ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY

The impacts of social media bandwagon cues on public demand for regulatory intervention during corporate crises

Yingru Ji[1] 🄳 | Sora Kim[2]

[1]College of Media and International Culture, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China

[2]School of Journalism and Communication, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, Hong Kong

Correspondence
Yingru Ji, College of Media and International Culture, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China.
Email: yingru.ji@gmail.com and yingru_ji@zju.edu.cn

Abstract

In the social media era, a growing number of corporate crises are entwined with salient social issues. To address such crises, publics may demand their government take action with regulations, legislation or public policy remediation. Through two online experiments in China, this study investigates how social media bandwagon cues contribute to public demand for regulatory intervention during corporate crises. This study finds that a social media post collecting a great number of likes, comments and shares (i.e., high levels of bandwagon cues) can directly lead to increased public demand. This study also reveals significant mediating roles of perceived crisis severity and publics' responsibility attributions to dual agents—an in-crisis company and social systems wherein the company operates. When publics are exposed to a post with high levels of bandwagon cues, they perceive greater crisis severity, which in turn increases their responsibility attribution to the company and to social systems. The heightened responsibility attribution then spills over to public demand. Moreover, crisis blame frames of the post content moderated the effects of bandwagon cues on publics' attribution to social systems and subsequent public demand.

KEYWORDS
bandwagon cues, crisis blame frames, crisis severity, public demand, responsibility attribution

1 | INTRODUCTION

The social media era is witness to a growing number of crisis-and-issue-intertwined events (Institute for Crisis Management [ICM], 2019; Pfeffer et al., 2014). A crisis-and-issue-intertwined event refers to a corporate crisis wherein the company is an accused party, and the accusations tend to raise a new public concern or arouse controversial issues in the public domain (Ji & Kim, 2020; Johnen et al., 2018). The biggest corporate crises in recent years were highly entwined with social issues such as workplace discrimination, environmental protection, food safety, data privacy protection and sexual harassment (Institute for Crisis Management, 2019; The Holmes Report, 2019). Before the social media era, corporate crises that caused severe casualties would take on salience in the public domain (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Today, a corporate crisis—regardless of actual levels

of severity—may provoke debates on social media, raise societal-level concerns and matures into a high-profile social issue (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Einwiller et al., 2017).

When a corporate crisis spills over into the public domain and triggers public concerns, publics may demand regulatory intervention such as government regulations, legislation and public policy remediation (Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Hillier-Brown et al., 2014). They tend to do so to redress industry- or society-wide inappropriate behaviours (Ji & Kim, 2020). For instance, during Uber's sexism scandal in 2017, publics called for systematic changes to arbitration laws in California (Levin, 2018). Related but distinct from the concept of expectation, public demand—as an indispensable political voice—tends to be publicly expressed and salient appeals (Coulter, 1988; Oehl et al., 2017). Public demand usually appears in the form of or accompanied by civic initiatives, advocacy and activism (Chelminski &

Coulter, 2011; Sheaff et al., 2002). Compared to expectation, public demand for regulatory intervention has greater potential to bring actual nation-state regulation, to influence organizational behaviours and to drive societal-level changes (Egorovy & Harstadz, 2017). Once publics call for regulatory intervention, crisis managers must not only try to correct the reputational damage caused by a crisis but also need to prepare for possible government regulations and policy constraints (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Thus, crisis-communication scholars need to pay attention to this sort of public demand.

Based on a thorough examination of social media studies and crisis communication literature, this study identifies that social media bandwagon cues (bandwagon cues hereafter, and these are indicators such as the number of likes, comments and retweets) are a vital predictor of public demand. Bandwagon cues may cause publics to overestimate a crisis's severity due to a biased statistical sense of crisis information on social media (H. S. Kim & Shyam Sundar, 2014; Lim, 2017). The overestimated crisis severity may increase publics' crisis responsibility attribution (Iyengar, 1991; Ji & Kim, 2019; Lee, 2004). To radically protect public interests and avoid future occurrences of similar crises, the increased crisis responsibility attribution would lead publics to expect the crisis to be resolved at the societal level and demand regulatory intervention (Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Ji & Kim, 2020). In this sense, social media bandwagon cues would affect public demand through serially increasing levels of perceived crisis severity and responsibility attribution. Given that such a serial mediation mechanism has not been theorized and empirically tested, this study attempts to fill the void.

A dominant crisis communication approach primarily examines responsibility attribution in the organizational context where the in-crisis company (hereafter company) is the prescriptive agent expected to shoulder the blame (e.g., Coombs, 2007). However, this study proposes, based on media framing studies (Iyengar, 1991), a dual-agent approach to understand crisis responsibility attribution in the public domain. That is, publics may attribute responsibility both/either to a company and/or to social systems wherein the company operates. This dual-agent perspective could improve the applicability of attribution-related crisis communication theories at the societal level.

On social media, a piece of crisis information conveys both non-content cues such as bandwagon cues (i.e., the number of likes, comments and retweets) and content cues (i.e., salient attributes of a text) such as crisis blame frame (Entman, 1993; Sundar, 2008). Previous framing studies have found that when a social problem arises the most frequently used content frame is the blame frame, that is, who should be blamed for the social problem—either an agent who is trapped in a social problem (such as an in-crisis company) or social systems at large (An & Gower, 2009; Liu, 2010; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Such a crisis blame frame provides content cues for publics to interpret the problematic situation and to determine which agent should bear the blame. That is, exposure to crisis blame frames would influence publics' own responsibility attribution and

subsequent demand. Such a framing effect might change the aforementioned effect of bandwagon cues. Therefore, this study also examined whether crisis-blame-frame cues would moderate the effects of bandwagon cues on public demand through mediators. Such an investigation can capture nuances in social media effects. In addition, although the impacts of bandwagon cues on a variety of audiences' attitudes and behaviours have been extensively studied, there is a lack when it comes to public demand for regulatory intervention into corporate crises as a dependent variable (DV). Through introducing the relatively less-studied outcome variable, this paper could extend the scholarship concerning social media bandwagon cues.

This study also responds to previous calls for crisis communication research in nondemocratic countries (Huang et al., 2016). In selecting China as a research context, this study provides contextually and culturally sensitive insights into the crisis communication scholarship. The investigation of emerging public demand into corporate crisis may also contribute to public administration literature because public demand carries implications for government regulation and public policy making.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Public demand for regulatory intervention in China

Public demand for regulatory intervention (hereafter public demand) refers to publics' call, during a crisis-and-issue intertwined event, for societal-level solutions such as government regulations, legislation and public policy remediation (Ji & Kim, 2020). By articulating their demands, publics can put pressure on government agencies and politicians to take action (Oehl et al., 2017). It is worth noting that government agencies may not implement regulations if an in-crisis company can take a timely and effective crisis management. (Fredriksson, 2014). Public demand is more likely to occur in an authoritarian country such as China. In China, the only powerful and legitimate social actor for regulating unethical corporate behaviours tends to be the government (Huang & Kim, 2018). To ensure a corporate crisis to be properly addressed, Chinese publics tend to prefer calling for nation-state regulatory intervention. Moreover, due to limited institutionalized outlets to participate in political agendas, Chinese tend to actively express their opinions on civic affairs amid corporate crisis and seek policy remediation and legislation (Taneja & Wu, 2014; G. Yang, 2013).

2.2 | Dual-agents approach to crisis responsibility attribution

Coombs (2007) defines crisis responsibility attribution as the degree to which publics believe an in-crisis organization should be blamed and held responsible for a crisis. Such a conceptualization primarily

deals with a crisis in the organizational context and predominantly investigates whether or not a crisis-involved organization is the proper agent to bear crisis responsibility. However, in this social media era, a growing number of corporate crises start from a paracrisis (i.e., a publicly visible accusation) and, during subsequent online firestorms (i.e., a sudden discharge of large amounts of accusations), these crises become full-fledged (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Einwiller et al., 2017; Pfeffer et al., 2014). Such a corporate crisis on social media tends to easily become a high-profile issue in the public domain, that is, beyond the organizational contexts, and trigger public outcry towards social systems (Ji & Kim, 2019; G. Yang, 2013).

Media framing studies suggest that news media attribute crisis responsibilities to different levels of agents—either social systems or individual agents that are trapped in the social problem (Iyengar, 1991). Social systems are a set of interrelated institutions, including formal and informal organizations in addition to relevant social values, norms and laws (Groenewegen et al., 2010). Social systems provide background and infrastructure for social practices (Knight, 1992). Therefore, deficiencies inherent in certain social systems may be responsible for an individuals' dilemma. Iyengar (1991) labelled the media frame that attributes responsibilities to individuals as the episodic frame while attribution to social systems as the thematic frame. Episodic frames describe an issue in terms of personal experience, whereas thematic frames place an issue in a general context using abstract and impersonal terms (Iyengar, 1991).

Taking Iyengar's (1991) episodic-and-thematic typology, this study considers that, once a corporate crisis becomes salient and activates public outcry in the public domain, publics may attribute crisis responsibility to the company and/or social systems. From an episodic framing perspective, the crisis tends to be evaluated as being caused by the company, and the company should solve the crisis by modifying its wrongdoings. From the viewpoint of thematic framing, a corporate crisis may result from deficiencies in social systems, and remedies require societal intervention. In this sense, both an in-crisis organization and social systems can be agents that shoulder crisis responsibility. This study defines crisis responsibility of social systems as the degree to which publics believe social systems should be held responsible for a corporate crisis.

The dual-agent approach of responsibility attribution would be particularly applicable in China. Cultural psychology literature finds that attribution tendencies vary across cultures (Hong & Chiu, 2001; Morris & Peng, 1994). North Americans tend to engage in dispositional attribution, that is, attribute one's behaviours to their own traits. In contrast, East Asians are more likely to engage in both dispositional and situational attribution. Situational attribution means people may contextualize one's behaviour and evaluate whether the behaviour is subjected to social situation's restraints (Ross, 1977). Social situations have relatively fixed properties and cultural characteristics, which may affect social actors' actions (Menon et al., 1999). Therefore, in the face of irresponsible corporate behaviours, East Asians may attribute responsibility to both the company and social systems.

2.3 | The impacts of social media bandwagon cues

The term bandwagon indicates popular actions or beliefs of others (Simon, 1954). A cue refers to a heuristic or a mental shortcut that can assist people as they make a simple judgement with a minimum of time, knowledge and computation (Gigerenzer et al., 2000). Fiske and Taylor (1984) argued that people are cognitive misers who, when trying to arrive at a conclusion, prefer to spend only necessary cognitive resources. In the social media era, people rely more on bandwagon cues to process online information than they do in offline situations (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). On one hand, facing a surplus of online information, people trying to form judgements would like to conserve their cognitive efforts by relying on bandwagon cues. On the other hand, social media's technology affordances convey bandwagon cues, which facilitate users' engagement in heuristic processing, that is, relying on mentally-read heuristics to process information (Chaiken, 1980; Sundar, 2008). On social media, bandwagon cues are computed based on an aggregate of all users' behaviours such as the total number of likes, comments and shares (Lin et al.,2016; Sundar, 2008). These bandwagon cues may induce users' mental shortcuts concerning popularity and salience (J. Yang, 2016). The literature suggests that when publics perceive a crisis as a publicly salient one, they tend to overestimate the adverse effects that the crisis has on the well-being of a society, and thus call for societal level solutions (H. S. Kim & Shyam Sundar, 2014; Lim, 2017). Therefore, this study proposes that social media bandwagon cues may contribute to public demands for regulatory intervention.

H1: *A high level of bandwagon cues leads to more public demand for regulatory intervention than a low level of bandwagon cues.*

Regarding the underlying mechanisms of bandwagon cues' impacts on public demand, literature reveals significant mediating roles of crisis severity and people's own attributional activities (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; H. S. Kim & Shyam Sundar, 2014; Lee, 2004; Lim, 2017). Crisis severity refers to 'the amount of damage generated by a crisis' (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; p.169). Without knowing exact damages, publics may perceive crisis severity based on social media salience (H. S. Kim & Shyam Sundar, 2014). When publics are exposed to a publicly salient crisis, they tend to perceive larger crisis severity than what actually is (Lim, 2017). Crisis severity is an imperative predictor of publics' attributional activities (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Lee, 2004).

A fundamental psychological need of publics is served by being able to attribute responsibility (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1985). As discussed above, during a crisis-and-issue-intertwined event, people tend to attribute responsibility to dual agents, that is, an in-crisis company and/or social systems. Although responsibility attribution to both agents may contribute to public demand, in China, there is considerable variance in the fundamental reasons behind people calling for regulatory intervention (Huang & Kim, 2018; Ji & Kim, 2019). Specifically, when publics attribute responsibility to the in-crisis company, their demand for regulatory intervention might be because they would like to browbeat the in-crisis company through the Chinese government's power. In this

sense, Chinese government stands in as a proxy agent of publics (Ji & Kim, 2020). In China, companies generally consider the government as mostly the primary stakeholder and strive to meet its expectations; as for the general public' appeals and accusations, in contrast, the same companies are highly likely to ignore them (He & Tian, 2008; Li & Zhang, 2010). That is why Chinese people tend to rely on the government to regulate a company's unethical behaviours.

When publics perceive more crisis severity, they may also attribute more responsibility to social systems and thus demand regulatory intervention. Partly due to the biased statistical inference, publics may assume the severe crisis issue is widely existed and thus infer deficiencies in social systems (Iyengar, 1991; H. S. Kim & Shyam Sundar, 2014). To avoid future occurrences of similar crises, societal level remedies such as government regulation and legislation seem to be necessary (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). In this sense, public demand for regulatory intervention tends to be because of their expectations of systematic changes. To figure out fundamental explanations regarding the impacts of bandwagon cues on public demand, this study considers crisis severity to be a first mediator and responsibility attribution to the in-crisis company and responsibility attribution to social systems as parallel mediators. Therefore, a hypothesis regarding mediation mechanisms is proposed below.

H2: *The high level of bandwagon cues would increase perceived crisis severity, which in turn would increase responsibility attributions to (a) the in-crisis company and (b) to social systems, and finally bringing about more calls for regulatory intervention than the low level of bandwagon cues.*

2.4 | The moderating effects of exposure to crisis-blame-frame cues

When publics are exposed to bandwagon cues on social media, they are concurrently exposed to the content of social media posts. Media framing literature suggests that, during a negative event, the most frequently-employed and situation-relevant content frame is the responsibility frame (An & Gower, 2009; Kuttschreuter et al., 2011). Responsibility frames can help audiences define the problems induced by the crisis, diagnose crisis causes, evaluate crisis responsibilities and seek out remedies (Entman, 1993). On social media, ordinary users also prefer to employ responsibility frames to express opinions (Choi & Lin, 2009). Prior literature suggests that a piece of media coverage tends to attribute overarching responsibilities to one agent at one time, that is, either to the in-crisis company or to social systems (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

For audiences who know little about a crisis, if a frame cue is immediately accessible, their own attribution may be vulnerable to the influence of the frame (Entman, 1993). When people are exposed to a piece of crisis information with a frame that blames a company, they are more likely to attribute the crisis responsibility to the company. If people are exposed to a message that considers social systems should be blamed, they may attribute responsibility to social systems (Semetko &

Valkenburg, 2000). In this sense, crisis-blame-frame cues may enhance the impacts of bandwagon cues on responsibility attribution and subsequent public demand. That is, for those exposed to blame-company frames, the impacts of exposure to bandwagon cues on publics' responsibility attribution to the in-crisis company would increase. For those exposed to blame-social-system frames, the impacts of bandwagon cues on responsibility attribution to social systems would improve. This study thus proposes two moderated mediation effects.

H3: *Crisis-blame-frame cues would moderate the mediation effects of bandwagon cues on public demand through publics' own responsibility attribution to (a) an in-crisis company and (b) social systems.*

3 | STUDY 1

3.1 | Procedure and design

Study 1 tests the relationship between bandwagon cues and public demand during a real-occurring crisis. The experiment employed a 2 (crisis-blame-frame cues [frame cues]: company vs. social systems) x 2 (bandwagon cues: high vs. low) between-subjects design. Participants were 228 college students from a large university in southern China. Each participant was rewarded CNY 3. For a 5 min survey, the amount is reasonable. Participants were randomly and equally assigned across conditions.

The experiment was conducted through an online survey. At the outset, participants were informed that they would read a social media post commenting on a negative event. Then, participants were exposed to the post (with frame cues and bandwagon cues being manipulated) for 20 s. After reading the post, participants were asked to respond to measures of public demand and manipulation check questions. They were then debriefed and thanked.

3.2 | Stimuli development

Two pretests were performed to develop proper stimuli. Pretest 1 (N = 44) was served to construct a fictitious social media user profile, and based on results, a profile of Su Fan [a gender-neutral and ordinary Chinese name and profile photo] was constructed. Pretest 2 (N = 30) was conducted to select a highly concerned crisis issue. As a result, a real company's (Ctrip, an online travel agency) real user data leakage crisis was employed as a scenario.

Based on above two pretests, two pieces of social media post content of similar lengths and structures were created with frames that blamed either the company or social systems. Frame-cues manipulation was adapted from Iyengar (1991). Bandwagon-cues manipulation was adapted from Lim (2017). High-level cues displayed 27K likes, 3.2K comments and 5.3K retweets, while low-level cues showed one like, comment and retweet, respectively.

The experiment stimuli simulated Weibo (i.e., equivalent to Twitter) interface (see Appendix 1 for stimuli). A third pretest (N = 64)

was performed to ensure no statistical differences among manipulated crisis frames stimuli in terms of their readability, comprehensibility and argument strength.

3.3 | Measures

3.3.1 | Manipulation checks (MC)

For frame cues, participants were asked to answer a single-answer question: 'Whom did the post blame more for the user data leakage scandal?' Two options are provided: (a) Ctrip, b) our society as a whole. For bandwagon cues, participants were asked to respond to three statements on a 7-point-agreement Likert scale concerning the numbers of likes, comments and retweets (e.g., 'many people liked/commented on/or retweeted this post').

3.3.2 | Public demand for regulatory intervention

Four items adapted from Ji and Kim (2020) were used. They were 'I would demand (1) government to regulate/(2) appeal for legislation/(3) call for the adoption of public policies/(4) demand regulatory intervention regarding user data leakage issue' (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; $M = 6.21$; $SD = 0.76$; Cronbach's $a = .86$).

3.4 | Results

3.4.1 | MC

For frame cues, logistic regression analysis with frame cues and bandwagon cues as independent variables and the MC of frame cues as a DV. Results revealed a successful manipulation, the significance only for the main effect of frame cues ($\chi^2[1] = 247.80$, $p < .001$; $M_{company}$ [SD] = 1.02 [0.130]; M_{social} [SD] = 1.94 [0.23]) without other significant effects. For bandwagon cues, a two-way ANOVA (the MC of bandwagon cues as DV) revealed a significant main effect of bandwagon cues ($F[1, 224] = 571.83$, $p < .001$; M_{high} [SD] = 5.88 [0.80]; M_{low} [SD] = 2.18 [1.45]). There were no other significant effects Figure 1.

3.5 | Main effect testing

H1 is concerned with the main effect of bandwagon cues on public demand. A two-way ANOVA found a significant main effect (M_{high} [SD] = 6.36 [0.57], M_{low} [SD] = 6.08 [0.88]; $F[1, 244] = 7.02$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = 0.03$), supporting H1. Results also revealed a significant interaction effect of bandwagon cues and frame cues on public demand ($F[1, 244] = 6.76$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = 0.03$). See Figure 2 for details. There was no significant main effect of frame cues ($M_{com}[SD] = 6.17$ [0.85], $M_{soc}[SD] = 6.27$ [0.65]; $F[1, 244] = 0.38$, $p > .05$).

3.6 | Discussion

Study 1 found that during Ctrip's data-privacy-leakage crisis, when publics were exposed to a social media post with a great number of likes, comments, and retweets, they were more likely to demand regulatory intervention. The interaction effects indicated that such a bandwagon-cue effect was particularly significant for participants who read the post blaming the company, Ctrip; for those in the
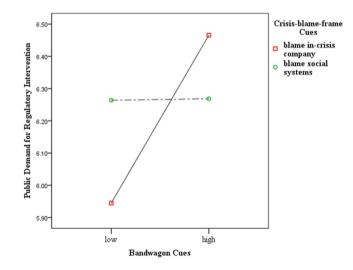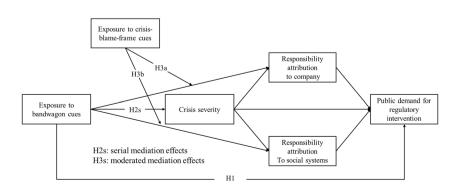

FIGURE 2 The interaction between bandwagon cues and frame cues on public demand (study 1)

FIGURE 1 Conceptual framework

blame-society frame conditions, regardless of levels of bandwagon cues, their demand was at a relatively stable level. The insignificant main effect of blame-frame cues suggested that, regardless of whether publics were exposed to frames that attributed blame to an in-crisis company or to social systems, they were about equally likely to call for regulatory intervention.

Using a real company and a data leakage crisis that occurred in the past as a scenario, the findings of Study 1 had a relatively high external validity. The significantly direct relationship between social media bandwagon cues and public demand provides a precondition to further explore the underlying mechanisms in the process. To strengthen internal validity of mechanism examinations, Study 2 was performed using a fictitious company and its sexual harassment scandal to develop stimuli. Previous literature recommends that using multiple stimuli and replicating experimental research could improve ecological validity and research rigorousness (Reeves et al., 2016; von Sikorski et al., 2018). In addition, Study 1 used a student sample, which was relatively convenient and less costly. To increase the generalizability of findings, Study 2 employed a nationally representative sample.

4 | STUDY 2

4.1 | Procedure and design

Study 2 attempts to replicate Study 1 and to test underlying mechanisms regarding why bandwagon cues exposure would affect public demand. The experiment also had a 2 (frame cues: company vs. social systems) x 2 (bandwagon cues: high vs. low) between-subjects design. The sample consisted of 651 responses. The sample is considered representative to the population of Chinese netizens in terms of gender and age distributions (CNNIC, 2018). Ages ranged from 18 to 64 ($M = 32.71$; $SD = 9.21$); 47.6% were female. Participants were recruited through a consumer panel managed by Dynata; Dynata charged CNY 8 for a valid response. The procedure was similar to that of Study 1. The difference was that after reading the post, participants were asked to rate public demand, responsibility attribution of social systems, responsibility attribution of the in-crisis company, perceived crisis severity in addition to MC and demographics.

4.2 | Stimuli development

A pretest ($N = 55$) was performed to select the name and industry of a fictitious company as well as a crisis-issue-intertwined scenario. Based on the results, Tebalon (a fictitious online real estate database company) and a sexual harassment crisis scenario were constructed. Referring to the content structure developed in Study 1, two messages of similar lengths were created to manipulate crisis blame frames. Bandwagon cues were manipulated the same as in Study 1. See Appendix 2 for stimuli.

4.3 | Measures

Manipulation check and public demand ($M = 6.16$; $SD = 0.81$; Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$.) measures were similar to those in Study 1. *Crisis responsibility attribution* to an in-crisis company ($M = 5.99$, $SD = 1.04$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$) and social systems ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.30$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$) were measured with three items adapted from Klein and Dawar (2004) and S. Kim (2014). A sample item was that I think Tebalon/our society as a whole is highly responsible for its sexual harassment issue. *Perceived crisis severity* has been measured with one item (Lee, 2004). It was 'how severe do you think the Tebalon sexual harassment crisis is?' on a seven-point Likert scale ($M = 5.95$, $SD = 0.94$).

4.4 | Results

4.4.1 | MC

Study 2 found a successful manipulation of frame cues as the logistic regression analysis demonstrated a significant main effect of frame cues ($\chi^2[1] = 605.92$, $p < .001$; $M_{company}$ [SD] = 1.04 [0.20]; M_{social} [SD] = 1.92 [0.27]) and insignificant effects of the bandwagon cues and the insignificant interaction effect on the MC of frame cues. Study 2 also showed a successful manipulation of bandwagon cues because the ANOVA results revealed a significant main effect of bandwagon cues ($F[1, 647] = 1549.48$, $p < .001$; M_{high} [SD] = 5.87 [0.79]; M_{low} [SD] = 2.20 [1.49]) and no other significant effects on the MC of bandwagon cues.

4.4.2 | Main effect testing

To test H1, a two-way ANOVA was performed. Results revealed similar patterns to those in Study 1. That is, there were a significantly positive main effect of bandwagon cues on public demand (M_{high} [SD] = 6.31 [0.68], M_{low} [SD] = 6.00 [0.90]; $F[1, 647] = 15.03$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.04$), a significant interaction effect ($F[1, 647] = 2.47$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2_p = 0.01$), but an insignificant main effect of frame cues ($M_{com}[SD]$ = 6.14 [0.85], $M_{soc}[SD]$ = 6.19 [0.78]; $F[1, 647] = 0.82$, $p > .05$). See Figure 3 for details. Despite similar patterns in the two studies, there was a slight difference. When participants read the post blaming society during the sexual harassment crisis, with an increase in levels of bandwagon cues, they were more likely to demand regulatory intervention. However, during the data leakage crisis (Study 1), the likelihood of public demand did not change much, regardless of levels of bandwagon cues. This inconsistence indicates that for participants in the blame-society conditions, the positive effect of bandwagon cues on public demand was larger during a sexual harassment crisis than during a data leakage crisis.

4.4.3 | Serial mediation testing

To test H2s, Hayes (2018) PROCESS model 81 was performed (10,000 bootstrap samples for bias-corrected bootstrap, 95% bootstrap CIs).
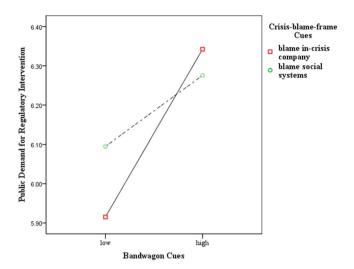
FIGURE 3 The interaction between bandwagon cues and frame cues on public demand (study 2)

Results revealed that two types of serial mediation effects (X [bandwagon cues]→$M1$ [crisis severity]→M_2 [attribution to company]→Y [public demand]: *Effect* = 0.02, SE = 0.01, CIs = [0.01−0.05] and $X → M_1 → M_3$ [attribution to social systems]→Y: *Effect* = 0.01, SE = 0.01, CIs = [0.01−0.02]) were positive and significant because CIs were above zero, supporting both H2a and H2b. As levels of bandwagon cues increased, people perceived larger crisis severity ($β$ = .22, p < .01), which in turn led to more responsibility attribution of either the in-crisis company ($β$ = .59, p < .001) or social systems ($β$ = .26, p < .001), and ultimately contributed to public demand ($M_2 → Y$: $β$ = .21, p < .001; $M_3 → Y$: $β$ = .09, p < .05). Results also showed that the indirect effects of bandwagon cues on public demand were statistically significant (CIs did not include zero) when perceived crisis severity ($X → M_1 → Y$: *Effect* = 0.06, SE = 0.02, CIs = [0.06−0.19]) or responsibility attribution of social systems ($X → M_3 → Y$: *Effect* = 0.02, SE = 0.01, CIs = [0.01−0.04]) as a single mediator. That said, with the increase in levels of bandwagon cues, people perceived higher levels of crisis severity ($β$ = .22, p < .01) or attributed more responsibility to social systems ($β$ = .23, p < .01), which led to more public demand ($M_1 → Y$: $β$ = .25, p < .001; $M_3 → Y$: $β$ = .09, p < .05). However, when responsibility attribution of the in-crisis company as a single mediator ($X → M_2 → Y$: *Effect* = 0.02, SE = 0.01, CIs = [−0.01 to 0.10]), the mediation effect was not significant (CIs included zero). Specific path results show that the impact of bandwagon cues on responsibility attribution of the company was insignificant ($β$ = .11, p > .05). In short, the indirect effects of bandwagon cues on public demand took place via four paths. Summarized regression coefficients and model effects can be seen in Table 1.

4.4.4 | Moderated mediation testing

H3 addressed whether frame cues moderated the indirect effects of bandwagon cues on public demand through publics' own attributional activities. To test H3s, PROCESS model 8 was performed with responsibility attribution to the in-crisis company and attribution to social

systems as parallel mediators (see Table 2 for summarized regression coefficients and model effects). Results showed that the indirect effects of bandwagon cues on public demand through responsibility attribution to the company did not change by levels of frame cues as CIs levels included zero for the index of moderated mediation (index = −0.07, SE = 0.05, CIs = [−0.08 to 0.03]). In contrast, the simple mediation effect through responsibility attribution to social systems depended on the varying levels of frame cues as CIs levels were above zero for the index of moderated mediation (index = 0.04, SE = 0.02, CIs = [0.01−0.09]). Therefore, H3a was not supported, but H3b was supported. The interaction between bandwagon cues and frame cues on attribution of social systems was significantly positive (b = 0.46, p < .05). As can be seen from Figure 4, for both frame cues, as bandwagon cues increased, the positive impact of bandwagon cues on responsibility attribution to social system increased; the bandwagon cue effect was larger among those exposed to the crisis frame cues of blaming social systems than the frame cues of blaming the company.

4.5 | Discussion

Study 2 replicated the findings of Study 1. That is, with the increase in levels of bandwagon cues, the likelihood of public demand increased too; such positive main effect was larger for participants in the blame-company conditions than those in blame-society conditions. These findings provide additional evidence that a high level of bandwagon cues led to more public demand than a low level of bandwagon cues during the sexual harassment crisis. By using a fictitious company and its sexual harassment crisis scenario, this study strengthens both internal validity and ecological validity. Using a nationally representative sample, Study 2 also enhances the finding's generalizability.

Study 2 also broadened the research scope of Study 1 through investigating serial mediation and moderated mediation mechanisms in the process. The results support the predictions of serial mediation models. That is, a high level of bandwagon cues on social media would amplify people's perceptions of crisis severity. Stronger crisis severity perceptions would lead to more crisis responsibility attributions to both the company and to social systems. Increased responsibility attribution finally contributes to public demand for regulatory intervention. Study 2 also provided evidence that crisis-blame-frame cues were boundary conditions for the effects of bandwagon cues on publics' own responsibility attribution to social systems and subsequent public demand. When publics read a post blaming society, they were more vulnerable to the influence of bandwagon cues on their own responsibility attribution to social systems than those who read a post blaming the company.

5 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

This paper aims to investigate whether and why social media bandwagon cues on social media contribute to public demand for regulatory intervention in crisis-and-issue-entwined events. This

TABLE 1 Standardized OLS regression coefficients with confidence intervals (CI) estimating crisis severity, responsibility attribution, and public demand (Model 81)

	Perceived crisis severity (M_1)		Attribution to company (M_2)		Attribution to social systems (M_3)		Public demand for regulatory intervention (Y)	
	Coeff. (SE)	CI levels	Coeff. (SE)	CI levels	Coeff. (SE)	CI levels	Coeff. (SE)	CI levels
Bandwagon cues (X)	0.22**(0.07)	[0.07–0.35]						
Sex (male = 0)	0.10*(0.07)	[0.04–0.33]						
X			0.11 (0.06)	[−0.01 to 0.24]				
M_1			0.59***(0.04)	[0.58–0.72]				
Income			0.09**(0.03)	[0.02–0.14]				
X					0.23**(0.09)	[0.12–0.50]		
M_1					0.26***(0.05)	[0.26–0.46]		
Income					0.10**(0.04)	[0.02–0.20]		
X							0.25***(0.05)	[0.09–0.31]
M_1							0.31***(0.04)	[0.20–0.35]
M_2							0.21***(0.03)	[0.11–0.23]
M_3							0.09* (0.02)	[0.01–0.09]
Age							−0.13***(0.01)	[−0.02 to −0.01]
Constant			5.07 (0.29)	[4.48–5.65]	2.10 (0.44)	[1.25–2.96]	3.51 (0.25)	[3.02–4.01]
	$R^2 = 0.03$		$R^2 = 0.37$		$R^2 = 0.12$		$R^2 = 0.31$	
	$F_{(5, 645)} = 4.34$		$F_{(6, 644)} = 63.57$		$F_{(6, 644)} = 14.51$		$F_{(8, 642)} = 36.10$	

Indirect effects of X on Y				
Serial mediation models	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
X → M_1 → Y	0.06	0.02	0.06	0.19
X → M_2 → Y	0.02	0.01	−0.01	0.10
X → M_3 → Y	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.04
X → M_1 → M_2 → Y	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.05
X → M_1 → M_3 → Y	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02

Abbreviation: Coeff., coefficients.

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$.

study demonstrates the high level of bandwagon cues contributed to more public demand during both data privacy leakage and sexual harassment crisis issues. Such a main effect sheds light on an emerging phenomenon that when a corporate crisis goes viral and has devolved into a high-profile social issue on social media, publics tend to call for regulatory intervention (Ji & Kim, 2020). This finding implies that publics' perceptions of whether a crisis pertains to beyond or within the organizational contexts could be dependent on bandwagon cues.

This study also theoretically proposed and empirically tested a mediation mechanism, explaining the relationship between bandwagon cues and public demand for regulatory intervention. Publics exposed to a post with a great number of likes, shares, and comments are more likely to overestimate crisis severity and negativity (Lim, 2017; Sung & Hwang, 2014). The heightened levels of crisis severity

perceptions would translate into more crisis responsibility attribution to both the in-crisis company and social systems (Coombs, 2007; Iyengar, 1991). When publics heavily blame the in-crisis company in China, they may expect the company to be regulated by the government and thus call for regulatory intervention (Huang and Kim, 2018). When publics attribute crisis responsibility to deficiencies in social systems, they may expect societal- or market-level changes and thus demand regulatory intervention (Taneja & Wu, 2014; G. Yang, 2013).

It is worth noting that, in the process of public demand, both the in-crisis company and social systems were considered agents bearing crisis responsibility in China, endorsing the dual-agent approach of responsibility attribution during crisis-and-issue entwined events. The dual-agent approach echoes Iyengar's (1991) idea that both social systems and individuals trapped in a dilemma were agents to shoulder responsibility.

TABLE 2 Unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with confidence intervals (CI) estimating responsibility attribution and public demand (Model 8)

	Attribution to company (M₂)		Attribution to social systems (M₃)		Public demand for regulatory intervention	
	Coeff. (SE)	CI levels	Coeff. (SE)	CI levels	Coeff. (SE)	CI levels
Bandwagon cues (X)	0.36** (0.11)	[0.14–0.59]				
Frame cues (W)	−0.10 (0.11)	[−0.33 to 0.12]				
X × W	−0.23 (0.16)	[−0.55 to 0.08]				
Education	0.09* (0.04)	[0.01–0.16]				
Income	0.11** (0.04)	[0.04–0.19]				
X			0.15 (0.14)	[−0.12 to 0.43]		
W			−0.23 (0.14)	[0.51–0.05]		
X × W			0.46* (0.20)	[0.06–0.85]		
Sex (male = 0)			0.28** (0.10)	[0.08–0.48]		
Age			0.01* (0.01)	[0.01–0.02]		
Income			0.12** (0.05)	[0.04–0.22]		
X					0.34*** (0.08)	[0.19–0.50]
W					0.27*** (0.08)	[0.11–0.43]
M₂					0.31*** (0.03)	[0.26–0.37]
M₃					0.09*** (0.02)	[0.04–0.13]
X × W					−0.25*** (0.03)	[−0.50 to −0.03]
Age					−0.01*** (0.01)	[−0.02 to −0.01]
Constant	5.07 (0.29)	[4.48–5.65]	3.60 (0.37)	[2.86–4.33]	3.98 (0.25)	[3.48–4.47]
	$R^2 = 0.06$		$R^2 = 0.06$		$R^2 = 0.26$	
	$F_{(7, 643)} = 5.32$		$F_{(7, 643)} = 6.03$		$F_{(9, 641)} = 25.30$	
Indices of moderated mediation						
Moderator: Frame cues	**Index**		**BootSE**	**BootLLCI**		**BootULCI**
X → M₂ → Y	−0.07		0.05	−0.18		0.03
X → M₃ → Y	0.04		0.02	0.01		0.09

Note: Only significant demographic variables are presented here.

Abbreviation: Coeff., coefficients.

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$.

This approach also endorses conclusions in cultural psychology that Chinese people would like to engage in both dispositional and situational attribution (Menon et al., 1999; Morris & Peng, 1994).

In addition to the serial mediation models, this study found simple mediation effects through crisis severity alone or only through attribution to social systems. The crisis-severity mediated model indicated that without going through one's own attributional activities, a person might decide to call for regulatory intervention if they believe a crisis is too severe to be handled by the in-crisis company. The finding supports the argument that publics tend to demand regulatory intervention when they believe that the crisis-involved company is unable to clear up the damage (Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997). Besides, without perceived crisis severity, publics may call for regulatory intervention when they think deficiencies

inherent in social systems should be responsible for the corporate crisis (Iyengar, 1991). That might be because China lacks institutionalized outlets for political participation; Chinese publics thus tend to vent various grievances against social systems under the banner of domestic non-politics-related topics such as corporate crisis (Yang, 2009). In this sense, when a corporate crisis occurs, Chinese people may blame social systems and call for social changes. In contrast, responsibility attribution to the company alone did not lead to public demand. That means, if publics only blame the company for its crisis, they may think it is unnecessary to call for societal-level remedies. The in-crisis company tends to be the primary agent in dealing with its crisis in the organizational context (e.g., Coombs, 2007).

Regarding the moderated mediation mechanism, this study discovered that indirect effects of bandwagon cues on public demand
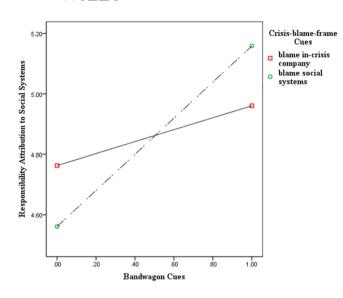
FIGURE 4 The interaction between bandwagon cues and frame cues on responsibility attribution to social systems (study 2)

through responsibility attribution to social systems depend on levels of crisis blame frames. The impacts of bandwagon cues are greater on attribution of social systems when people are exposed to a post with the crisis frame cues of blaming social systems than blaming the company. That suggests, as for the levels of publics' own responsibility attribution to social systems, framing effects can enhance bandwagon effects. This finding echoes what media framing studies expected, that is, responsibility frames significantly impact recipients' own attributions (Borah, 2011; Entman, 1993). However, crisis-blame-frame cues did not moderate the effects of bandwagon cues on publics' own responsibility attribution to the in-crisis company. These findings seem plausible given a primary agent to shoulder crisis responsibility could be the in-crisis company rather than social systems (Coombs, 2007). No matter which blame frames that publics were exposed to, they naturally attribute responsibility to the in-crisis company, that is, attending to dispositional attribution (Morris & Peng, 1994). However, a logical link between a corporate crisis and deficiencies in social systems is needed. From a dynamic constructivist approach to culture, publics are more likely to associate a corporate crisis with its social context when situational cues are provided (Hong et al., 2000).

6 | THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study sheds light on an emerging phenomenon—when a corporate crisis spills over from the organizational context into the public domain where they become socially salient issues, there is a rise in public demand for regulatory intervention (Ji & Kim, 2020). As an early attempt, this study theoretically proposes and empirically confirms a relatively comprehensive model to explain the role that bandwagon cues exposure plays in the process and its underlying mechanisms. The theoretical framework contributes to establishing a linkage between research agendas in organizational communication and that in the public domain.

This study also adds fresh evidence to the growing body of knowledge that bandwagon cues can influence audiences' attitudes and behaviours. The impacts of bandwagon cues were primarily investigated under the contexts of selective news exposure, public opinion estimations, source credibility evaluations, and consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. The current study adds another new layer that bandwagon cues can facilitate and translate into public demand for regulatory intervention. Moreover, the dual-agent approach to responsibility attribution provides compelling insights into attribution-related theories (Coombs, 2007; S. Kim, 2014; Lee, 2004). Besides, this study offers culturally relevant insights for understanding Chinese publics' social media exposure, attributional activities and demand for regulatory intervention into corporate crises.

From a practical standpoint, this study recommends crisis managers monitor the emergence of bandwagon cues and devote their crisis management efforts as soon as possible. Otherwise, once a piece of crisis information goes viral on social media (i.e., attracting a great number of likes, comments and shares), publics may be motivated to call for regulatory intervention. Given public demand carries implications for actual implementations of government regulations and policies, crisis managers may have to deal with challenges derived from the crisis itself and new regulations resulting from public demand. This study recommends that, from a managerial perspective, companies should combine issue management and crisis management functions within their organizational structures (Jaques, 2012). Crisis managers should improve emergency handling and public affairs management expertise and take a strategic perspective to blend crisis preparedness with systematic issue-management planning (Heath & Palenchar, 2009).

7 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

The findings should be cautiously interpreted given the following limitations. The effect size of bandwagon cues exposure on public demand was small. As limited effects theory suggests, media effects tend to be small, limited and conditional media effects (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948). However, this study still encourages future studies to explore whether the effect size of bandwagon cues would be larger if using other experimental stimuli. Besides, this study defined crisis severity as the degree to which people considered a crisis severe and measured it using a single-item scale. This study recommends future studies deliberately theorizing and measuring this construct. That is because this construct can be defined in multiple ways (e.g., Laufer et al., 2005; Zhou & Ki, 2018). While the single-item measure was easy for participants to respond to, its reliability and construct validity cannot be tested. Moreover, Study 1 employed a real

company's crisis as scenario. The prior reputation of the company was not controlled, which might threaten the internal validity of Study 1. In addition, although the study provided conceptual understandings of crisis-and-issue intertwined events, it neither categorized such events nor made connections with existing typologies of corporate crisis such as crisis types of situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2014) as well as corporate ability and corporate social responsibility crisis types (e.g., S. Kim, 2014; Sohn & Lariscy, 2015). As a result, crisis-and-issue intertwined events tend to be a broad concept in this study, and practitioners may find it difficult to apply our conclusions into practice. We thus call for future studies to categorize crisis-and-issue intertwined events and bridge such events with widely-applied crisis types. Last, this study set the research context in China. It is noteworthy that the economic system in China is distinct from those in democratic countries (Baron, 2003; Ji & Kim, 2019). This study suggests future studies examining the across-culture consistencies and differences.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

None.

ORCID

Yingru Ji http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2969-2947

REFERENCES

An, S. K., & Gower, K. K. (2009). How do the news media frame crises? A content analysis of crisis news coverage. *Public Relations Review*, *35*(2), 107–112. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.01.010

Baron, D. P. (2003). Private politics. *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy*, *12*(1), 31–66. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1430-9134.2003.00031.x

Borah, P. (2011). Conceptual issues in framing theory: A systematic examination of a decade's literature. *Journal of Communication*, *61*(2), 246–263. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01539.x

Chaiken, S. (1980). Heuristic versus systematic information processing and the use of source versus message cues in persuasion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *39*(5), 752–766. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.39.5.752

Chelminski, P., & Coulter, R. A. (2011). An examination of consumer advocacy and complaining behavior in the context of service failure. *Journal of Services Marketing*, *25*(5), 361–370. https://doi.org/10.1108/08876041111149711

Choi, Y., & Lin, Y. H. (2009). Consumer response to crisis: Exploring the concept of involvement in Mattel product recalls. *Public Relations Review*, *35*(1), 18–22. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2008.09.009

CNNIC. (2018, August 20). China Internet Network Information Center 2018 annual report. http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201808/P020180820630889299840.pdf

Coombs, W. T. (2007). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, *10*(3), 163–176. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550049

Coombs, W. T. (2014). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding*. Sage Publications.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2002). Helping crisis managers protect reputational assets: Initial tests of the situational crisis communication theory. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *16*(2), 165–186. https://doi.org/10.1177/089331802237233

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, J. S. (2012). The paracrisis: The challenges created by publicly managing crisis prevention. *Public Relations Review*, *38*(3), 408–415. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2012.04.004

Coulter, P. B. (1988). *Political voice: Citizen demand for urban public services* (Vol. 1). University of Alabama Press.

Egorovy, G., & Harstadz, B. (2017). Private politics and public regulation. *The Review of Economic Studies*, *84*(4), 1652–1682. https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdx009

Einwiller, S., Viererbl, B., & Himmelreich, S. (2017). Journalists' coverage of online firestorms in German-language news media. *Journalism Practice*, *11*(9), 1178–1197. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2016.1229578

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, *43*(4), 51–58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x

Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (1984). *Social cognition*. Addison-Wesley.

Fredriksson, M. (2014). Crisis communication as institutional maintenance. *Public Relations Inquiry*, *3*(3), 319–340. https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X14536724

Gigerenzer, G., & Todd, P. M., ABC Research Group. (2000). *Simple heuristics that make us smart*. Oxford University Press.

Groenewegen, J., Spithoven, A. H. G. M., & van den Berg, A. (2010). *Institutional economics: An introduction*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Hayes, A. F. (2018). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. Guilford Publications.

Heath, R. L., & Palenchar, M. J. (2009). Issue management and crisis communication. In R. L. Heath & M. J. Palenchar (Eds.), *Strategic issues management: Organizations and public policy challenges* (2nd ed., pp. 125–156). Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452274829.n8

Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. Psychology Press.

He, Y., & Tian, Z. (2008). Government-oriented corporate public relation strategies in transitional China. *Management and Organization Review*, *4*(3), 367–391. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-8784.2008.00119.x

Hillier-Brown, F. C., Bambra, C. L., Cairns, J. M., Kasim, A., Moore, H. J., & Summerbell, C. D. (2014). A systematic review of the effectiveness of individual, community and societal level interventions at reducing socioeconomic inequalities in obesity amongst children. *BMC Public Health*, *14*(1), 834. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-834

Hong, Y., & Chiu, C. (2001). Toward a paradigm shift: From cross-cultural differences in social cognition to social-cognitive mediation of cultural differences. *Social Cognition*, *19*(3), 181–196. https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.19.3.181.21471

Hong, Y.-Y., Morris, M. W., Chiu, C.-Y., & Benet-Martínez, V. (2000). Multicultural minds: A dynamic constructivist approach to culture and cognition. *American Psychologist*, *55*(7), 709–720. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.7.709

Huang, Y. H. C., & Kim, S. (2018). Cultures of crisis response: Chinese public relations practices in context. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, *11*(1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2018.1426373

Huang, Y. H. C., Wu, F., & Cheng, Y. (2016). Crisis communication in context: Cultural and political influences underpinning Chinese public relations practice. *Public Relations Review*, *42*(1), 201–213. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2015.11.015

Institute for Crisis Management. (2019). ICM annual crisis report. https://crisisconsultant.com/icm-annual-crisis-report/

Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible?: How television frames political issues*. University of Chicago Press.

Jaques, T. (2012). Is issue management evolving or progressing towards extinction: A status review. *Public Communication Review*, 2(1), 35–44. https://doi.org/10.5130/pcr.v2i1.2183

Ji, Y., & Kim, S. (2019). Communication-mediated psychological mechanisms of Chinese publics' post-crisis corporate associations and government associations. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 27(2), 182–194. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12255

Ji, Y., & Kim, S. (2020). Crisis-induced public demand for regulatory intervention in the social media era. *New Media & Society*, 22(6), 959–983. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819874473

Johnen, M., Jungblut, M., & Ziegele, M. (2018). The digital outcry: What incites participation behavior in an online firestorm? *New Media & Society*, 20(9), 3140–3160. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817741883

Kim, H. S., & Shyam Sundar, S. (2014). Can online buddies and bandwagon cues enhance user participation in online health communities? *Computers in Human Behavior*, 37, 319–333. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.04.039

Kim, S. (2014). The role of prior expectancies and relational satisfaction in crisis. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 91(1), 139–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699013514413

Klein, J., & Dawar, N. (2004). Corporate social responsibility and consumers' attributions and brand evaluations in a product–harm crisis. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 21(3), 203–217. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2003.12.003

Knight, J. (1992). *Institutions and social conflict*. Cambridge University Press.

Kuttschreuter, M., Gutteling, J. M., & de Hond, M. (2011). Framing and tone-of-voice of disaster media coverage: The aftermath of the Enschede fireworks disaster in the Netherlands. *Health, Risk & Society*, 13(3), 201–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698575.2011.558620

Laufer, D., Gillespie, K., McBride, B., & Gonzalez, S. (2005). The role of severity in consumer attributions of blame: Defensive attributions in product-harm crises in Mexico. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 17(2–3), 33–50. https://doi.org/10.1300/j046v17n02_03

Lazarsfeld, P. F., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H. (1948). *The people's choice: How the voter makes up his mind in a presidential election*. Sloan and Pearce.

Lee, B. K. (2004). Audience-oriented approach to crisis communication: A study of Hong Kong consumers' evaluation of an organizational crisis. *Communication Research*, 31(5), 600–618. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650204267936

Levin, S. (2018, April 12). *Susan fowler's plan after Uber? Tear down the system that protects harassers*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/apr/11/susan-fowler-uber-interview-forced-arbitration-law

Lim, J. S. (2017). How a paracrisis situation is instigated by an online firestorm and visual mockery: Testing a paracrisis development model. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 67, 252–263. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.10.032

Lin, X., Spence, P. R., Sellnow, T. L., & Lachlan, K. A. (2016). Crisis communication, learning and responding: Best practices in social media. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 65, 601–605. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.080

Liu, B. F. (2010). Distinguishing how elite newspapers and A-list blogs cover crises: Insights for managing crises online. *Public Relations Review*, 36(1), 28–34. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.10.006

Li, W., & Zhang, R. (2010). Corporate social responsibility, ownership structure, and political interference: Evidence from China. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 96(4), 631–645. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-010-0488-z

Menon, T., Morris, M. W., Chiu, C., & Hong, Y. (1999). Culture and the construal of agency: Attribution to individual versus group dispositions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76(5), 701–717. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.76.5.701

Metzger, M. J., & Flanagin, A. J. (2013). Credibility and trust of information in online environments: The use of cognitive heuristics. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 59, 210–220. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.07.012

Morris, M. W., & Peng, K. (1994). Culture and cause: American and Chinese attributions for social and physical events. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67(6), 949–971. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.67.6.949

Oehl, B., Schaffer, L. M., & Bernauer, T. (2017). How to measure public demand for policies when there is no appropriate survey data. *Journal of Public Policy*, 37(2), 173–204. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0143814x16000155

Pfeffer, J., Zorbach, T., & Carley, K. M. (2014). Understanding online firestorms: Negative word-of-mouth dynamics in social media networks. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 20(1–2), 117–128. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2013.797778

Reeves, B., Yeykelis, L., & Cummings, J. J. (2016). The use of media in media psychology. *Media Psychology*, 19(1), 49–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2015.1030083

Rosenthal, U., & Kouzmin, A. (1997). Crises and crisis management: Toward comprehensive government decision making. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 7(2), 277–304. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.jpart.a024349

Ross, L. (1977). The intuitive psychologist and his shortcomings: Distortions in the attribution process, *In advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 10, pp. 173–220). Academic Press.

Semetko, H. A., & Valkenburg, P. M. V. (2000). Framing European politics: A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of Communication*, 50(2), 93–109. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2000.tb02843.x

Sheaff, R., Pickard, S., & Smith, K. (2002). Public service responsiveness to users' demands and needs: Theory, practice and primary healthcare in England. *Public Administration*, 80(3), 435–452. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9299.00312

von Sikorski, C., Knoll, J., & Matthes, J. (2018). A new look at celebrity endorsements in politics: Investigating the impact of scandalous celebrity endorsers and politicians' best responses. *Media Psychology*, 21(3), 403–436. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2017.1378109

Simon, H. A. (1954). Bandwagon and underdog effects and the possibility of election predictions. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 18(3), 245–253. https://doi.org/10.1086/266513

Sohn, Y., & Lariscy, R. W. (2015). A "buffer" or "boomerang?"—The role of corporate reputation in bad times. *Communication Research*, 42(2), 237–259. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650212466891

Sundar, S. S. (2008). The MAIN model: A heuristic approach to understanding technology effects on credibility. In M. J. Metzger, & A. J. Flanagin (Eds.), *Digital media, youth, and credibility* (pp. 73–100). The MIT Press.

Sung, M., & Hwang, J. S. (2014). Who drives a crisis? The diffusion of an issue through social networks. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 36, 246–257. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.03.063

Taneja, H., & Wu, A. X. (2014). Does the great firewall really isolate the Chinese? Integrating access blockage with cultural factors to explain Web user behavior. *The Information Society*, 30(5), 297–309. https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2014.944728

The Holmes Report. (2019). *Crisis review: The top 20 crises of 2018*. https://www.holmesreport.com/long-reads/article/crisis-review-the-top-20-crises-of-2018-(part-1-of-3)

Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. *Psychological Review*, 92(4), 548–573. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.92.4.548

Yang, G. (2009). *The power of the Internet in China: Citizen activism online*. Columbia University Press.

Yang, G. (2013). Contesting food safety in the Chinese media: Between hegemony and counter-hegemony. *The China Quarterly*, *214*, 337–355. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0305741013000386

Yang, J. (2016). Effects of popularity-based news recommendations ("most-viewed") on users' exposure to online news. *Media Psychology*, *19*(2), 243–271. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2015.1006333

Zhou, Z., & Ki, E. J. (2018). Does severity matter?: An investigation of crisis severity from defensive attribution theory perspective. *Public Relations Review*, *44*(4), 610–618. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2018.08.008

APPENDIX 1: STIMULI FOR STUDY 1

Experimental condition for blame-company-frame and high bandwagon cues

Notes: 1. The crisis scenario was identically presented for each condition as a piece of background information. Its English translation is 'The online travel agency company Ctrip is involved with a user data leakage scandal. Ms. Shen received a fraudulent text message about flight cancellation after booking a flight ticket for colleagues via the Ctrip mobile APP. Ms. Shen was defrauded of 120,000 Chinse Yuan during the fake refund process. In recent years, Ctrip has experienced many data leakage incidents. In 2014, Ctrip leaked the credit card information of more than 90 users during the debugging of the payment service interface function'.

2. The translated version of blame-company frame is 'Ctrip should be blamed for the data leakage issue. It seems that data leakage incidents frequently occurred in the company. However, Ctrip purposefully ignored the issue. The company should rectify its management problems. Better corporate policies, guidelines and cultures are needed to protect user privacy'.

Experimental condition for blame-society-frame and low bandwagon cues

Note: The translation of blame-social system frame is '*Our society should be blamed for the data leakage issue. Data leakage incidents frequently occurred in our society. However, national awareness of the issue has been not enough. We should call for societal-level remedies. Better-established policies, regulations and laws are needed to protect user privacy*'.

APPENDIX 2: STIMULI FOR STUDY 2

Experimental condition for blame-company-frame and high bandwagon cues

Notes: 1. The crisis scenario was identically presented for each condition as a piece of background information. Its English translation is '*The online real estate database company Tebalon is involved with a sexual harassment scandal. A female employee accused her male supervisor of requesting sex. He also told her that the only way she can get a promotion is to accept his request. She filed a complaint, but she never heard from HR. A Tebalon's HR staff member disclosed that, in the past 3 years, the HR department has ignored 47 sexual harassment complaints*'.

2. The translated version of blame-company frame is '*Tebalon should be blamed for the sexual harassment issue. It seems that sexual harassment incidents are pervasive in the company. Although its HR department has received formal complaints, Tebalon purposefully ignored the issue. Such a company culture is toxic, protecting harassers and power abusers. The company should rectify its management problems. Better corporate policies, guidelines and cultures are needed*'.

Experimental condition for blame-society-frame and low bandwagon cues

苏凡
4月30日 20:30
整个社会都应该被指责。
性骚扰事件在社会里太普遍了。
受害者没啥投诉途径，更别说法律诉讼了。
对于利用职权进行性骚扰的人，社会太宽容了。
很多人甚至没意识到性骚扰不对。
这样的现状需要改变，应该完善法律和监管机制，营造更好的社会氛围。

房地产在线服务公司泰博科技陷入性骚扰丑闻：一名女员工指控其男主管对其提出性要求。男主管威胁她说，"你晋升的唯一机会是和我睡"。该女员工向公司人事部门发起正式投诉，但没有得到任何反馈。人事部门的员工揭露，在过去三年，该公司无视了47起性骚扰投诉。
商业简讯

☆ 收藏 　　　 ☑ 转发 1 　　　 💬 评论 1 　　　 👍 点赞 1

Note: The translation of blame-social system frame is '*Our society should be blamed for the sexual harassment issue. Sexual harassment incidents are pervasive in our society. Although national awareness of the issue has been raised, victims still find it difficult to come forward, let alone to file a lawsuit. Our culture often tolerates harassers and power abusers. We should call for societal-level remedies. Better-established policies, regulations and laws are needed*'.