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Social media hype in times of crises: Nature, characteristics and impact on organizations

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Social Media Hype in Times of Crises: Nature, Characteristics and Impact on Organizations

Augustine Pang

Abstract

This article extends Vasterman's (2005) concept of media hype by analyzing how it applies in the social media context. It then develops the concept of social media hype, its nature, characteristics through examination of five cases that attracted much social media attention. Social media hype can be defined as a netizen-generated hype that causes huge interest that is triggered by a key event and sustained by a self-reinforcing quality in its ability for users to engage in conversation. It involves a trigger event, followed by interest waves, and sustaining of the interests on different social media platforms. In response, organizations should pay heed to rigorously monitored sentiments online, respond quickly in the same medium in which the hype occurs, sharing consistent message across all mediums, and most importantly, value relationships with stakeholders.

Keywords

Social media hype, netizens, crisis communication

Introduction

Social media has empowered stakeholders, giving them platforms to instantaneously connect and share ideas, thereby encouraging participation, openness, conversation and community. During crises, social media can break news stories before traditional media and facilitate discussion even before the latter report of the story (Pang, Nasrath & Chong, in

press). Thus, it is possible that “social media hype” exists even before Vasterman’s (2005) traditional “media hype” is triggered. This article examines how social media hype is generated, how it manifests and its unique characteristics. This study is significant as social media has become a catalyst that exacerbates crises (Siah, Bansal & Pang, 2010). As netizens increasingly take to social media, organizations must recognize the implications and respond to it in an appropriate manner to maintain their reputations.

Literature Review

Vasterman (2005) defined media hype as a “media-generated, wall-to-wall news wave, triggered by one specific event and enlarged by the self-reinforcing processes within the news production of the media” (p. 515). For media hype to be triggered, Vasterman (2005) argued for four conditions to take place:

- A key event which receives much media attention;
- A rapid rise and gradual fall of a news wave;
- The media keep the news in the headlines instead of reporting new developments in the news by reporting “comparable incidents or linking them to key event” (p. 516);
- There is interaction between the media and newsmakers resulting in increased coverage of “social action” and “reactions from social actors” (p. 516).

Further distinctions were made in the kinds of news reported. Incident-related news items were factual reports about actual events whereas thematically-related news items were not factual reports but related to the theme of the news (Vasterman 2005). For instance, it was evident that there were many thematically-related news spins after Tiger Woods’ sex scandal exploded. It is argued that in the absence of developments of incident-related news, thematically-related news keep an issue alive. Vasterman (2005) also distinguished between two kinds of media hype: a magnified media hype occurs when the media focus on the crisis in detail, whereas an enlarged media hype is when the media report on all stories which fall under the same theme as the crisis. Vasterman (2005) argues that media hype can follow six patterns.

- A “positive feedback loop” where “regular” coverage follows an event (p. 513);
- A key event takes place and a “chain reaction” is triggered (p. 513);
- A news theme is identified and disseminated across different news desks for follow up
- Lowering of news thresholds leads to increase in thematically-related news
- The news build-up is triggered by responses and feedback from readers, and these “feed the news wave, reinforcing the news-worthiness of the news theme” (p. 515).
- Media hype tapers off with decline in the news wave.

Wien and Elmelund-Præstekær (2009) expanded on Vasterman’s (2005) framework and identified four indicators of media hypes.

- The trigger event “must deal with an issue where several and legitimate points of view—or interests” can be presented thereby discussed openly” (p. 195).
- The issue “allows different interpretations within several frames” (p. 195).
- It must be “capable of condensing a complex problem into one striking image” (p. 195).
- The news values must have waned sufficiently for the news threshold to be lowered.

Social Media

The communication landscape has witnessed the emergence of social media. Several phenomena are observed.

Activism of netizens: As information penetrates large communities, traditional media is no longer the sole news provider. In a realm where gate-keeping is virtually absent (Pang et al., in press; Siah et al., 2010), netizens become empowered to generate information as long as there is a demand for them, as it does in times of crises (Pang, 2013). The accumulation of online conversations fuel news waves. Consequently, netizens choose which crises to fuel discussion, based on personal experiences, observations and feelings.

Efficacy of information sharing: Social media networks foster bonds among netizens and hence build relationships more effectively than traditional media (Safko & Brake, 2009). When crises erupt, negative messages about the organization shared on social media platforms may be more influential than what is presented on traditional news platforms. Heverin and Zach's (2010) study of tweets disseminated during the Washington shooting of four police officers showed that netizens, more than official news sources, formed the majority of tweet authors in sharing crisis related information. About 80 per cent of their tweets were information-related and they directed other netizens to third-party sources of information. Tweets also contained opinions and emotions about the crisis. Over half of the tweets were categorized as retweets, where users shared information word-for-word with their followers. User interest remained high.

Spread of misinformation: Mendoza, Poblete and Castillo's (2010) study of Twitter user behaviour during the 2010 Chile earthquake showed that while it helped to broadcast news, it was also the source of unsubstantiated rumours. Doer, Fouz and Friedrich's (2012) study found that rumours spread rapidly on social network. When netizens pick up a rumour from their social network neighbours, it would be quickly disseminated to other neighbours. Thus, the interactivity instantly creates a one-to-many discourse (Qualman, 2009).

The situation is further complicated by a new phenomenon called paracrises which Coombs and Holladay (2012) defined as a phenomenon that "resembles a crisis because it threatens the organisation's reputation" (p. 408) but not necessarily disrupting operations or requiring full-force crisis management efforts. Paracrises appearing in social media are unique as they "appear in full view of stakeholders" (p. 408). The medium has increased their visibility and numbers. This visibility means that stakeholders can see how the organization manages the threat. The opportunities presented in social media make it more imperative for organizations to be cognizant of the information generated online.

Based on the above discussion, this study thus seeks to examine:

RQ1. How is social media hype manifested?

RQ2. What are the characteristics of social media hype?

RQ3. What is social media hype?

Method

Case Studies

Stake (1995) defines case study as an examination of multiple cases to provide insight into a key phenomenon. These cases are studied in-depth, including their narratives, contexts and key activities to identify salient characteristics. This method is appropriate to study social media hype, where the author and his assistants seek to define and examine its manifestation and characteristics. Five cases were analyzed.

The Cases

KFC Malaysia and the food tampering videos (2010): Two videos containing footages of employees from KFC Malaysia tampering with food were anonymously sent to KFC headquarters in October 2010. The videos were subsequently leaked onto YouTube in 2011. The first video, showing employees swiping uncooked chicken parts against the soles of their shoes, was uploaded on 25 June 2011, while the second video which showed how employees wrung dirty rags into cooking pots appeared on 6 July 2011. KFC responded online.

SMRT crisis (2011): Singapore's train operator, SMRT, suffered three major breakdowns on 14, 15 and 17 December 2011, affecting more than half a million commuters. As SMRT struggled to gain control of the crisis, many took to social networks to complain about the crisis, making it one of the top trending topics in Singapore. Users sent pictures to citizen journalism website STOMP, and created Facebook pages and Twitter channels slamming the company, sharing and re-sharing information.

CNB/SCDF Sex-for-Favours Scandal (2012): On 24 January 2012, *Lianhe Wanbao*, an evening Chinese language newspaper in Singapore, broke the news regarding the suspension of SCDF (Singapore Civil Defence Force) Commissioner Peter Lim and CNB (Central Narcotics Bureau) Chief Ng Boon Gay as they were under investigation by CPIB (Corruption Practices Investigation Bureau). This generated huge public interest. Within 24 hours, the Ministry of Home Affairs and its Minister Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean issued a statement confirming the investigations and the suspension of both men. As the news broke in

other traditional media outlets, interests among netizens rose sharply. The interest level dwindled after a week, but picked up again in June and September 2012 as more information were released.

United Breaks Guitars Crisis (2009): The story began in July 2009 when musician David Carroll's acoustic guitar was damaged by United Airline's baggage handlers. Despite Carroll's complaints, the airline denied responsibility and rejected his compensation claims, provoking him to write the song "United Breaks Guitars" which was consequently uploaded on YouTube. Within 24 hours, the music video had garnered more than 500 comments and 24,000 views. It quickly spread to other online and mainstream media, fuelling talk about consumer revolt. United eventually offered Carroll full compensation. Carroll leveraged interest in his first video to release a second video, "United Breaks Guitars Song Two", which sparked a smaller wave. This time, United responded by addressing the issue and clarifying the matter. Within three months, in October 2009, United made another mistake with Carroll by losing his baggage. Carroll released a third song, "United Breaks Guitars Song Three" in 2010.

Nestle vs. Greenpeace UK (2010): On 17 March, Greenpeace UK launched a campaign against Nestle, alleging that the maker of the popular Kit Kat chocolate bars was using palm oil from companies that destroyed Indonesian rainforests thereby pushing its inhabitants, the Orang-Utans, to extinction. The crisis exacerbated when Greenpeace posted a grisly video, "Have a Break?" on YouTube, a one minute clip showing an office worker opening a Kit Kat packet and biting into an Orang-Utan's finger instead of a chocolate bar. Nestle responded by demanding that YouTube remove the video. Greenpeace promptly housed the video on an alternative video-sharing site, Vimeo, which attracted 78,500 views within hours. Overnight, Nestle became the poster child for censorship. Users took their social media war to Nestle's Facebook page. The crisis escalated when a Nestle Facebook moderator threatened to delete comments from users who were using altered Nestle logos as their profile pictures. Nestle eventually admitted that it finally saw how social media could be harnessed. It called for a moratorium with Greenpeace UK and announced a partnership with The Forest Trust combat deforestation.

Based on Vasterman's (2005) seminal work on media hype, the cases were selected as they had extensive media coverage and were also discussed extensively by netizens online. To ensure diversity, cases were identified from an international mix, and in doing so, strengthen the robustness of research findings (Stacks, 2010).

Social Media Statistical Tools

In order to understand the fluctuations of social media hype, online statistical tools were used to obtain information on the volume of interest for each case over the crisis timeframe. Cross analyzing results across social media platforms allow for trend comparison to determine if hype displays similar patterns in different media. The online tools used were:

Google trends—The statistics on Google search data traffic reflect stakeholders' interest in the crisis over a period of time. Google Trends also works simultaneously with Google News as major peaks on the graphs which are labelled with popular news stories related to the keyword at a point in time. This allowed users to identify the events that drove the sudden spikes in searches on the topic.

Topsy pro analytics—This tool generates graphs for the volume of Twitter conversations revolving around chosen keywords. Conversation volume reflects the level of interest in the crisis. The application's "Discovery" function also provided qualitative insights.

YouTube—This generates graphs reflecting the number of YouTube views for a video since its upload. Points in the graph are also marked with significant events, such as when the video was first embedded or when first viewed from a mobile device. This enabled the monitoring of the rise in the number of views to user-related events.

Wildfire social media monitor—This measures the change in the fan numbers for Facebook brand pages. Fan numbers are taken as indicators for hype on Facebook, as an increase in fan numbers usually reflects increased interest in the organization and crisis.

Facebook—Facebook Timeline is used to locate Facebook comments exchanged during the peak of the crises. Comments found added insights on the discussions of the crisis.

Blogs and Forums—Discussions on the top 10 most searched for Blogs and Forums on Google Search are monitored. Search engines to identify sources are used because websites that appear high on search results have been streamlined and are considered most relevant to the keywords used. This made it possible for large volume of data to be sieved and identify blogs and forums most appropriate for the study.

In addition, social media sentiment was obtained by analyzing conversations on platforms. This determined stakeholders' sentiment towards the crises and identified the factors which drove social media hype.

Findings and Discussion

The analytics for each of the cases are first explored before the research questions are examined.

KFC Malaysia and the food tampering videos (2010)

Google Trends (Figure 1). The drastic increase from Point 1 to Point 2 took place within a day of the release of the first video on 25 June. The rise in curiosity and interest levels of netizens was supported by statistics from Google Trends showing that searches for the term increased by

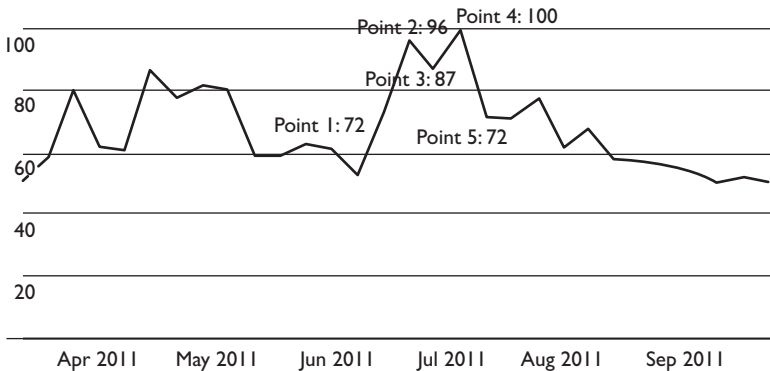


Figure 1. Interest over time on Google Trends

70 per cent over that period. The searches declined at Point 3 before surging to Point 4, which coincided with the release of the second video on 6 July. By the time KFC responded at Point 5, the searches surged to another high.

YouTube Statistics (Figure 2). The first referrals were made via Facebook and YouTube. This showed that netizens influenced one another in a loop. All videos experienced an instant spike in views on the same day the videos were uploaded. A separate incident involving KFC Malaysia that took place in February 2012 resulted in the sudden increase in views, indicated by Point J.

Facebook Pages and Timeline (Figure 3). The number of “Likes” on KFC Malaysia’s fan page increased by 33,163 from 196,962 on 26 June to 230,125 on 18 July. KFC Malaysia called out for feedback and in doing so, channelled the traffic from YouTube to their Facebook page.

Twitter (Figure 4). Twitter mentions and conversations peaked from 30 June to 30 July. It dropped after 30 July with top tweet going

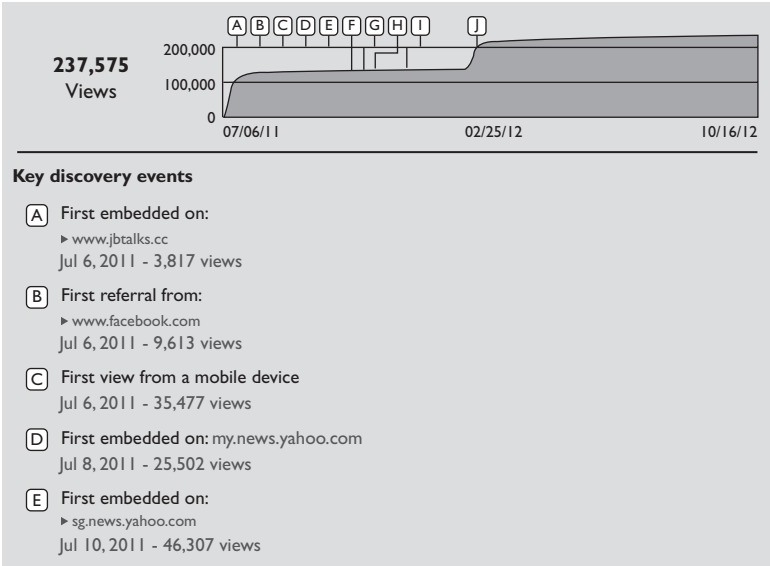


Figure 2. YouTube Statistics

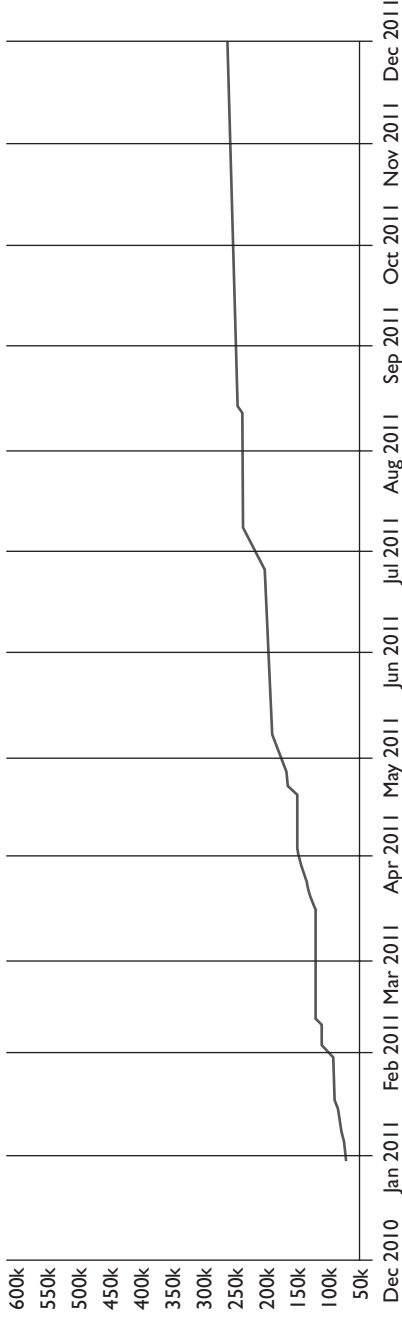


Figure 3. Statistics from KFC Malaysia Facebook page

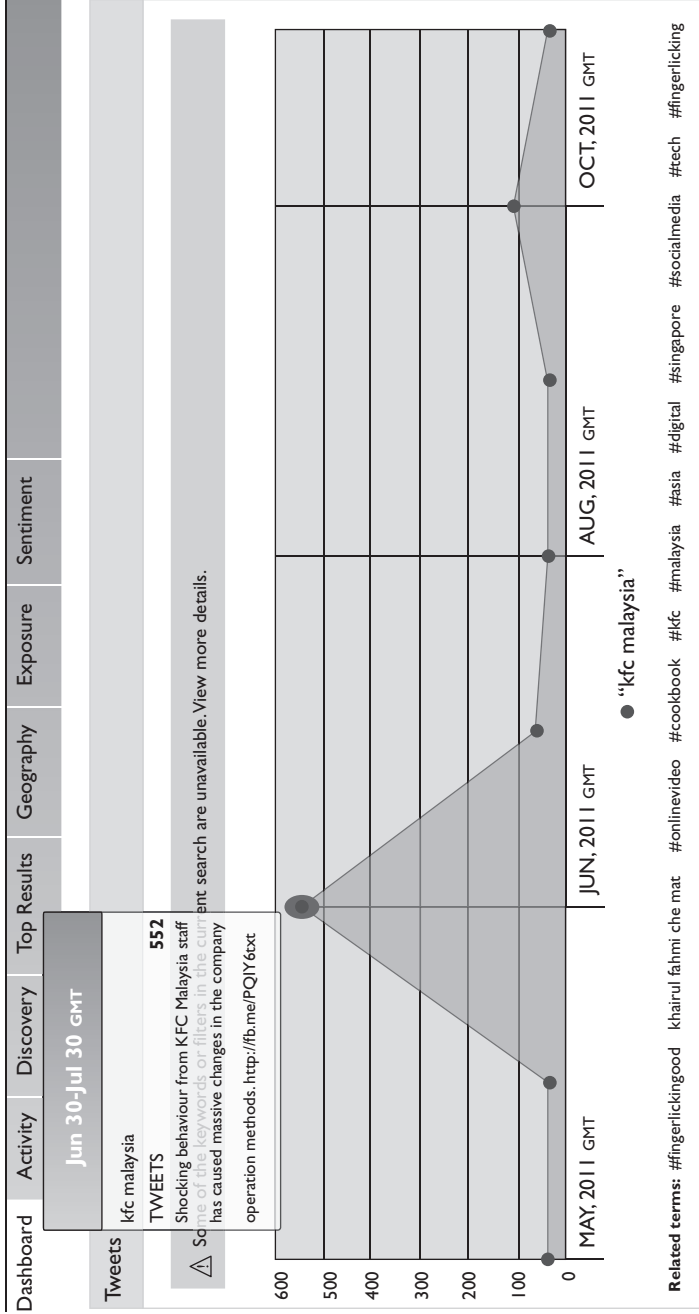


Figure 4. Interest over time on Twitter based on Topsy Pro Analytics

to “How #KFC Malaysia Handled a Social Media Disaster—[#HumberPR #SM #Crisis](http://bit.ly/pxQZHW)”.

Forums/Blogs. There was no sign of any page with a high volume of comments or KFC bashing. The latest post found was on the 22 July 2011, echoing the decline of social media hype in the other platforms. What is notable is that the results page revealed mostly blogs and forums discussing the crisis management tactics employed by KFC Malaysia.

SMRT Crisis (2011)

Google Trends (Figure 5). Three waves were evident: Points 1, 2 and 3. The peak in interest coincided with the first breakdown on 14 December. The second wave emerged due to a 10-hour disruption on the North–East line on 15 March. The third wave was caused by two incidents of breakdowns in April. Points 2 and 3 were significantly smaller in scale compared to 1. Point 1 reached its peak in the shortest period of time compared to 2 and 3. Points 2 and 3 took a longer time to peak.

Twitter (Figure 6). A peak in activity occurred in the period between 30 November and 30 December both for tweets with the hashtags #SMRT and #SMRT breakdown. For #SMRT breakdown, this rose from 0 to 717 in December 2011. There was already activity on #SMRT prior to the breakdown, but similarly, this peaked from an average of 9,641 tweets in October 2011 to 59,133 tweets in December 2011. This number dropped drastically by end January, almost as quickly as it peaked. However, it never returned to pre-crisis numbers—hovering between 13,500 and 14,000 post-crisis, compared to an approximate 10,000 pre-crisis.

Blogs/Forums. The majority of blog posts and forum discussions were published between 16 and 17 December. As the first major breakdown on the North–South line took place on 15 December, with subsequent breakdowns occurring in the next few days, many of these were posted on the same days when the first series of breakdowns occurred.

CNB/SCDF Sex-for-Favours Scandal (2012)

The analytics:

Google Trends (Figure 7). Three peaks were observed. The first peak occurred from 22–28 January after the story broke in *Lianhe Wanbao* and *The Straits Times* as well as the release of statements by the government. The second peak occurred from 3 to 9 June, when both men

Trends

Web Search Interest **mrt at singapore, mrt breakdown, smrt breakdown** Worldwide, Sep 2011 - Sep 2012

Explore trends
Hot searches

Interest over time [?]

The number 100 represents the peak search volume

News headlines [?] Forecast [?]

Search terms [?]

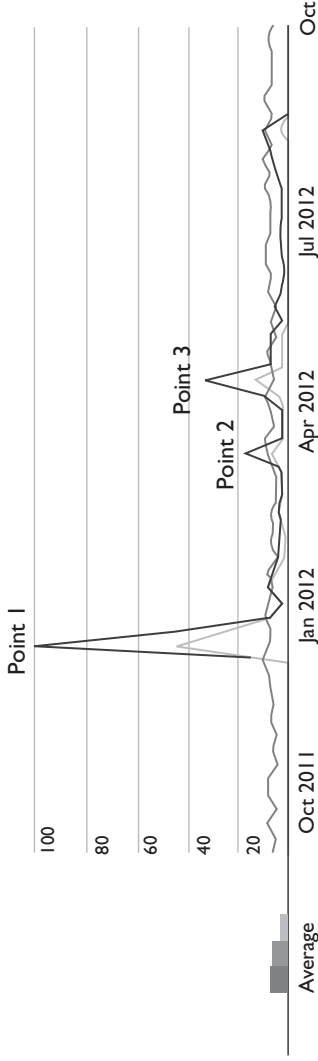
× **mrt at singapore**

× **mrt breakdown**

× **smrt breakdown**

+ Add terms

▶ Other comparisons



Average

Embed

Limit to

Figure 5. Interest over time on Google Trends

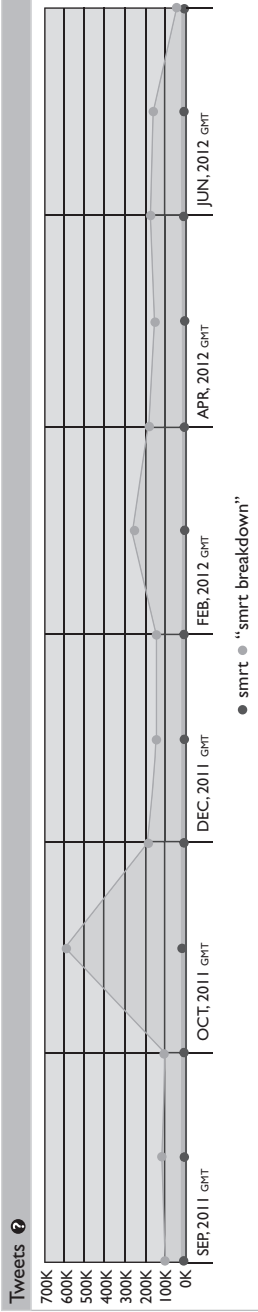


Figure 6. Twitter based on Topsy Pro Analytics

Interest over time [?](#)

The number 100 represents the peak search volume

News headlines [Forecast](#) [?](#)

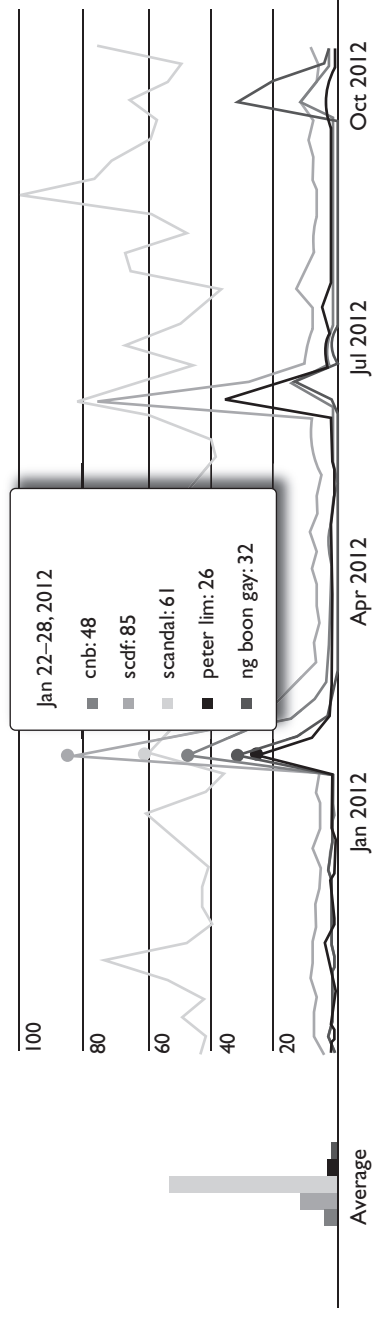


Figure 7. Interest over time on Google Trends

were charged in court. The third peak occurred from 23 to 29 September, when the trial of former CNB chief Ng Boon Gay was heard in court. Interest about the case was generated by updates on traditional media. This interest was transferred onto social media.

Twitter (Figure 8). Twitter trends showed three peaks. During the first peak, from 30 December to 29 January, “SCDF” had 678 tweets, “CNB” 575, and “Scandal” 532. After this period, it was observed that activity for “SCDF” and “CNB” dropped, but activity for “Scandal” remained active. This could be related to other scandals that were happening in Singapore at around the same time. The second peak from 28 May to 27 June saw an increase. This could be due to the two men being charged in court. In the third peak from 25 September to 25 October, there was an increase in activity only for “CNB”. This was largely due to the fact the trial had started for ex-CNB Chief Ng Boon Gay.

Blogs/Forums (Figure 9). Interest spiked in the first wave as netizens went online to discuss and to find out more information which traditional media had not covered. The highest amount of activity occurred over the first 24 hours, and gradually decreased. The hype on the forum generally lasted over 20 days as it was fed by new information, discussion and speculation about the issues surrounding the case.

United Breaks Guitars Crisis (2009)

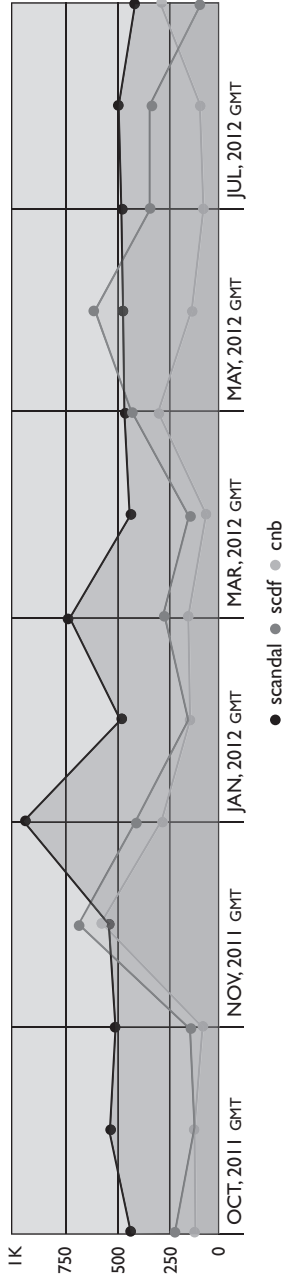
The analytics:

Google Trends (Figure 9). Three waves were observed. The first major wave was when United Breaks Guitars video was first uploaded onto YouTube by David Carroll (as indicated in the chart below). However, once it peaked, interest dropped as quickly as it rose. A second smaller wave rose with the release of United Breaks Guitars Song Two and a third minor wave was caused when United Airlines lost Carroll’s baggage in a separate incident.

YouTube Statistics (Figure 10). Views increased when the first video was uploaded. Carroll’s prominence as a musician in the band, Sons of Maxwell, and his ability to share the videos on his own website resulted in increased support from his fans, thereby driving views. As mobile device adoption increased globally, many YouTube views were made more accessible. The other two videos that Carroll made later, however, did not gain as much traction.

Tweets

 Some of the keywords or filters in the current search are unavailable. View more details.



Related terms: prosecution officers big bang doug ross fiona millar fansign cardboard city personal scheduled arrests spoiler corruption ongoing injuries facult

Figure 8. Interest over time on Twitter based on Topsy Pro Analytics

Interest over time [?]

The number 100 represents the peak search volume

News headlines Forecast [?]

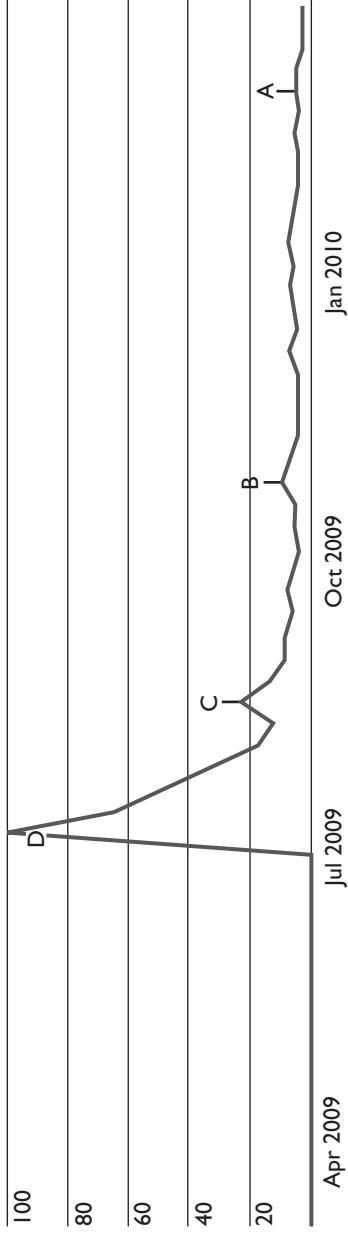


Figure 9. Interest over Time on Google Trends

Embed

Views and discovery

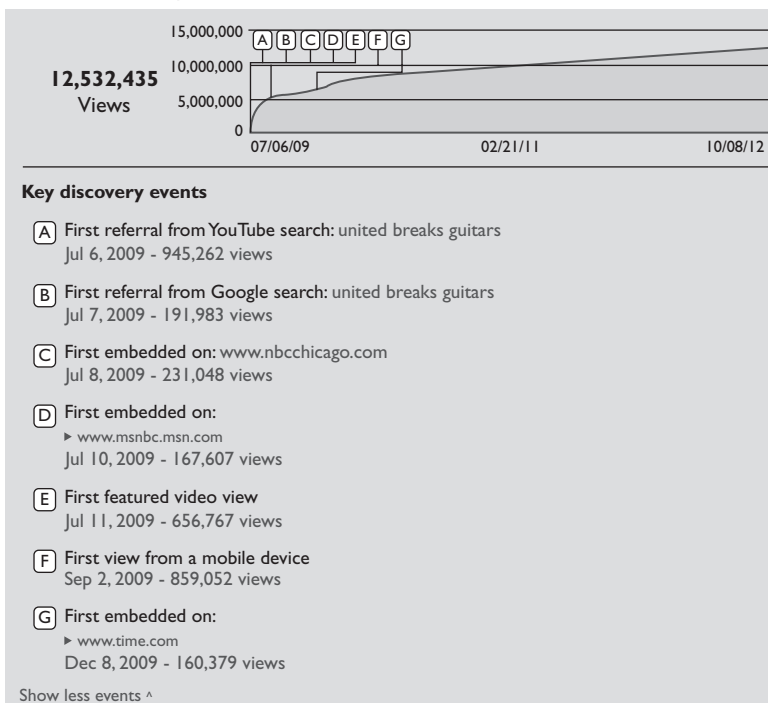


Figure 10. YouTube Statistics for United Breaks Guitars

Blogs and Forums. Frequency of discussion on blogs and forums showed similar patterns to Google Trends, peaking at the same three points. Discussion centred on netizens' similar experiences with United Airlines.

Nestle vs. Greenpeace UK (2010)

Vimeo (Figure 11). There was a spike in views of Greenpeace's "Have a Break?" video on Vimeo from 17 March, the date it was posted, to 18 March, the peak-day.

Google Trends (Figure 12). Three peaks were observed. The largest peak was between 14 and 20 March, during the trigger event, followed

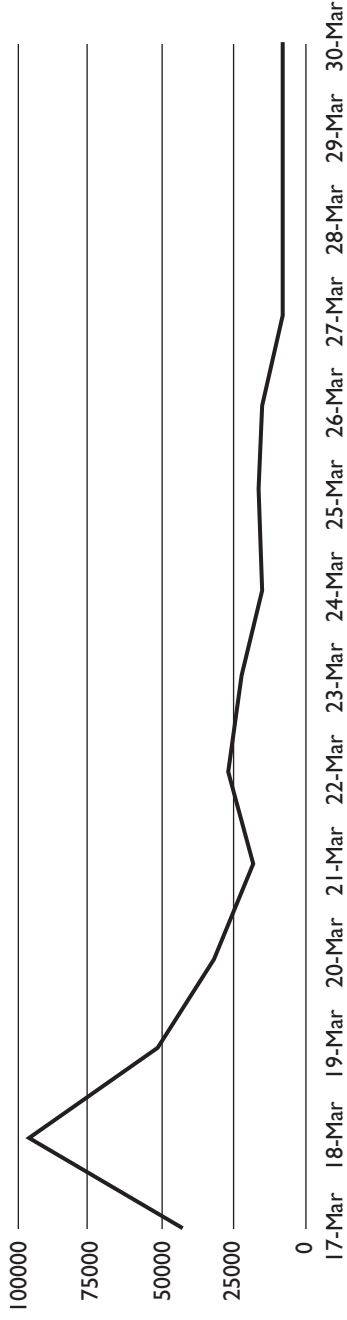


Figure 11. Total of New Plays on Greenpeace UK's "Have a Break?"

Interest over time [?](#)

The number 100 represents the peak search volume

News headlines [?](#) Forecast [?](#)

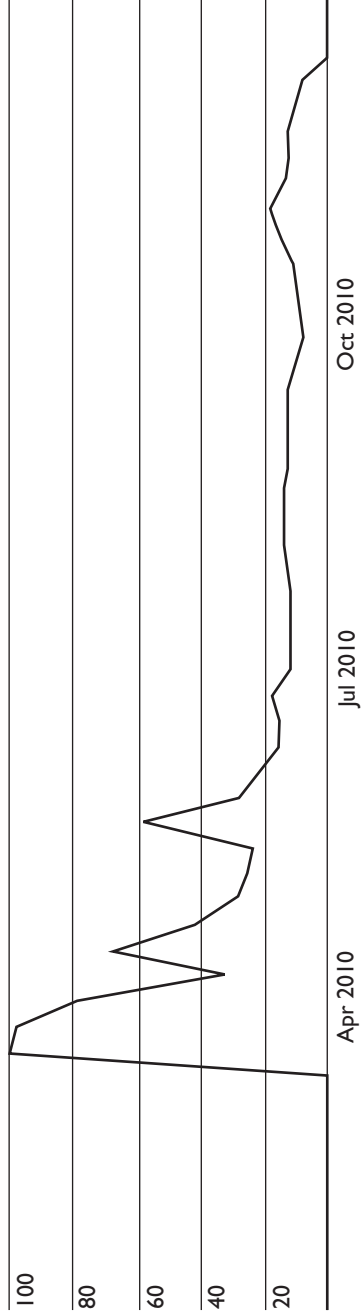


Figure 12. Interest over Time on Google Trends

Model of Social Media Hype

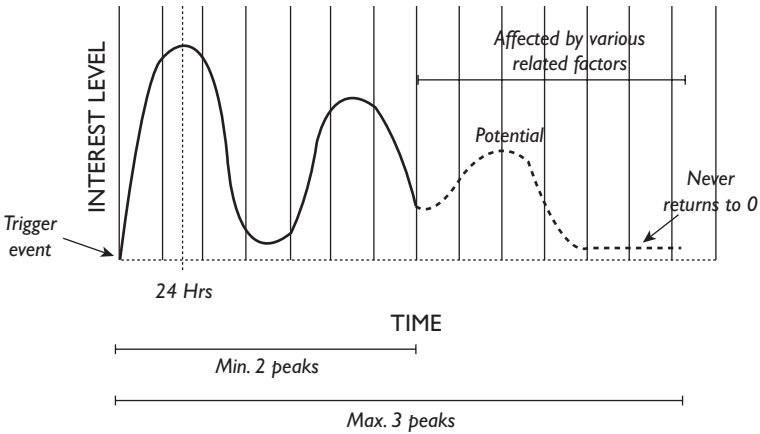


Figure 13. Social Media Hype

by decline between 21 and 27 March. It again peaked between the 11 and 17 April period when Nestle Chairman Peter Brabeck-Letmathe called for a deforestation moratorium with Greenpeace. It peaked again during the 16–22 May period as Nestle announced a partnership with The Forest Trust to combat deforestation.

Blogs and forums. Top searches on blogs revealed heavy commentaries by social media experts. Many said Nestle had broken basic rules of social media engagement by refusing to listen to users and threatening to delete users' comments, when censorship was a particularly touchy issue for the web community. Forums generated diverse views. Some were critical of Nestle while others felt Greenpeace were extremist.

The first research question examined how social media hype is manifested. Social media hype is manifested in several ways.

User-to-User: Users fuelled the hype in a two-way direction. The phenomenon occurred very rapidly across all case studies, usually within 24 hours after the crises were triggered. For the "United Breaks Guitar" crisis, the video was originally posted on YouTube. Netizens subsequently discussed this on forums, which in turn generated more awareness, and that in turn directed traffic back to the YouTube video. In social media hype, the positive feedback loops are operationalized

as users' sharing behaviour. For the SMRT crisis, the message alert describing the breakdown as "income opportunity" was originally posted on Facebook, but quickly went viral on other mediums, aided by share buttons.

Platform-to-Platform. Cross-referrals occurred where users arrived at content via hyperlinks embedded in forums, or online news articles. When users employed different media to satisfy diverse information seeking and sharing needs, hype can spread to various social media channels. Coverage by online news sites further drove social media hype by increasing awareness, and bringing credibility to the news (Pang et al. in press). For instance, rumours of the CNB/SCDF scandal were triggered in online sites like *The Online Citizen*, and they gained credibility when the Chinese-language newspaper *Lianhe Wanbao* reported the case. Thus, even though hype was generated within the social media sphere, when reported by traditional media, it further fuelled the hype as more users returned online to seek information. With the rise in mobile device adoption, users could share content more freely, thus increasing and sustaining social media hype. For instance, in the SMRT crisis, trapped passengers in the trains were able to snap and share pictures of the chaos online.

Mobilization of netizens: Social media hype is sustained by its ability to mobilize and link netizens. They take cues from their peers in their social networks. For instance, Greenpeace offered the banned "Have a Break?" video as a gift, calling on users to share it online, saying "The more people who join in, the more interesting we'll make it for Nestle". In one day, the original "Have a Break?" video found its way back on YouTube, with users encouraged to share it. Greenpeace was thus able to achieve its agenda by leveraging on social media as a people-power tool, fuelling the hype.

Stakeholders' perception of organizations' efforts: The organization could also be under netizens' scrutiny, particularly if it had riled stakeholders previously. For instance, when United Airlines broke Carroll's guitar and Carroll took to social media, users joined in to lambast United as they poured out their unpleasant experiences. This gained a following online and drove social media hype. Organizations' prior reputation also influences hype. For instance, in the SMRT crisis, netizens

were observed to discuss other seemingly unrelated issues pertaining to the organization, like the raising of train fares, the high salaries of SMRT management, particularly in relation to their disenchantment with the then-CEO who was accused of focusing on generating profits for shareholders rather than ensuring that trains were properly maintained (Pang, 2013). It was to emerge later that under her watch, SMRT profits doubled whilst maintenance budgets had not increased since 2002 despite increasing ridership, more frequent train runs, and ageing infrastructure (Tan, 2012). Thus, with resentment towards SMRT already simmering, the breakdown crisis fed netizens with ammunition to criticize the organization.

An organization's prior reputation impacts how stakeholders and, by extension in this study, netizens perceive it. Coombs (2008) argued that if it had a good reputation, the halo effect, or goodwill generated, would shield the organization from substantive reputational damage. On the contrary, it had a poor reputation, the velcro effect, or unhappiness generated, exposes the organization to further reputational damage (Pang et al., 2012).

The second research question examines the characteristics of social media hype. Three characteristics are evident.

Trigger event resounds with netizens' emotions: Present in all the cases were human interest elements which evoked stakeholders' emotions. When emotions were aroused, netizens were more likely to share emotionally charged content to make sense of their experiences (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

Platforms create space for discussion: Conversations appeared to be driven by two motivations. First, netizens were eager to share the experiences, particularly if they had direct experiences with the organizations concerned. For instance, in the United Breaks Guitars case, netizens freely shared their bad experiences with United Airlines. Second, the trigger event was deemed contentious to generate public debate and diverse views. For example, the CNB/SCDF sex scandal was hotly debated on online platform, HardwareZone.com, as it was one of the rare occasions in supposedly corruption-free Singapore where two senior civil servants were almost concurrently charged. The opinions expressed

were diverse: some argued that the parties involved did no wrong as they were consensual adults, others argued that this involved corruption. The different perspectives perpetuated debate, generating more interest as the cases ensued.

The third research question examines what a social media hype entails. Based on the above findings, social media hype can be defined as a “netizen-generated hype that causes huge interest that is triggered by a key event and sustained by a self-reinforcing quality in its ability for users to engage in conversation”. It involves:

- a. *A key trigger event:* There is a significant event which captures public attention. Usually, this event has human interest elements, invoking netizens’ interest to participate in discussions. Building on Wien and Elmelund-Præstekær’s (2009) description of media hype, social media hype triggered events exhibit similar characteristics to media hype as the key events did fuel online discussions and encourage sharing of content on social media platforms.
- b. *Interest waves:* A sudden increase in interest levels occurs, rising within 24 hours, followed by ebbs and falls in user interest. Social media hype experiences a minimum of two interest waves and can be sustained over three peaks. Subsequent waves following the first peak will fall in terms of magnitude and prominence, and not be as high as the first peak. It is observed that social media hype is primarily driven by information vacuum. Information vacuum is generated in times of crises: “People want to know what happens when bad things happen” (Pang, 2013, p. 209). This insatiable thirst for information is driven by stakeholders as well as the media. In the social media sphere, users seek information to satisfy curiosity, manage uncertainties, and share perspectives leading to what is observed as interest waves. Similar to Wien and Elmelund-Præstekær’s (2009) extension of media hype, social media hype experiences fatigue after two to three interest waves. While news waves on traditional media eventually reach zero, interest waves on social media hype does not appear to have returned to zero, indicating that perceptions of the organization and the crisis remain.

- c. *Sustaining and spreading of interest across different mediums:* Even when there were no more updates surrounding the event, interest was sustained when previously not known information was shared online. Netizens were actively seeking and contributing to fill the information vacuum.

Conclusion

This article has examined how social media hype is generated, how it manifests and its unique characteristics. The question remains: How should organizations prepare for it? Several suggestions are offered:

- Conscientiously and consistently monitor publics' perception about the organization (Pang, 2012)
- Respond quickly (Coombs, 2012).
- Value stakeholder relationships (Pang et al., 2010).
- Respond in appropriate media (Pang et al., in press)
- Consistent messaging (Coombs, 2012).

This study has several limitations. As some of the cases occurred many years ago, some data could not be captured, like Twitter results for Nestle vs. Greenpeace and United Breaks Guitars. Second, free online statistical tools were used to collect data. However, these free tools were limited in scope. Further studies could consider collecting a more comprehensive set of data from other online tools which may require subscription to access.

Future studies can also examine the convergence of social media hype with traditional media hype. Social media hype is a phenomenon that has moved crises from offline to online. Increasingly, more netizens are likely to voice their opinions about organizations and crises online. However, organizations have the power and opportunity to lead and engage. This study provides nascent but crucial insights on what this phenomenon encompasses.

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