Danlait’s 2013 Social Media Crisis in Vietnam: A Case Study to Explore Online Crisis Scanning Criteria

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Abstract

Social media has changed the way information is sought and collected. Everyone has potential to influence others through social media. Therefore, social media is used increasingly in crisis communication. Crisis managers must be able to identify warning signs and enact effective strategic responses faster and more accurately. However, research on social media in crisis communication is mostly focusing on how management and public relations forces use social media to respond to a crisis. In most research, stakeholders, media and general audiences are neglected. This paper examines the use of social media by those other publics during crisis, through a case study of Danlait’s milk crisis in 2013, to evaluate the importance of social media in crisis communication in Vietnam, and to understand what factors contributed to the becoming of a social media crisis in Vietnam.

Keywords: crisis management, social media, case study, Vietnam, Danlait
Introduction

At present, more than 650,000 Facebook shares, 100,000 tweets and 48-hours-worth of YouTube video are posted every second (McBee Strategic nd). A 2012 survey by Market Force, one of the pioneers in the customer intelligence industry, found that 81% of their U.S. respondents said that they are influenced by friends’ social media posts. Further, 60% said that they gather insights about companies from those posts (Market Force 2012). These findings indicate that each person has the potential to influence others with the aid of social media. Social media has changed the way information is sought and collected.

However, research on social media in crisis communication is mostly focusing on how management and PR forces use social media to respond to a crisis. In most research, stakeholders, media, and general audiences are being neglected. And in most current practices, companies and PR practitioners would focus more on celebrity and key opinion leaders when conducting social media scanning and implementing social media campaigns. This paper examined the use of social media from the audience end during a crisis, through a case study of Danlait’s milk crisis in 2013, to evaluate the importance of social media in crisis communication in Vietnam. This paper used a case study of Danlait to examine the social media entries and traditional media coverage to identify what social media factors contributed to the becoming of a social media crisis in Vietnam. With this purpose in mind, the research questions were formed as follows:

RQ1: Which is more important in escalating Danlait’s crisis: the characteristics of the social media platform itself, or the social identity and level of connectedness of the participants?

RQ2: Did the negative perception of the participants to Danlait’s reactions contribute to the crisis escalation?
Case Background

In January 2013, on various forums for young parents, a mother in Hanoi expressed her suspicions about Danlait’s baby milk. She stated that after consuming the milk, her then-six-month-old baby started losing weight, experiencing slow teething, and was eventually hospitalised due to malnutrition. In Vietnam, the milk was advertised as a product from one of Europe’s leading goat milk producers; however, little was found about the brand name from her acquaintances in France (Thu 2013).

The report stirred up thousands of young mothers and caused anxiety among Danlait’s consumers. Vietnam’s Food Administration only went as far as revealing that the product’s price had been ballooned five times by its importer, but the administration never investigated into the product’s quality (Thu 2013). Following this reply, consumers reacted even more aggressively. Using online forums, a Facebook fanpage and personal pages, they exchanged tips on how to identify falsely labelled products, voiced their concerns, and relentlessly analysed and criticised the company’s responses. Their restless fight resulted in a number of independent media investigations, formal investigations from the Food Administration, and official responses from both the French and Vietnamese governments. The investigations found out that Danlait was a supplement that had been falsely labeled as “milk,” and it had very little nutritional value (VietnamNet 2013). The company could not play deaf anymore (VietnamNet 2013).

The case was resolved when the products were confiscated and the company was taken to court, heavily fined and placed on the verge of bankruptcy. Although the issue was resolved, the social media platforms have remained active, with people sharing experiences on how to protect babies from dangerous products.

Literature Review

Crisis and paracrisis

A crisis is the perception of unexpected incidents that need attention and prompt reaction. An unresolved crisis can seriously threaten stakeholders’ expectancies, and impact upon an
organisation’s reputation and performance, and generate negative future outcomes (Coombs 2012). In many cases, it is the outside stakeholders’ perceptions that count, not the management’s. Therefore, management must be able to see the incident from stakeholders’ points of view to accurately assess and react to a crisis.

The term “paracrisis” was first proposed by Coombs and Holladay (2012) when they defined it as a “publicly visible crisis threat that charges an organisation with irresponsible or unethical behavior” (p. 414). There was a need to coin this new term because social media crises were often confused with traditional crises, but social media crises have distinct characteristics that set them apart.

While crises can start virtually anywhere, a paracrisis usually starts online via a social media platform. With the viral nature of social media, it is easier than ever for the first warning sign to increase exposure and turn into a popular conversation or online firestorm. Crisis managers are expected to react even faster and more carefully with the sign of a paracrisis, to provide the stakeholders with a quick and accurate response (Coombs 2012).

A paracrisis’ unique warning sign is that it appears in full view of stakeholders. Social media make everything public to both an organisation and its stakeholders. Typically, when there is a sign of a crisis, crisis prevention efforts, such as a behind-the-scene safety revision or a corporate reorganisation, are made invisible to stakeholders to minimise the impact. However, social media increases the visibility of the warning sign and highlights stakeholders’ concerns. The public appearance demands a public management, where managers have to explain to all stakeholders what they will do to address the concerns or why they choose to ignore them (Coombs 2012). The challenge of a paracrisis is that mismanagement can easily drive it to become a full crisis for the organisation.

The final distinct characteristic of a paracrisis is that it is mainly a reputational threat. Unlike traditional crisis management that involves risk communication, issue communication, and reputation management (Coombs and Holladay 2012), paracrisis management only deals with reputation. Reputation is a general belief or perception about a person or organisation (L’Etang
2008). It is influenced by public expression of opinions, information sharing and networks of communication. Therefore, although reputation is essential to an organisation’s development and execution, it is something that is formed subjectively outside that organisation. In the case of a paracrisis, a stakeholder’s claim that an organisation is unethical or irresponsible is an expression of opinion. How stakeholders view an organisation’s responses is also subjective opinion. When these opinions get shared virally through the social media platform, if they are negative perceptions, they have the potential to directly damage the reputation of the involved organisation.

Because it fits all of the above characteristics, Danlait’s case was treated in this research as a paracrisis instead of a traditional crisis. Since a paracrisis does not have a precrisis phase, it needs to be managed as quickly and accurately as possible. Therefore, in this research, the period of 60 days right after the initial post about Danlait and the immediate responses would be in focus to examine the dynamic of social media and Danlait’s paracrisis.

*Social media role in crisis communication*

According to Mr. Nguyen Thai Phien, deputy director of Vietnam’s Media Department of the Ministry of Information and Communications, social media has taken the traditional media’s position to be the first choice for information (Bao Dien Tu DCSVN 2012). For many, user-generated content is less institutional and commercial, and often perceived as more authentic.

In crisis times, communication among stakeholders has always been important. Now, social media are enabling numerous individuals to voice their feelings or inner thoughts, share their actions or ask questions on a larger scale, contributing to the collective information-seeking and information-sharing process. These user-generated contents during a crisis are making a growing impact, as they are considered legitimate and credible sources. Information found in social media is believed to be more up to date and unique (Procopio and Procopio 2007; Sutton et al. 2007). Therefore, as shown in many studies of crises, the general public perceives social media to be credible; in fact, even more credible than traditional media (Procopio and Procopio 2007).
Furthermore, traditional news also rely on social media to retrieve information (Sutton et al. 2007).

Factors of opinion spreading in social media

By examining different studies on online firestorms, Pfeffer, Zorbach and Carley (2014) have pointed out seven factors that describe the dynamics of opinion spreading in social media. For the purpose of this paper, the author categorised those seven factors into platform-based, poster-based, and perception-based factors. The first two categories were used to analyse data in this research.

Platform-based factors

As the main feature of social media is the constant flow of communication, people can be reached within a relatively short period of time. Therefore, the first factor proposed by Pfeffer and colleagues (2014) is speed and volume of communication, which is the flow of information and the time and amount of information turnover in a social media platform.

The second factor is lack of diversity. In both traditional and social media communication, similar people usually join together and exchange similar interests, topics and opinions. Since what matters to one person is most likely to matter to the others, the information gets spread faster and makes a bigger impact within these homophilic social circles (Pfeffer et al. 2014).

As social media rises, even journalists turn to these channels to gather information and use as an online source (Sutton et al. 2007), which makes up the final factor in this category, cross-media dynamics. It is the ability of social media to get additional media coverage, or to be picked up by traditional media.

Poster-based factors
Online information echoes within a person’s social network, giving the impression that this topic is being talked about by everyone. The first factor to examine this effect is the transitive link in the network, or network cluster, which amplifies the information spreading. The other factor that contributes to this echo effect is the unrestrained information flow, which is the ability to echo and amplify information or opinions. This flow is conditioned by the number of ties (i.e. online connections and friends) a person has in his or her network.

Perception-based factors

As an information piece is spread to an individual through his or her network, the person has the choice to share or repost that information, or to take any action based on that information. That choice was termed by Pfeffer and colleagues (2014) as a binary choice, which is the first perception-based factor for online opinion spreading.

The last factor is the network-triggered decision process, which is the process of adopting others’ opinions or beliefs through social media. This process reflects the final perception of an individual regarding whether to accept or reject the opinion, and whether the information has influenced that person.

Organisations’ psychological reactions during crises

According to Berge (1990), PR managers commonly have six psychological reactions during crises, which can lead to a negative impact on the business’s reputation. Because a crisis is perceptual, positive reception of responses is essential to managing a crisis. Therefore, this study also used these reactions to evaluate crisis management. These psychological reactions include disbelief, siege mentality, panic, narrow-minded focus, shifting of blame and hurt feelings.

Disbelief is an “it can’t happen here” defense in which managers are unprepared or refuse to acknowledge the crisis, and deny any change. Disbelief is more likely to happen in a paracrisis, when the process is sped up through social media that makes the swirl of events harder to follow
This reaction is closely related to defensive avoidance, when the managers choose immediate relief over long-term resolution (Berge 1990).

The second reaction is *siege mentality*, which means managers do nothing and say nothing, instead of controlling how a message gets out with as little confusion as possible, because they underestimate the importance of their audiences. The third type of reaction is *panic*, which is a contrary response to siege mentality. Panicking managers feel an urge to respond, but they do it emotionally, without a plan, and appear irrational to the public. Fourth, when the reaction is that of *narrow-minded focus*, it is often seen that managers have given in to the destiny of the crisis, and chosen to let others (i.e. a PR department) deal with the problem. Berge (1990) noted that if a crisis is ignored, it can have a terrible effect on an organisation as a whole, so the reaction effort needs to be cooperative. The fifth reaction is *shifting of blame*. This reaction only displays poor management skills. It shows an inability to defend anything, thus giving a bad reputation with the public. Finally, the sixth reaction is *hurt feelings*. Social pressure and potential effects of the crisis on the company’s functions may cause emotional turbulence in the managers, which may deter their productivity. Hurt feelings can make the managers take the issue in a personal way.

**Methodology**

In this paper, a case study on Danlait’s crisis was presented. The first part of the research was to see if in this case, the characteristics of the social media platform itself were more important in escalating the crisis than were the social identity and level of connectedness of the participants. To examine this, all social media entries for Danlait’s case were examined chronologically. Among Pfeffer and colleagues’ (2014) seven factors of opinion spreading in social media, five were chosen to analyse these entries. The researcher focused on the factors that show characteristics of either the posted platform or the poster and ignored the other factors on users’ perceptions. The five factors were divided into two categories: platform-based and poster-based.

In the platform-based factors, speed and volume of communication were measured with the number of posts and comments over time, to see the frequency as well as the volume of those
posts. The lack of diversity dimension was examined through the demographic information (e.g. age, gender, income, marital status, hobbies, etc.) of the platform’s members. Finally, the number of times an information piece was picked up or quoted by traditional media was used to reflect the cross-media dynamics. For poster-based factors, the network cluster was determined by the number of \textit{likes} and \textit{shares} on Facebook, as those dimensions can be displayed on a person’s homepage for all of the friends to see, while the unrestricted information flow was accounted for by the number of friends and connections that posters had in each platform.

The second part of this research aimed to determine if Danlait’s incident escalated into a crisis because the participants negatively perceived reactions by the involved organisation. The study examined official responses from Danlait on the proposed traditional media outlets during the time frame through Berge’s (1990) six psychological reactions during crises: disbelief, siege mentality, panic, narrow-minded focus, shifting of blame, and hurt feelings. The results were then compared in context with social media entries if needed to further explain the social media dynamics.

There are two main channels examined for this research, which are the social media channel and the traditional media channel. The social media channel was used to analyse how netizens voiced their concerns and reacted to Danlait’s reactions, and to see how Danlait responded directly to the accusing party through social media. The traditional media channel was used to examine Danlait’s official responses to the broader publics. The researched media were chosen as below:

- Social media:
  - Webtretho forum (one of the first forums that started the topic, and in the author’s view, the most eloquent forum throughout the crisis)
  - Ha Galaxie’s personal Facebook page (Ha Galaxie was the first person to notice that there was something wrong with Danlait’s products; she started discussion of the topic on forums and her own Facebook page)
  - “Together we share information on Danlait and other products” Facebook group (also started by Ha Galaxie, this group is the main and more eloquent Facebook group on Danlait’s case)
- Traditional media: This research looked only into primary news articles through the journalists’ own investigations. It did not look into syndicated articles, which were only re-published from outside sources.

As data for the study, the researcher utilised all social media entries (including posts, thanks, comments, likes and shares) and traditional media coverage from 2 February to 3 April 2013, which includes the full 60-day period after the first entry on Danlait’s milk quality came out.

**Data Analysis**

*Platform-based factors*

*Speed and volume of communication*

Figure 1 shows the number of entries about Danlait on Webtretho forum, along with the number of thanks. The thanks button on Webtretho works similarly to the like button on Facebook. Members hit thanks to show their appreciation to a useful or relevant post.

The first entry was posted on 2 February with little interest shown from this online community. Members became increasingly interested in the topic from around 8 February, with five entries on the topic and twelve thanks altogether. The engagement peaked on 21 February with 49 entries from 27 different members, and 57 thanks. The communication on this platform slowed down from 26 February, after the Facebook official group for this Danlait case started.
During the examined 60-day period, there were 165 entries, 172 thanks, and until now, the topic has gathered a lot of attention with a total of 87 members replying and more than 59,000 views on this particular platform.

Figure 2 shows the number of posts and comments on Ha Galaxie’s personal Facebook page. Posts about Danlait were submitted from 6 to 26 February. Ha stopped posting on this topic after the Danlait’s Facebook group started.
There are two peaks in Figure 2. The number of posts peaked on 9 February, with five posts, when Ha Galaxie’s son was hospitalised due to malnutrition. She was by her child’s side and updated his status on Facebook, along with her concerns of the long-term effects of Danlait on her child. These posts received 376 likes and 127 comments. The number of comments peaked on 18 February, when Ha’s son was hospitalised again. Even though there was only one post on this day, many people had already become aware of Danlait and were following Ha’s situation, resulting in a total of 752 comments on the baby’s sickness.

During this period, Ha Galaxie made only seven posts, but was able to gather 1,310 comments, which is an average of more than 187 comments per post.

Figure 3 exhibits the number of posts and comments on the Facebook group. The group started on 20 February with already very high involvement from its founding members (63 posts, 248 comments). In less than 24 hours, the group grew to more than 1,000 members (Ha 2013). The involvement peaked on 21 February with 86 posts and 679 comments. The group stayed active throughout the time frame with new posts and comments every day.
Diversity

Webtretho is Vietnam’s largest women’s online community, with 81% of its four million members being female, and 55% of the members aged from 24 to 35 (Le 2013). Most of Webtretho’s members are employed and have children; 78% of the members have an office job and 64% have a child under three.

On the other hand, the researcher’s personal interview with Ngo (2014), the group’s moderator and one of its founding members, stated that at the beginning of April 2013, the group had about 3,800 members with mostly young mothers as active members. A number of fathers also joined the group, contributing the technical skills for analysing the online data of Danlait’s affiliated websites.

Cross-media dynamics

Figure 4 indicates the traditional media coverage about Danlait. This coverage either introduced information from the social media platforms or used quotes and photos from those platforms as a
secondary source. Within the 60-day time frame, there were 100 articles. The majority of the articles came out during the first two weeks of the case, with 21 and 22 February being the days when most of the articles were published.

**Figure 4** Number of Traditional Media Coverage

*Poster-based factors*

*Network cluster*

Figure 5 introduces the number of *likes* and *shares* on Ha Galaxie’s page. The day with the lowest numbers is 21 February (38 *likes*, 13 *shares*), while the day with highest involvement is 18 February (3,015 *likes*, 5,526 *shares*) on the post of the baby’s second hospitalisation.
Figure 6 graphs the number of *likes* on the Facebook group over time. As it is a closed group, its posts cannot be shared, thus the number of *shares* is not applicable. The engagement of this community was quite consistent throughout the period, with the exception of only one day with no *likes*. The two peaks are on 21 February, the day when most of the information was posted, and 27 February.
On Webtretho’s topic, among the 87 posters, four accounted for 22% of all entries. Two of them were well engaged in the bigger Webtretho community, making about 1,000 entries total throughout their membership. The other two posters were only engaged in this specific Danlait topic, when their entries accounted for 20% and 35% their total posts. Despite their difference in levels of engagement, none of these four posters had friends or connections in this community.

On the Facebook group, four contributors posted more than 44% of all of the entries. Ha Galaxie was among those four people, and she was also the one who started the accusation. She was an everyday English teacher in Hanoi, who at the time had no strong online presence or popularity. When the case was in focus, she became known more and more, gaining 4,357 followers on Facebook. The other three contributors also had no strong online presence prior to the case. After
the case, one of them developed 559 friends on Facebook. The number of friends and followers for the other two posters is unknown.

*Danlait’s responses*

Table 1 shows Danlait’s different types of reactions in the media. Within the time frame, there is one entry from Danlait on Webtretho, and two articles in the press, in *The Box* and *Tien Phong*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Social media outlet/Publication</th>
<th>Disbelief</th>
<th>Siege mentality</th>
<th>Panic</th>
<th>Narrow-minded focus</th>
<th>Shifting of blame</th>
<th>Hurt feelings</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-Feb</td>
<td>Webtretho</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>22-Feb</td>
<td><em>The Box</em></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>24-Feb</td>
<td><em>Tien Phong</em></td>
<td>x</td>
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</table>

**TABLE 1** DANLAIT’S REACTIONS ON SOCIAL AND TRADITIONAL MEDIA OUTLETS

On 18 February, Danlait posted a long entry on Webtretho, as a reply to the accusation. The company gave information proving that the product’s content was exactly as it was stated in its advertising and that it was of high quality, including quality certifications from France’s Ministry of Agriculture and Fishing and Vietnam’s Food Hygiene and Safety Administration. Further, Danlait stated that the accusation was purely malicious. Afterward, many questions and much feedback were directed to Danlait, but the company did not provide any further statements on this forum.

The 22 February article on *The Box* was not an official response from Danlait. It showed text messages between Ha Galaxie and Danlait’s manager, which were posted on the previous day in the Facebook group. While continuing the accusation, the manager began to offend Ha Galaxie throughout the messages by calling her “crazy,” and “ignorant yet talked too much”. The article also stated that later, when a journalist tried that manager’s phone number, the answerer denied the text message conversation. He was quoted saying “I was not the one who texted or called […] Maybe someone took this phone and used for a while. I won’t explain further.” (The Box 2013)
*Tien Phong*’s article on 24 February was the only official interview between Danlait and the press. At this point, Danlait’s products had been confiscated by officials, and the online community continued to give proofs that Danlait was a fake product and could harm children’s health. Despite all that, Danlait’s general manager stated that he would award one billion VND for whoever could prove Danlait was an under-qualified product.

Figure 7 is a graph of the number of posts across the examined platforms and the days of Danlait’s reactions. The number of posts on Webtretho went up after Danlait’s first response, and the Facebook group started two days later. The graph peaks on 21 February on all three platforms. It is the day when Ha Galaxie posted her heated text messages with Danlait’s manager, which led to *The Box*’s article about Danlait’s reaction.
Figure 7: Number of posts across social media platforms and days of Danlait’s responses.
Discussion

Factors of opinion spreading in social media

Before the Facebook group started on 20 February, the topic on Webtretho and Ha Galaxie’s page saw enormous speed and volume of communication. The volumes on both platforms are high, with up to 57 forum posts, five Facebook posts and 752 comments on one day. There were people replying to the first entry on the forum or commenting on the posts on Ha Galaxie’s page, making the communication on these platforms both two-way and thoroughly engaging. This two-way trend was conditioned by the speed of communication on each platform, when the flow of information was fast enough to keep people noticing new postings and adding their feedback. Also operating on Facebook, Danlait’s group enjoyed an even higher volume of information and speed of interaction. Very strong engagement was seen on the first day (63 posts, 248 comments) and the interactions were fairly consistent throughout the examined period.

Both the Webtretho forum and the Facebook group exhibited a lack of diversity in their members’ demographics. At the time, the majority of Webtretho’s members were of the same gender, age range, employment and family status. They shared very similar interests in family and children. On the other hand, although the background information of the Facebook group members is unclear, all of them shared the same concerns about health and safety for infants. With the group being extremely narrowly focused, its members needed to be homophilic and have strong passion about the topic to join the group.

The cross-media dynamics factor is not shown as clearly as the aforementioned two factors in the data. The number of media pick-ups is only 100, compared to almost 1,000 posts and 5,000 comments across the social media platforms. However, Figures 1, 3 and 4 show that the number of articles published on one day went up or down similarly to the volume of information on the social media platforms that day. It can be inferred then that the articles are being influenced by the information flow on social media.
The number of *likes* and *shares* on Ha Galaxie’s page, shown in Figure 5, indicates a significant network cluster. The numbers peaked at 3,015 *likes* and 5,526 *shares*, making the echo chamber for that specific post bigger than ever, and widely spreading the story throughout the bigger community. However, when cross-examined with the number of media pick-ups (Figure 4) and Danlait’s reactions (Figure 7), there is no clear relationship between the network amplifier and the other two dimensions. It is possible that the echo effect only stays in the online community, with little impact to Danlait or traditional media outlets. Besides, the number of *likes* on the Facebook group, shown in Figure 6, only serves as an internal echo chamber within the group. Since this Facebook group has private settings, the information cannot be shown on the members’ walls. Therefore, although the statistics show very consistent engagement thoroughly, it has no influence on the opinion spreading effect.

The unrestrained information flow analysis indicates that all of the top distributors on both platforms have a very weak online presence and only a few to no online connections. Ha Galaxie is the only poster that has more than 4,000 followers, but that figure only happened after the case was known. Accordingly, it is concluded that the number of friends and connections, or the unrestrained flow, does not account for the viral effect of communication in this case.

To review, the RQ1 aimed to see which is more important in escalating the Danlait crisis, the characteristics of the social media platform itself, or the social identity and level of connectedness of the participants. Altogether, the platform-based factors were strongly indicated in the data, with positive influence on the number of traditional media pick-ups, while the poster-based factors do not demonstrate any association with opinion spreading effect. It is thus concluded that the platform is more important than participants in making the widespread, impactful result of this Danlait case.

*Danlait’s responses*

It is seen from Table 1 that all Danlait’s responses were negatively perceived reactions, as in Berge’s (1990) definition. The first reaction was disbelief, or the refusal to acknowledge the crisis. Even though the company responded quickly, it failed to follow through on the case and
take necessary steps to alleviate the accusation. Since this event was a paracrisis, in which the business did not understand its importance and refused to react, the crisis escalated easily. The second reaction was hurt feelings when the manager took the issue personally. He felt that Ha Galaxie was offending him so he got into a heated conversation with her. This reaction appeared to the public as both impolite and unprofessional, worsening Danlait’s image. The third reaction was panic. Danlait’s response on *Tien Phong* appeared very irrational. It simply emphasised the evidence presented in the first response and ignored all of the newly posted proof on social media. It did not make any counterarguments to the accusation either. At this point, a single denial with nothing to back up would not have worked. The final type of Danlait’s reaction was taking a siege mentality, which is the mentality of doing nothing, saying nothing, and underestimating the importance of the public. Even though Table 1 only shows this reaction in *The Box*’s article, when Danlait declined to answer the press and continued to say that nothing had happened, this siege mentality was expressed throughout the period. Danlait only offered three responses over the examined 60 days, as opposed to 100 coverage and thousands of entries and comments online. This lack of responsiveness clearly indicates that Danlait did not think very highly of the online community or care enough to actively seek to control the messages.

Figure 7 presents that the number of posts on Webtretho and the Facebook group that were posted immediately after Danlait’s first response, which can be inferred to be the result of that response. Some people were not satisfied with evidence that Danlait provided and some were asking more questions, but Danlait did not reply. The peak on 21 February was an indirect result of the company’s silence, when the community reached out to Danlait through emails and text messages and reported those actions online. The reported data became the materials for the second articles. Nevertheless, there is no explicit relationship between the later reactions and the social media posts. The number of posts started to decline after the second article was published, and even though the community stayed active throughout the period, there is no clear trend.

To answer RQ2, which wanted to see if the negative perception of the participants to Danlait’s reactions contributed to the crisis escalation, the data conclusively presented that Danlait’s responses are considered to be unproductive and negative reactions by Berge’s (1990) definitions. Even though Figure 7 does not show a clear relationship between those responses
and the public’s perception, the responses could account for the first two peaks of interactions from the social media users.

Limitations and suggestions

This study is subject to three limitations. The first limitation of this study is that the data were collected one year after the case had started. Some social media entries and articles were removed because of the time constraint of the platform or media outlet, which made them inaccessible to the researcher. The second limitation is that the present study only focused on social media and did not account for any offline factors that could contribute to the paracrisis, such as the government’s pressure and the traditional media’s investigations. Further study would need to delve into broader data of other publics in addition to the online community of young parents to completely grasp the reasons behind and dynamics of this paracrisis involving Danlait. The remaining, inherent limitation of this study is the empirical approach. Future research may use this paper as preliminary research and take a quantitative approach to expand the scope, and analyse the thematic cases to fully understand the online crisis scanning criteria.

Conclusion

It is clear that social media has empowered people to be more influential than ever before. One piece of opinion can echo and make a deep impact on a business. On how social media contribute to crisis communication in Vietnam, this research arrived at in Danlait’s case, characteristics of the platform are more important than the identity and connectedness of the participants in escalating a crisis. Although this paper could not conclude that Danlait’s incident escalated into a crisis because responsible parties’ reactions were perceived negatively by netizens, it did prove that Danlait’s responses are negative types of reactions that could potentially harm the business. More study is needed to look into the offline publics and fully examine the reasons and dynamics behind this case. On the other hand, future research can take a quantitative approach to analyse a bigger social media landscape to draw a more significant conclusion on the online crisis scanning criteria. As social media is on the rise, its importance
cannot be overlooked and careful studies can greatly help both organisations and individuals in their social media communication process.
References
