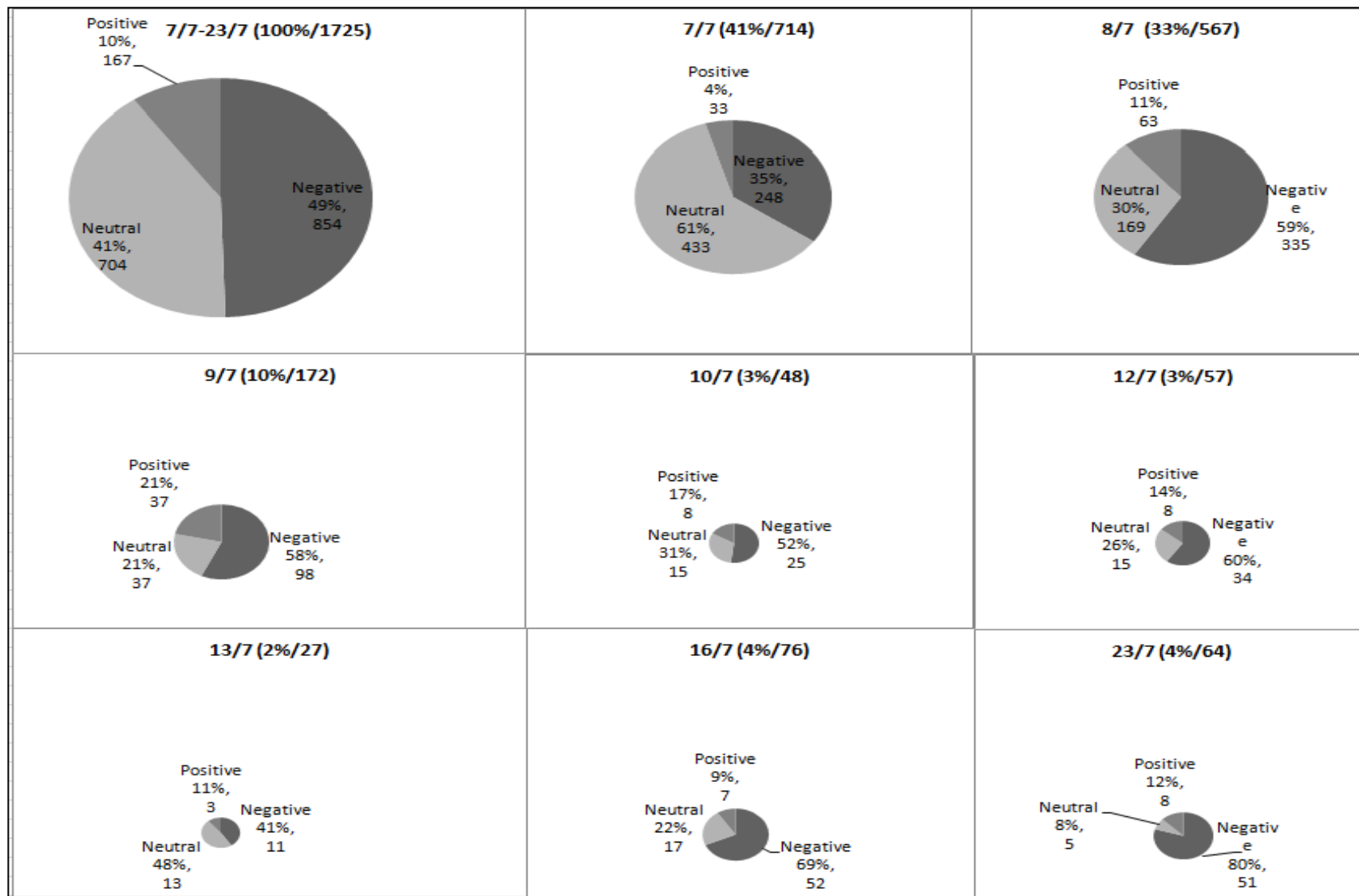**Figure 3 Tonality of publics' response (by date) on Sina Weibo**

Figure 4 Variations in the predominant crisis-induced emotions (Anger, Sadness, Contempt) (by post)
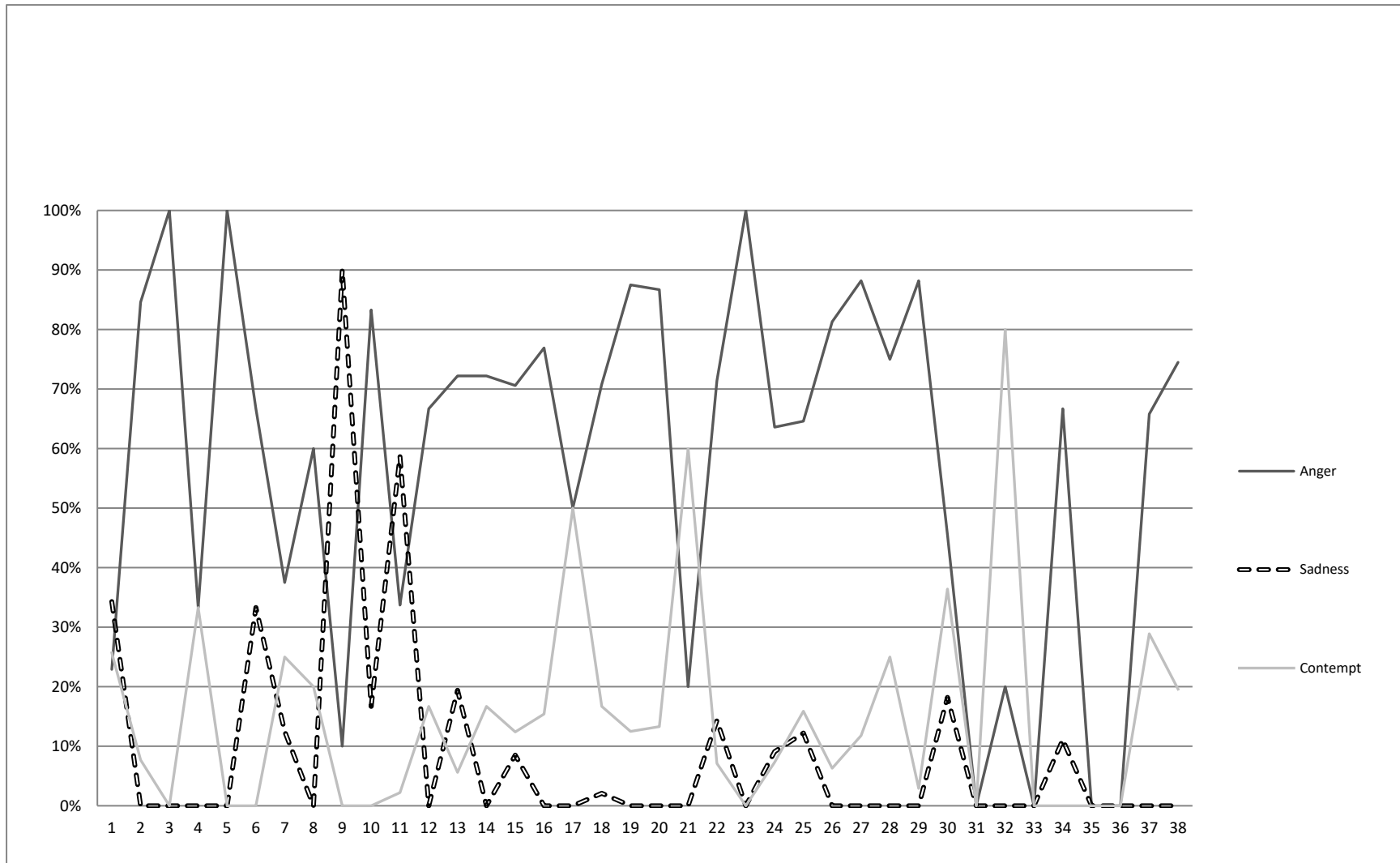
Figure 5 Emotionality of fan responses (by date) on Sina Weibo in the Asiana Airlines Flight 214 Crash