The Polarization and Civility of Hong Kong Political Discourse on Facebook News Pages

by

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DEDICATION

       I dedicate this thesis to my beloved hometown, Hong Kong, hoping that this study contributes to its democracy movement.

       I would like to thank my parents and brother, Matthias Fok, Lily Lee, and Leo Fok for being with me during this time, for supporting my dreams and for encouraging me to leave Hong Kong and study in a country different than mine.

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ABSTRACT

This content analysis research investigated the content and quality of political discourse generated by online news media's Facebook pages in Hong Kong. First, the focus of this study was to examine how Hong Kong's online news media frame the political relationship between Hong Kong and China by analyzing the news postings on the Facebook pages of the top three online news media organizations in post-handover Hong Kong. The three online news media being analyzed were *Stand News*, *Post 852*, and *Hong Kong 01*. The results suggest that some online news media have a tendency to embed partisan, pro-democracy perspectives in their news posts via social media. The findings also indicate that some online news media tend to produce *affective news* as an audience engagement strategy. Second, the present research also explored the degree of polarization, levels of civility and politeness, and how readers themselves view the current political situation by analyzing Facebook user comments on the news postings from the three selected organizations. The findings reveal that incivility and impoliteness did not dominate online political discourse, rather readers tend to be rude and abusive with their messages sometimes.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Hong Kong - China Relationship

In 1997, Britain returned Hong Kong to China after having governed it as a colony for over 150 years. The Chinese Communist Government promised the former British colony a policy of "One Country, Two Systems," guaranteeing that Hong Kong would be governed as a Special Administrative Region. It would retain its own currency, legal and parliamentary systems (democratic institutions which have been developed since the British colonial period) and uphold the existing rights and freedoms of the Hong Kong people that have been enjoyed for 50 years (Holliday & Wong, 2003).

However, the national unification process between Hong Kong and China has not been a smooth process (So, 2011). Critical voices have emerged in Hong Kong to protest against actions by the government which have been seen as prioritizing the interests of the Chinese Communist Government, as in the spending of public funds for pro-China projects, for example. At the same time, many citizens have expressed dissatisfaction and anger over the economic policies of the Hong Kong government which are seen as contributing factors in producing new social inequalities in the society (Ng, 2017).

By international standards, Hong Kong has a limited form of democracy. It has relatively free elections in the legislative branch, which includes political parties from different ends of the political spectrum. However, citizens do not elect the head of the executive branch. In the past, Hong Kong citizens had no right to vote. Under the British colonial rule, which lasted until 1997, city governors were appointed by government

officials in London. The wishes of the Hong Kong citizens played no part in the governors' appointments. Following the region's return to Chinese rule, a pro-Beijing committee, made up of 1,200 members of an Election Committee, began choosing Hong Kong's leader. However, only 7% of Hong Kong's registered voters possess voting rights for the Election Committee, leaving 93% of the citizenry without representation in this institution. Therefore, the selection of Hong Kong's Chief Executive can be hardly be called a democratic process. At the time of Hong Kong's handover to China, both sides agreed that 20 years later Hong Kong citizens would be able to elect their leader by universal suffrage. However, it remained unclear how exactly that process would take place. Beijing's plan was to allow Hong Kong citizens to elect their leader by popular vote in 2017, but only after each of the three candidates had been approved by a majority of the 1,200-member Election Committee. However, the China-vetted reform proposal has been vetoed by the Hong Kong legislature. The pro-democracy side has rejected this reform as "fake democracy" (Bilsky, 2015).

Serious splits among Hong Kong citizens exist with respect to constitutional development and the introduction of universal suffrage to elect the Chief Executive in 2017. A study conducted by the University of Hong Kong revealed that 35% of the respondents supported the reform framework offered by Beijing while 44% of the respondents opposed it (Ming Pao, 2014). Another survey conducted by the Concern Group for Public Opinion on Constitutional Development found that 50% of respondents supported the constitutional reform bill on 2017 universal suffrage based on Beijing's restrictive framework, while 38% of respondents opposed it (Lam, 2015). These findings

suggest that Hong Kong people remain sharply divided over the general framework of universal suffrage as well as the details of its implementation. Political tensions between those calling for increased democracy and universal suffrage and the Hong Kong/Beijing government are expected to continue (Sing & Tang, 2012).

Since late September 2014, thousands of residents occupied the main roads of Hong Kong in several financial districts, including the government's headquarters and the base of the Legislative Council for 79 days. Demonstrators called for civil nomination of the candidates in Hong Kong's 2017 elections for Chief Executive, the elections for the city-state's highest post. The police initially responded with tear gas and pepper spray, to which protesters defended themselves with umbrellas, hence giving the movement its popular name, the Umbrella Movement. The end of the Umbrella Movement's mass sit-in did not resolve the disagreement between the government and residents asking for increased democratization in Hong Kong. Those who embrace this ideal of increased democratization in Hong Kong's government and political process are labeled as the pro-democracy, or pan-democracy camp, and are also described as the opposition camp (for their opposition of the existing Chinese-controlled government).

On the other hand, pro-Beijing partisans and conservatives organized their own groups, held their own press conferences and public forums, disrupted democratic meetings, and vowed a popular protest of their own to counter Democrats' Occupy Movement for genuine universal suffrage elections. The government and the main pro-Beijing political party repeatedly denied the "civil nomination of candidates"

proposal suggested by pan-democrats and emphasised that such a proposal is in conflict with Article 45 of the Basic Law (the constitutional document of the post-handover Hong Kong), which states that: "The ultimate aim is the selection of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures." Moreover, when the pro-Beijing political party announced its own proposal, leaders acknowledged that their design mirrored their understanding of what Beijing wanted (DAB, 2014). One pro-Beijing newspaper, *Tai Kung Pao*, responded to the democrats' proposal with a rousing rejection. It described the proposal as a "confrontation" (Tai Kung Pao, 2013).

Ortmann (2015) described the Umbrella Movement as the culmination of Hong Kong's protracted democratization process. Before it came into being, protests and social movements against the government policies already existed, and the unsolved political and social problems can be seen as the long-term causes leading to the development of the Umbrella Movement.

In the post-Umbrella Movement era, the city now faces a divided society and political stalemate. Public opinion and attitude have become deeply divided. Lee (2016) discovered that the degree of polarization of public opinion in Hong Kong has been on the rise over the years. The polarization of public opinion reached an unusually high level in 2014 following the Umbrella Movement's occupation and it continued to rise. Lee's study showed that political discussion via social media was positively related to the

extreme attitudes of individuals toward the movement, the police force, and the Hong

Kong and Chinese governments.

Social Media as Source of News

Despite the fact that Hong Kong has a traditional press that tends to be

conservative, the online sphere is characterized by pluralism and integration within civil

society. It provides platforms for exposure to alternative information, public discourse,

and the coordination of collective actions (Yung & Leung, 2014). Hong Kong has

highly-advanced Internet infrastructures. In particular, there are a total of 5,100,000

Facebook users in Hong Kong, with 71% penetration of the its population, 80% of its

online population, and 235% of mobile penetration rate in Hong Kong (Internet World

Stats, 2016; Office of the Communications Authority [OFCA], 2016), which is among

the highest rates in the world. Chan (2015) pointed out that mobile news has become

more prevalent among younger users in Hong Kong and is increasing among users aged

35 to 54. Among a variety of social media platforms, Facebook serves to facilitate a

variety of roles in Hong Kong's political and media system: as a carrier of information, as

a promotional channel, as a mobilization tool, and as a meeting space for like-minded

individuals (Yung & Leung, 2014). Surveys found that Facebook is Hong Kong's top

digital platform (Lam, 2014). News media in Hong Kong, like others around the world,

have been quick to respond to technological advances and changing patterns of use

(Westlund, 2013). Many of the mainstream, large circulation newspapers have adapted to

the market conditions and have become multiplatforms, supplementing their print

editions with online mobile apps. It is common for media organizations to establish and

maintain Facebook pages. Lee et al.'s study (2015) showed that Facebook (19%) ranked third as a news source after the mainstream media pro-China Television Broadcasts Ltd. (TVB) (67%) and anti-China Apple Daily (33%). Facebook was the most important social media platform during the Umbrella Movement. The study also discovered that if a person got his or her political news from sources other than social media, he or she was more likely to place more trust in and to express more satisfaction with the established authorities, including the government and the police, irrespective of which generation he or she belonged to (Lee et al., 2015). That is, traditional mass media in Hong Kong tend to be more pro-establishment, while social media tend to be insurgent or anti-establishment.

Unlike Hong Kong, China has an authoritarian government. Free expression is limited in public spaces, and the media system is significantly affected by government censorship. The rapid growth of Internet use in China has contributed to loosening the authoritarian government's control over the freedom of expression, although tension between the public and the regime exist (Chen et al., 2016). Western social media sites, like Facebook and Twitter, are banned by the Chinese government. Sina Weibo, a microblogging service with 242 million users, is one of the permitted social media platforms in China (CNNIC, 2016). The Chinese government has quickly adapted to changes in the online environment and has utilized social media to maintain its control over Chinese society (Sullivan, 2014). For instance, in 2012 the government issued a rule banning Weibo posts that threaten national security and requiring Weibo service providers to verify the identity of users. Consequently, Weibo monitors sensitive words

and blocks content. These actions threaten the freedom of expression, and they have caused a decrease in the number of registered users from 331 million accounts to 275 million accounts in 2014 (BBC, 2014).

Research Objective

The purpose of this research is to investigate the content and quality of political discourse generated by online news media's Facebook pages in Hong Kong. First, I examined how Hong Kong online news media frame the political relationship between Hong Kong and China by analyzing the news postings on the Facebook pages of the top three online news media organizations in Hong Kong. The three online news media analyzed were *Stand News*, *Post 852*, and *Hong Kong 01*. Second, I explored the levels of polarization, civility, politeness, and how readers themselves view the current political climate by analyzing the Facebook users' comments related to the news postings from the three selected organizations.

Technological innovations combined with political and societal trends have changed the definition and models of political engagement and political news acquisition. Facebook has become a form of civil engagement that cannot be overlooked. Past studies suggest that social media is fostering and reinforcing other forms of political engagements, both new and traditional (Chen et al, 2016; Choi & Shin, 2016; Chan, 2016; Peters & Witschge, 2015; Chouliaraki, 2010; Carpini & Williams, 2001; Bucy et al, 1998). The Internet has played a transformative role in the development of political discussion and Facebook operates as a catalyst in the transformation (Yung & Leung, 2014). Yung and Leung's study (2014) showed that 29% of respondents indicate that they

very often collect information related to news and social issues through Facebook in Hong Kong. About 22% indicate that they very frequently provide/share information related to news/social issues on Facebook, about 16% of them very often express their views on news/social issues, and 14% very often participate in discussion (through comments) on such matters on Facebook. These studies suggest that Facebook is an emerging essential political tool that cannot be ignored within Hong Kong political communication. This study, therefore, investigated how both online news media and netizens exchange information and ideas on Facebook as a popular outlet for political discussion in Hong Kong. Furthermore, this study examined whether such form of political discourse cultivates or undermines Hong Kong's democratic development.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Framing in News Media

Media research has produced extensive evidence that news content is not an objective creature and not separated from socioeconomic and political influences (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Graber, 1997; Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Gerbner (1964) argued that there is "no fundamentally non-ideological, apolitical, non-partisan news gathering and reporting system." Entman (1993) explaining that the concept of framing is "to select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them salient." Scheufele (1999) suggested that there are at least five potential factors shaping how journalists frame a topic, including social norms and values, organizational pressures and constraints, pressure by interest groups, journalistic routines, and the ideological or political orientations of journalists. Edelman (1993) contended that news frame is "driven by ideology and prejudice rather than by rigorous analysis or the aspiration to solve social problems." Journalists may not only draw their ideas and language from any or all of the other forums, frequently paraphrasing or quoting their sources, but may also contribute their own frames and invent their own clever catchphrases, drawing on a popular culture that they share with their audience (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989).

There are numerous empirical studies on media framing and framing effects. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) analyzed the content of 2,601 newspaper stories and 15,22 television news stories in the period surrounding the Amsterdam meetings of European heads of state in 1997. By using five news frames in their study, they discovered that the use of news frames depended on both the type of outlet and the topic.

The most significant differences were between sensationalist vs. serious types of news outlets. Sober and serious outlets more often used the responsible and conflict frames in the presentation of news, while sensationalist outlets more often used the human interest frame. DeLung et al. (2012) looked into the influence of proximity and frame valence on credibility, bias, recall, and reading intention in news articles. The study reveals that some media professionals, in hopes of making their stories appear more credible, might choose to localize a story and thereby neglect more weighty or balancing information. Adding further support of Gerhards and Rucht's (1992) collective action frames, Harlow (2011) proved that Facebook user comments were framed in such a way to motivate others to participate in the Italian social movement. Patterson (1993) highlighted that the growth of elite polarization in the United States has coincided with a shift toward a more interpretative style of news coverage that may embolden the use of a negative tone or critical comments regarding elite actions.

Conceptualizing Polarization

Mouffe (2000) emphasized the importance of tolerating disagreement by saying that, "a well-functioning democracy calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions …. too much emphasis on consensus and refusal of confrontation lead to apathy and disaffection with political participation "(p. 104).

According to Fiorina and Abrams (2008), "standard dictionary definitions of polarization emphasize the simultaneous presence of opposing or conflicting principles, tendencies, or points of view" (p. 556). McCarty et al. (2006) provided an even more straightforward version: "Polarization is, for short, a separation of politics into liberal and

conservative camps" (p. 3). Hogg et al. (1990) defined group polarization as the tendency for group discussion to produce a group decision or consensual group position that is more extreme than the mean of the individual group members' prior attitudes and opinions in a direction already favored by the group. Psychological experiments indicated that exposure to pro-attitudinal information induces people to adopt more extreme positions and serves to diminish their openness to alternative views (Sunstein, 2009). People have a tendency to see viewpoints expressed by individuals with whom they share an identity as an element of group identity. As a result, possessing such views and defending them against opposing views becomes an aspect of group solidarity (Spears et al., 1990).

Similar research found that ideological fragmented news, combined with an ideologically stratified audience, endangers civil society. (Sunstein, 2009; Stroud, 2010). Arceneaux et al. (2013) examined the polarizing effect of opinionated political talk shows and concluded that ideological media materials do have the power to polarize political attitudes, especially among individuals who possess strong motivations to craft counter-arguments.

Empirical studies have shown that homophily results in polarization (Baron et al., 1996; Sunstein, 2002; Gilbert et al., 2009). Also, DeGroot (1974) proposed a process where at each time step, individuals simultaneously update their opinion to the weighted average of their neighbors' and their own opinion at the previous time step. However, Dandekar et al. (2013) examined polarization in society through DeGroot's model of opinion formation and argued that such a model is a phenomenon in social psychology

called biased assimilation, rather than polarization. Biased assimilation occurs when presented with mixed or inconclusive evidence on a complex issue, individuals draw undue support for their initial position, thereby arriving at a more extreme opinion (Dandekar et al., 2013). In other words, homophily (greater interaction between like-minded individuals) alone, without biased assimilation, is not sufficient to polarize society.

Lee (2016) analyzed data derived before and during the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. He discovered that the political communication via social media was significantly related to extreme political attitudes only during, but not after the height of the social movement. Such polarization occurred in both people with and without a clear political orientation. The study also suggested that opinion polarization is not unique to social media when the political context itself is polarizing. Baum and Groeling (2008) found evidence of an increased reliance of many politically-attentive Americans on a partisan news sites such as *Daily Kos* and *Free Republic*, which could potentially pose a significant challenge to American democracy. Support of such claims of partisanship comes from both the Left and Right concerning ideological bias in the media.

New technologies: More polarized or more diverse public opinion?

The Internet has largely reduced the costs of producing, disseminating, and accessing diverse political information and perspectives. Online publishing, for example, bypasses the costly equipment required to produce physical newspapers and magazines. Online social networking technologies, such as Facebook and Twitter, enable individuals to produce their own information and simultaneously share information with any number

of contacts (Dodie, 2003; Bakshy et al., 2012). Weiss and Joyce (2009) suggested that digital journalism "allow[s] for a closer relationship with the audience; a shortened social space" between news organizations and their readers (p. 593). The interaction with the news, for instance, posting a comment narrows the gap between news producer and reader.

Past studies have shown that homophily, for instance, greater interaction between like-minded individuals, results in polarization. Flaxman, Goel, and Rao (2016) examined the effect of such technological changes on ideological segregation. Sunstein (2009) has predicted the rise of "echo chambers," in which individuals are largely exposed to conforming opinions. Also, news aggregators, search engines, and social networks are increasingly personalizing content through machine-learning models (Suri and Taneja, 2012), potentially creating "filter bubbles" (Pariser, 2011) in which algorithms inadvertently amplify ideological segregation by automatically recommending content an individual is likely to agree with. Moreover, individuals are more likely to share information that conforms to opinions in their local social neighborhoods (Spears, Lea, and Lee, 1990; Schkade, Sunstein, and Hastie, 2007). Such information segregation has been a great concern, as it has long been thought that functioning democracies depend critically upon voters who are exposed to and understand a variety of political views (Downs, 1957; Baron, 1994; Lassen, 2005). Levendusky (2013) explained how biased presentation of the news by partisan outlets leads viewers to perceive the other party more negatively, to trust them less, and to be less supportive of bipartisanship.

Civility and Online Political Discussion

Digital platforms afford users the opportunity to interact with the news and other news readers through comments. These platforms offer the potential for dynamic public discussion of current affairs, but they could also become tools for polarization of public opinion.

Papacharissi (2004) highlighted that there is a distinction between incivility and impoliteness. She depicted messages that "deny others rights, threaten democracy, or use antagonistic stereotypes (p. 279)" as uncivil; messages that include "name-calling, aspersions, synonyms for liar, hyperbole, words that indicated, pejorative speak, or vulgarity occurred (p. 274)" as impolite. Comments frequently labeled as uncivil may be simply impolite, which can have a pro-democratic and liberating effect. On the other hand, the most dangerous form of incivility is one that is presented in a cloak of politeness, "impeccable incivility" (Papacharissi, 2004). Her study supported the internet's potential to revive the public sphere, provided that greater diversity and volume of discussion is present.

Santana (2014) defined civility in discourse as the willingness to consider and adopt another point of view. Hwang et al. (2008) suggested that discursive incivility leads to a collapse in deliberative dialogue. The uncivil expression has a detrimental effect on open-mindedness compared to civil expression. Civility reduces social friction and enable people who may disagree on an issue to gather, constructively debate, and reach rational conclusions (Kingwell, 1995). Further studies examined the level of civility in political

discussion on social media (Benson, 1996; Kenski, et al., 2012; Kushin & Kitchener, 2009; Molaei, 2010).

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The first question is to study how do the three most popular online news media in Hong Kong frame their pro-democracy movement news coverages on Facebook.

RQ1: *How polarized are the top online media organizations covering the political relationship between Hong Kong and China in Hong Kong?*

The second question is to examine how diverse and civilized are the user comments on the three most popular online news media in Hong Kong.

RQ2: *How polarized and civil are user comments on the top media organizations covering the political relationship between Hong Kong and China in Hong Kong?*

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Sampling

This study proceeded from a quantitative content analysis of both news posts (N = 285) and user comments (N = 720) on the Facebook pages of the three most popular Chinese-language online news media in Hong Kong: *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*. To generate the sample, a list of Facebook news posts and comments from the three selected media were collected from a seven-day period (February 1-7, 2017) with the Graph API tool. The studied week was randomly selected. However, I expected that there would be more news posts about the 2017 CE Election in late March.

For the news post section, I examined 285 posts from the three media, including 104 posts from *Stand News*, 101 posts from *Hong Kong 01*, and 80 posts from *Post 852*. For the user comment section, I analyzed 720 comments of each examined news post from the first section, including 277 comments from *Stand News*, 300 comments from *Hong Kong 01*, and 143 comments from *Post 852*. These comments were selected by applying the "Top Comments" filter from the comment column in each post on a Facebook Page and selecting the top three comments for each news post. This Facebook default filter is designed to show the most relevant comments at the top of the page.[1]

The selection of the top three media was based on webpage traffic data provided by Alex.com.[2] So (2016) looked at the online news media traffic on one single day in October 2016 and listed out the top nine rankings in Hong Kong and their global rankings. In this study, I retrieved an identical set of webpage traffic data from Alexa.com on both February 10 and 11, 2017. The three identical sets of website traffic

data showed that the top nine popular online news media in Hong Kong were the same, except the fifth and sixth ranks were swapped from October 2016 to February 2017 and they did not affect my final selection process. Despite the fact that *Bastille Post* ranked the most popular online news media in Hong Kong, I excluded it given its lack of consistent political news posts published on its page. For similar reasons, I excluded *Passion Times*, which ranked in the fourth place. Thus, *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852* were selected for this study.

Table 1. *Most popular online news sites in Hong Kong, according to Alexa.com.*

Online News Media in Hong Kong	Alexa (HK) Traffic Rank (15 Oct 2016)	Alexa (HK) Traffic Rank (10 Feb 2017)	Alexa (HK) Traffic Rank (11 Feb 2017)
Bastille Post (巴士的報)	15 (1)	13 (1)	13 (1)
***Stand News* (立場新聞)**	41 (2)	32 (2)	**32 (2)**
***Hong Kong 01* (香港 01)**	53 (3)	39 (3)	**39 (3)**
Passion Time (熱血時報)	159 (4)	151 (4)	153 (4)
***Post 852* (852郵報)**	395 (6)	198 (5)	**198 (5)**
Meme HK (謎米香港)	202 (5)	204 (6)	202 (6)
Initium Media (端傳媒)	422 (7)	647 (7)	646 (7)
VJ Media (輔仁媒體)	657 (8)	665 (8)	659 (8)
Hong Kong In-media (香港獨立媒體)	694 (9)	763 (9)	769 (9)

Stand News has 198,059 total likes and 196,284 total followers on Facebook. From February 1-7, 2017 (the studied period), there were 1,216 total user comments generated by 680 unique accounts and recorded by Graph API. Launched soon after the Umbrella Movement concluded in December 2014, *Stand News* (or "Standpoint News" in Chinese), has been met with both praise and criticism on social media due to its peculiar origins.[3] The launching statement of *Stand News* names Hong Kong as its home and thus Hong Kong is its "standpoint" or political stance. The political position of *Stand News* can be best reflected in the membership of its Board, including conventional democrats who contributed to Hong Kong's democratic reform in past decades and new youth activists who were active in the Umbrella Movement. *Stand News* has adopted a non-profit and donation-centered model.

Media 2: *Hong Kong 01*

Hong Kong 01 has 112,200 total page likes and 250,749 total followers on Facebook. From February 1-7, 2017 (the studied period), there were 1,599 total user comments generated by 1,208 unique accounts and recorded by Graph API. *Hong Kong 01* claims to be a news media centered on online news as its primary business and print media as a side product. The site that launched in January 2016 suggests that it enjoys solid financial support from its major investor, Yu Pun-hoi, who used to own a mainstream local newspaper. *Hong Kong 01* states that, "*Hong Kong 01* will express its opinions on various issues, prompt discussion and communicate among members of society, according to its own thoughts and belief. Its prime mission … is taking the

initiative to promote society's reform and progression" (HKJA, 2016). The Hong Kong

Journalist Association concerned such an approach would collide with journalistic ethics.

Critics also questioned whether Yu has a "political task" and whether he is being backed

by "red capital" which refers to money from China (HKJA, 2016).

<center>Media 3: *Post 852*</center>

Post 852 has 64,160 total page likes and 61,993 total followers on Facebook.

From February 1-7, 2017 (the studied period), there were 873 total user comments

generated by 436 unique accounts and recorded by Graph API. Named after Hong

Kong's country calling code, *Post 852* was set up by a former mainstream newspaper

editor-in-chief, Yuen Yiu-ching, in 2013. His goal was to open up space for critical

opinions as he was dissatisfied with self-censorship in the traditional media. Like *Stand

News*, *Post 852* also has adopted a non-profit and donation-centered model.

<center>**Measures**</center>

In this study, there are certain codes that indicate polarization. The following

items were used for both the coding for RQ1 (news post by the media) and RQ2 (user

comments by the readers):

Media organization. Coders entered 0 = "*Stand News*"; 1 = "*Hong Kong 01*"; and

2 = "Post 852" to identified the source of the news post/comment.

Policy issue. Coders located the actual policy item discussed in the post/comment.

At the end, I took the qualitative information and recoded it quantitatively, using the

following coding scheme: 1 = "Election"; 2 = "Art and culture"; 3 = "China"; 4 =

"Crime"; 5 = "Cross-border law enforcement"; 6 = "Education"; 7 = "Finance"; 8 =

"Hong Kong"; 9 = "Police"; and 10 = "Other issues" to this question. To clarify, the initial coding scheme did not include policy issues and themes, rather they emerged during the coding process. When media predominantly produces news regarding one single issue, the results are potentially polarizing.

Post subjectivity. This category looks at whether the Facebook post/comment contained facts, opinion, both, or none. Coders entered 0 = "Facts"; 1 = "Opinion"; and 2 = "Hybrid" to this question. When media predominantly produces opinionated messages with little or no factual information, the results are potentially polarizing.

Post stance. Coders entered 0 = "Consistent"; 1 = "Contrary"; and 2 = "Neutral" to answer this question: "Does the post contain an explicit reference to pro-democracy?" It is assumed that the three media outlets examined have a pro-democracy orientation in varying degrees. When media predominantly produces stories that reinforce a particular stance, the results are potentially polarizing.

Tone towards policy issue. Coders entered 0 = "Supportive"; 1 = "Critical"; and 2 = "Neutral" to this question. When media repeatedly use only supportive or critical tones, the results are potentially polarizing.

Number of point of view. Coders entered 1 = "1"; and 2 = "2"; and 3 = "3 or above" to identify the number of points of view presented in a post. When media predominantly present a single perspective, the results are potentially polarizing.

Persuasion approach. Coders entered 0 = " Ethos"; 1 = "Pathos"; 2 = "Logos"; and 3 = "Not applicable" to this question.

Visual strategy. Coders entered 0 = " Image"; 1 = "Video"; 2 = "Emoji"; 3 =

"Infographic"; and 4 = "Voting" to this question.

Framing. To measure the extent to which certain frames appear in posts that

mention politics, this study adopted a series of 20 questions developed by Semetko and

Valkenburg (2000) to which the coder had to answer 1 = "Yes" or 0 = "No." Each

question was meant to measure one of five news frames: attribution of responsibility,

human interest, conflict, morality, and economic. If the answer to at least one of the

above questions was affirmative, then the frame was recorded as applied in the post.

Given the characteristics of human interest frame (dramatized and emotional), conflict

frame (emphasis on conflict), and responsibility frame (blaming), these three frames were

also the key indications of polarization in news in this study.

- ***Responsibility frame***. This frame presents an issue or problem in such a way as to

  attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an

  individual or group. The U.S. news media have been credited with, or blamed for,

  shaping the public's understanding of who is responsible for causing or solving

  key social problems, such as poverty (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Iyengar and

  Simon (1993) argued that sometimes television news encourages people to offer

  individual-level explanations for social problems by covering an issue or problem

  in terms of an event or individual (episodically) rather than regarding the larger

  historical, social context (thematically). For example, the individual is held

  responsible for his or her fate, instead of the government or the system.

- ***Human interest frame***. This frame brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem. Neuman et al. (1992) called this frame next to conflict, and found it to be a common frame in the news. As the market for news everywhere becomes more competitive, newsrooms are at pains to produce a product that captures and retains audience interest (Bennett, 1995). Framing news in human interest terms is one way to achieve this. Such a frame refers to an effort to personalize the news, dramatize or "emotionalize" the news, in order to capture and retain audience interest (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

- ***Conflict frame***. This frame emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions as a way of capturing audience interest. Neuman et al. (1992) found that conflict was the most common frame found in the U.S. news media they analyzed. Because of the emphasis on conflict, the news media have been criticized for inducing public cynicism and mistrust of political leaders (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997).

- ***Morality frame***. This frame puts the event, problem, or issue in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions. A newspaper could, for example, use the views of an interest group to raise questions about euthanasia. Such a story may contain moral messages or offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave. Neuman et al. (1992) found this frame to be more common in audience response than in news content.

- ***Economic frame***. This frame reports an event, problem, or issue regarding the

  consequences it will have economically on an individual, group, institution,

  region, or country.

Table 2. *Frames used in the coding of media posts and user comments, as measures of polarization*

Main Frames	Subframes
Responsibility frame	RF1: Does the post (comment) suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem?
	RF2: Does the post (comment) suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?
	RF3: Does the post (comment) suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?
	RF4: Does the post (comment) suggest that an ind. (or group of people in society) is resp. for the issue-problem?
	RF5: Does the post (comment) suggest the problem requires urgent action?
Human interest frame	HF1: Does the post (comment) provide a human example or "human face" on the issue?
	HF2: Does the post (comment) employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?
	HF3: Does the post (comment) emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?
	HF4: Does the post (comment) go into the private or personal lives of the actors?
	HF5: Does the post (comment) contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy, or compassion?
Conflict frame	CF1: Does the post (comment) reflect disagreement between parties-individuals-groups-countries?

	CF2: Does one party-individual-group-country reproach another?
	CF3: Does the post (comment) refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?
	CF4: Does the post (comment) refer to winners and losers?
Morality frame	MF1: Does the post (comment) contain any moral message?
	MF2: Does the post (comment) make reference to morality, God, and other religious tenets?
	MF3: Does the post (comment) offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?
Economic frame	EF1: Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?
	EF2: Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?
	EF3: Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?

For RQ2 (user comments by the readers), there were two extra codings included as follows:

Civility. A three-item index was used to code for civility or the lack thereof. If there was at least one instance of incivility or impoliteness within a message, then that was enough to render the comment as uncivil or impolite. The three-item civility index consisted of the following three questions:

(1) Does the discussant verbalize a threat to democracy (e.g. propose to overthrow a democratic government by force)?

(2) Does the discussant assign stereotypes (e.g. associated person with a group by using labels, whether those are mild – 'liberal,' or more offensive – 'faggot')?

(3) Does the discussant threaten other individuals' rights (e.g. personal freedom,

freedom to speak)?

Coders answered 0 = "Yes" or 1 = "No." If the answer to at least one of the above

questions was affirmative, then the comments were labeled as uncivil.

Politeness. Politeness was measured in a manner similar to civility, in that an

index was used and if a comment included at least one instance of impoliteness, it was

labeled as impolite. If name-calling (e.g. weirdo, traitor, crackpot), aspersions (e.g.

reckless, irrational), synonyms for liar (e.g. hoax, farce), hyperbole (e.g. outrageous,

heinous), or words that indicated pejorative speak or vulgarity occurred, then the message

was considered impolite (Papacharissi, 2004).

Content Analysis as a Social Science Tool

Content analysis, according to Kerlinger (1973), should be viewed as "a method

of observation" similar to observing people's behavior or "asking them to respond to

scales," except that the investigator "asks questions of the communications" (p. 525).

Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) quoted Berelson's (1952) definition of content analysis as "a

research technique for objective systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest

content of communication " (p. 18), includes the important specification of the process as

being objective, systematic, and focusing on a content's manifest (or denotative or

shared) meaning (as opposed to connotative or latent "between-the-lines" meaning).

Weber (1990) defined "content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures

to make valid inferences from text" (p. 9). Krippendorff (1980) emphasized that, "content

analysis is a research technique for making replicative and valid inferences from data to

their context" (p. 21). Content analysis allows researchers to draw conclusions from

content evidence without having to gain access to communicators who may be unwilling

or unable to be examined directly because it is a "non-obtrusive, non-reactive,

measurable technique." Therefore, the messages are "separate and apart from

communicators and receivers" (p. 30). Also, quantification by the coding team permits

reduction to numbers of large amounts of information or data that would be logistically

impossible for close qualitative analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

Results of Research Question 1

RQ1 sought to determine how polarized the top online news media organizations are when covering the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. In order to answer this question, I analyzed the (1) frames, (2) policy issues, (3) subjectivity, (4) political stance, (5) tone, (6) number of point of views, (7) persuasion approach, and (8) visual strategy present in the postings by media organizations.

In terms of the **framing**, the top three most frequent frames used by media organizations are conflict, human interest, and attribution of responsibility (*see Figure 1*). About 68% of all the postings used the conflict frame. About 58% used the human interest frame. And about 53% used the responsibility frame. Many postings use more than one frame at a time. The average number of frames per post is 2.02 frames (*sd =* 1.258) While 14% of all postings use no frame at all, and 22% use only one frame, the remaining 64 % use two or more frames. The analysis shows that 24% use two frames, 27% use three frames, and 13% use four frames at once.
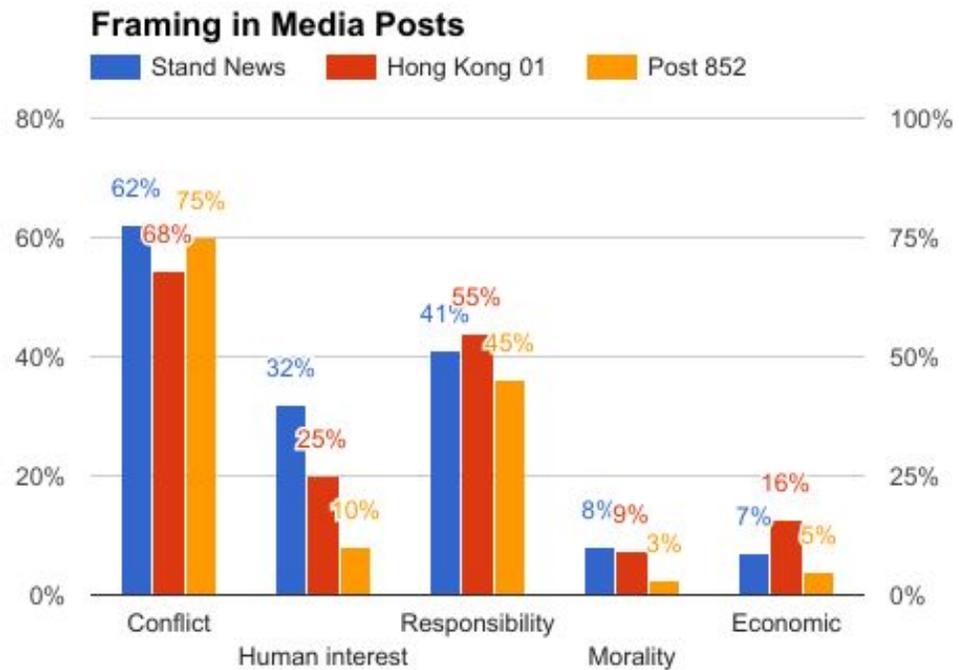
Figure 1. *Frame use by the three studied media pages.*

<u>*Conflict frame (Sum)*</u>

Results showed that 68% (or 193 stories) of all the Facebook posts were placed into the conflict frame. This is the most popular frame for all the three media organizations analyzed. *Stand News* had 62% of all its stories framed as conflict, *Hong Kong 01* had 68% framed as conflict, and *Post 852* had 75% framed as conflict. There is no significant difference of the number of conflict-framed posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Another finding is that the conflict frame is rarely used alone. Out of 193 stories using this frame, only 23% use conflict by itself, while the remaining 77% use between two to four frames. About 58% of all conflict-framed posts also use the responsibility

frame, and 62% use the human interest frame. The combination of conflict and morality accounts for only 21% of all conflict frames, and conflict and economic frames comprises only 7% of all conflict frames.

Human interest frame (Sum)

Results showed that 58% of all the Facebook posts were placed into the human interest frame. This is the second most popular frame for all three media organizations analyzed. *Stand News* had 32% of all its stories framed as human interest, *Hong Kong 01* had 25% framed as human interest, and *Post 852* had 10% framed as human interest. *Stand News* and *Hong Kong 01* had significantly more human interest-framed posts than *Post 852* (x^2 = 22.093, df = 2, p < .001).

The human frame is also used in connection with other frames. Only 9% of all the postings contain only this frame and no others. About 27% contain a second frame, 42% contain three frames, and 22% contain four frames. The most popular combination is human interest and conflict, present in 73% of all human interest stories. Human interest and responsibility appear in 64% of all human interest stories. Human interest and morality account for 30% of all human interest stories, and human interest and the economic frame comprises only 12% of all human interest stories.

Responsibility frame (Sum)

Results showed that 53% of all the Facebook posts were placed into the responsibility frame. This is the third most popular frame for all three media organizations analyzed. *Stand News* had 41% of all its stories framed as responsibility, *Hong Kong 01* had 55% framed as responsibility, and *Post 852* had 45% framed as

responsibility. There is no significant difference in the number of responsibility-framed posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

The responsibility frame is almost never used alone. Only one posting using this frame contained no other frames. Responsibility is nearly always accompanied by other frames. About 22% of all responsibility-framed postings contained a second frame, 50% contained three frames, and 27% contained four frames. The most popular combinations of frames are responsibility and conflict (in 83% of all responsibility postings), and responsibility and human interest (in 78% of all responsibility frames). A third of the time (345 instances), responsibility is discussed in association with morality frames, and 9% of the times is combined with economic frames.

Morality frame (Sum)

Results showed that only 20% of all the Facebook posts were placed into the morality frame. This is the second least popular frame for all three media organizations analyzed. *Stand News* had 8% of all of its stories framed as morality, *Hong Kong 01* had 9% framed as morality, and *Post 852* had 3% framed as morality. *Post 852* had significantly less morality-framed posts than *Stand News* and *Hong Kong 01* ($x^2 = 8.795$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$).

Economic frame (Sum)

Results showed that only 10% of all the Facebook posts were placed into the economic frame. This is the least popular frame for all three media organizations analyzed. *Stand News* had 7% of all of its stories framed as economic, *Hong Kong 01* had 16% framed as economic, and *Post 852* had 5% framed as economic. There is no

significant difference in the number of economic-framed posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Each of these five main news frames are constructed by several **subframes**. The responsibility frame contains five subframes, including RF1, RF2, RF3, RF4, and RF5. Responsibility Frame 1 (RF1) focuses on whether the post suggests that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem. Responsibility Frame 2 (RF2) focuses on whether the post suggests that some level of the government is responsible for the issue or problem. Responsibility Frame 3 (RF3) focuses on whether the post suggests solutions to the problem or issue. Responsibility Frame 4 (RF4) focuses on whether the post suggests that an individual (or group of people in society) is responsible for the issue-problem. Responsibility Frame 5 (RF5) focuses on whether the post suggests that the problem requires urgent action.

Responsibility Frame 1 (RF1)

Results showed that only 13% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 18% of all of its stories framed as RF1-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 11% framed as RF1-related, and *Post 852* had 9% of all of its stories as RF1-related. There is no significant difference in the number of RF1-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Responsibility Frame 2 (RF2)

Results showed that 22% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 21% of all of its stories framed as RF2-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 22% framed as RF2-related, and *Post 852* had 23% of all of its stories as RF2-related. There is

no significant difference in the number of RF2-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Responsibility Frame 3 (RF3)

Results showed that only 7% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 7% of all of its stories framed as RF3-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 8% framed as RF3-related, and *Post 852* had 5% of all of its stories as RF3-related. There is no significant difference in the number of RF3-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Responsibility Frame 4 (RF4)

Results showed that 36% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 31% of all of its stories framed as RF4-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 45% framed as RF4-related, and *Post 852* had 33% of all of its stories as RF4-related. There is no significant difference in the number of RF4-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Responsibility Frame 5 (RF5)

Results showed that only 1% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 0% of all of its stories framed as RF5-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 3% framed as RF5-related, and *Post 852* had 0% of all of its stories as RF5-related. There is no significant difference in the number of RF5-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

The human interest frame also contains five subframes. Human Interest Frame 1 (HF1) focuses on whether the post provides a human example or "human face" to the

issue. Human Interest Frame 2 (HF2) focuses on whether the post employs adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion. Human Interest Frame 3 (HF3) focuses on whether the post emphasizes how individuals and groups are affected by the issue or problem. Human Interest Frame 4 (HF4) focuses on whether the post goes into the private or personal lives of the actors. Human Interest Frame 5 (HF5) focuses on whether the post contains visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy, or compassion.

Human Interest Frame 1 (HF1)

Results showed that 25 % of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 15% of all of its stories framed as HF1-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 48% framed as HF1-related, and *Post 852* had 8% of all of its stories as HF1-related. *Hong Kong 01* had significantly more HF1-related posts than *Stand News* and *Post 852* ($x^2 = 46.039$, *df* = 2, *p* < .001).

Human Interest Frame 2 (HF2)

Results showed that 44% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 43% of all of its stories framed as HF2-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 58% framed as HF2-related, and *Post 852* had 26% of all of its stories as HF2-related. *Hong Kong 01* had significantly more HF2-related posts than *Stand News* and *Post 852*. Meanwhile, *Post 852* had significantly fewer HF2-related posts than *Hong Kong 01,* but *Stand News* had no significantly different number of HF2-related posts from either *Post 852* or *Hong Kong 01*($x^2 = 18.781$, *df* = 2, *p* < .001).

Human Interest Frame 3 (HF3)

Results showed that 39% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 40% of all of its stories framed as HF3-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 53% framed as HF3-related, and *Post 852* had 19% of all of its stories as HF3-related. *Post 852* had significantly fewer HF3-related posts than *Stand News* and *Hong Kong 01* ($x^2 = 21.645$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$).

Human Interest Frame 4 (HF4)

Results showed that 19% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 10% of all of its stories framed as HF4-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 40 %framed as HF4-related, and *Post 852* had 6% of all of its stories as HF4-related. *Hong Kong 01* had significantly fewer HF4-related posts than *Stand News* and *Post 852* ($x^2 = 41.746$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$).

Human Interest Frame 5 (HF5)

Results showed that 34 % of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 48% of all of its stories framed as HF5-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 47% framed as HF5-related, and *Post 852* had 0% of all of its stories as HF5-related. *Post 852* had significantly fewer HF5-related posts than *Stand News* and *Hong Kong 01* ($x^2 = 57.439$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$).

The conflict frame contains four subframes, including CF1, CF2, CF3, and CF4. Conflict Frame 1 (CF1) focuses on whether the post reflects disagreement between parties-individuals-groups-countries. Conflict Frame 2 (CF2) focuses on whether the post reflects one party-individual-group-country being reproachful of another. Conflict Frame

3 (CF3) focuses on whether the post refers to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue. Conflict Frame 4 (CF4) focuses on whether the post refers to winners and losers.

Conflict Frame 1 (CF1)

Results showed that 53 % of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 43% of all of its stories framed as CF1-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 52% framed as CF1-related, and *Post 852* had 66% of all of its stories as CF1-related. *Post 852* had significantly more CF1-related posts than *Stand News* and *Hong Kong 01*. Meanwhile, *Stand News* had significant fewer CF1-related posts than *Post 852,* but *Hong Kong 01* had no significant different number of CF1-related posts from either *Stand News* or *Post 852* (x^2 = 9.661, *df* = 2, *p* < .05).

Conflict Frame 2 (CF2)

Results showed that 40% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 34% of all of its stories framed as CF2-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 47% framed as CF2-related, and *Post 852* had 40% of all of its stories as CF2-related. There is no significant difference in the number of CF2-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Conflict Frame 3 (CF3)

Results showed that only 17% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 12% of all of its stories framed as CF3-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 13% framed as CF3-related, and *Post 852* had 30% of all of its stories as

CF3-related. *Post 852* had significantly more CF3-related posts than *Stand News* and *Hong Kong 01* ($x^2 = 12.877$, *df* = 2, *p* < .05).

Conflict Frame 4 (CF4)

Results showed that 40% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 24% of all of its stories framed as CF4-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 42% framed as CF4-related, and *Post 852* had 59% of all of its stories as CF4-related. *Hong Kong 01* and *Post 852* had significantly more CF4-related posts than *Stand News* ($x^2 = 22.864$, *df* = 2, *p* < .001).

The morality frame contains three subframes, including MF1, MF2, and MF3. Morality Frame 1 (MF1) focuses on whether the post contains any moral message. Morality Frame 2 (MF2) focuses on whether the post makes reference to morality, God, and other religious tenets. Morality Frame 3 (MF3) focuses on whether the post offers specific social prescriptions about how to behave.

Morality Frame 1 (MF1)

Results showed that only 19% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 21% of all of its stories framed as MF1-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 25% framed as MF1-related, and *Post 852* had 9% of all of its stories as MF1-related. *Post 852* had significantly fewer MF1-related posts than *Stand News* and *Hong Kong 01*. Meanwhile, *Post 852* had significant fewer MF1-related posts than *Hong Kong 01,* but *Stand News* showed no significant different number of MF1-related posts from either *Post 852* or *Hong Kong 01* ($x^2 = 7.963$, *df* = 2, *p* < .05).

Morality Frame 2 (MF2)

Results showed that only 1% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 2% of all of its stories framed as MF2-related. *Hong Kong 01* and *Post 852* both had 0% of their stories as MF2-related. There is no significant difference in the number of MF2-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Morality Frame 3 (MF3)

Results showed that only 13% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 13% of all of its stories framed as MF3-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 20% framed as MF3-related, and *Post 852* had 4% of all of its stories as MF3-related. *Post 852* had significantly fewer MF3-related posts than *Stand News* and *Hong Kong 01*. Meanwhile, *Post 852* had significant fewer MF3-related posts than *Hong Kong 01,* but *Stand News* showed no significant different number of MF3-related posts from either *Post 852* or *Hong Kong 01* ($x^2 = 10.425$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$).

The economic frame also contains three subframes, including EF1, EF2, and EF3. Economic Frame 1 (EF1) focuses on whether the post has a mention of financial losses or gains, now or in the future. Economic Frame 2 (EF2) focuses on whether the post has a mention of the costs, or degree of expense, involved. Economic Frame 3 (EF3) focuses on whether the post references the economic consequences of pursuing, or not pursuing, a course of action.

Economic Frame 1 (EF1)

Results showed that only 6% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 5% of all of its stories framed as EF1-related, *Hong Kong 01* had

9% framed as EF1-related, and *Post 852* had 4% of all of its stories as EF1-related. There is no significant difference in the number of EF1-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Economic Frame 2 (EF2)

Results showed that only 8% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 5% of all of its stories framed as EF2-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 14 % framed as EF2-related, and *Post 852* had 4% of all of its stories as EF2-related. There is no significant difference in the number of EF2-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Economic Frame 3 (EF3)

Results showed that only 4% of all the Facebook posts were placed into this frame. *Stand News* had 2% of all of its stories framed as EF3-related, *Hong Kong 01* had 9% framed as EF3-related, and *Post 852* had 1% of all of its stories as EF3-related. There is no significant difference in the number of EF3-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Level of Subjectivity in News Postings

In terms of **subjectivity**, the most frequently cited type of subjectivity used by media organizations is hybrid. About 37% of all the postings were hybrid. About 35% were opinion, and about 28% were descriptive reporting.

Subjectivity of Media Posts
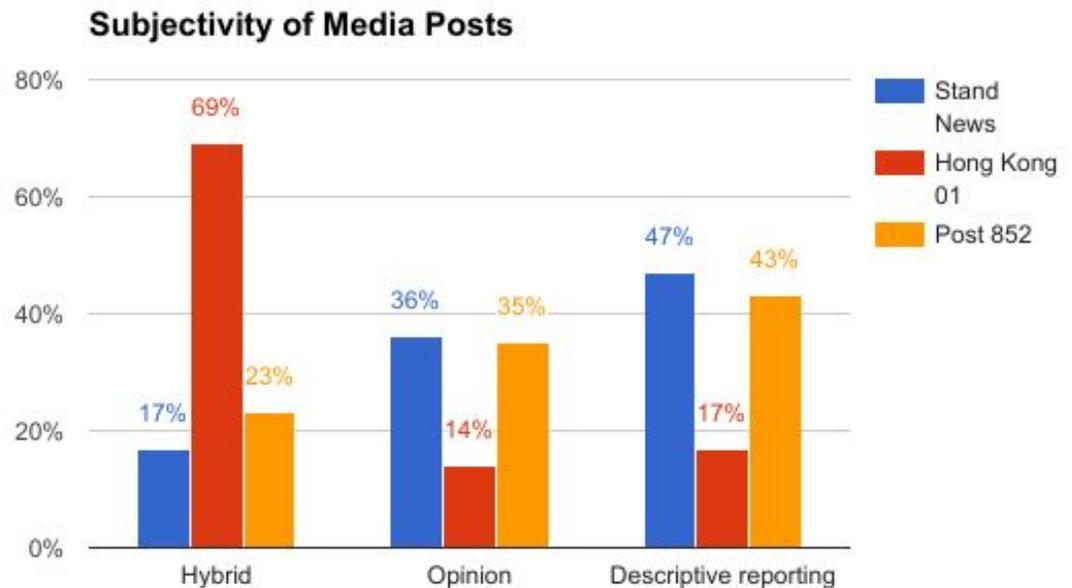
Figure 2. *Subjectivity use by the three studied media pages.*

<u>Hybrid</u>

Results showed that 37% of all the Facebook posts were hybrid. *Stand News* had 17% of all of its stories identified as hybrid, *Hong Kong 01* had 69% identified as hybrid, and *Post 852* had 23% identified as hybrid. *Hong Kong 01* had significantly more hybrid posts than *Stand News* and *Post 852* (x^2 = 69.684, *df* = 4, *p* < .001).

<u>Opinion</u>

Results showed that 35% of all the Facebook posts were opinion. *Stand News* had 36% of all of its stories identified as opinion, *Hong Kong 01* had 14% identified as opinion, and *Post 852* had 35 %identified as opinion. *Hong Kong 01* had significantly fewer opinion posts than *Stand News* and *Post 852* (x^2 = 69.684, *df* = 4, *p* < .001).

Results showed that 28% of all the Facebook posts were descriptive reporting. *Stand News* had 47% of all of its stories identified as descriptive reporting, *Hong Kong 01* had 17% identified as descriptive reporting, and *Post 852* had 43% identified as descriptive reporting. *Hong Kong 01* had significantly fewer descriptive reporting posts than *Stand News* and *Post 852* ($x^2 = 69.684$, *df* = 4, *p* < .001).

Political Stance Towards the Pro-democracy Movement

In terms of **political stance**, most of the postings by media organizations had a supportive stance of the pro-democracy movement. About 53% of all the postings were supportive. About 3% were contrary, and about 44% were neutral.
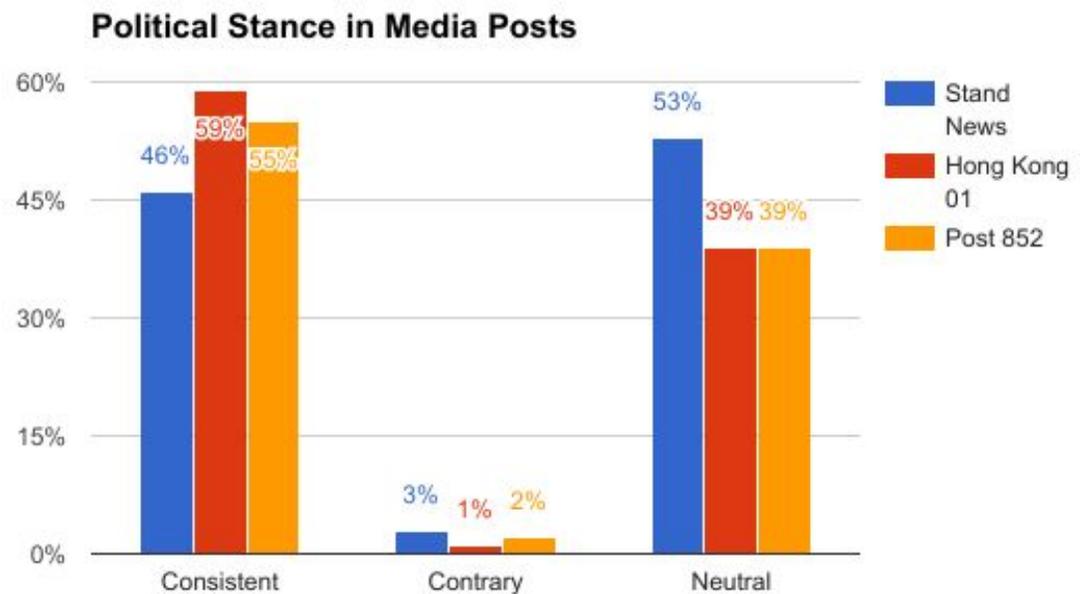
Figure 3. *Political stance use by the three studied media pages.*

Results showed that 53 % of all the Facebook posts were consistent. _Stand News_ had 46% of all of its stories were consistent, _Hong Kong 01_ had 59% were consistent, and _Post 852_ had 55% were consistent. There is no significant difference of the number in consistent posts among _Stand News_, _Hong Kong 01_, and _Post 852_.

Contrary

Results showed that only 3% of all the Facebook posts were contrary. _Stand News_ had 1% of all of its stories were contrary, _Hong Kong 01_ had 2% were contrary, and _Post 852_ had 6% were contrary. There is no significant difference of the number in contrary posts among _Stand News_, _Hong Kong 01_, and _Post 852_.

Neutral

Results showed that 44% of all the Facebook posts were neutral. _Stand News_ had 53% of all of its stories were neutral, _Hong Kong 01_ and _Post 852_ both had 39% that were neutral. There is no significant difference of the number in neutral posts among _Stand News_, _Hong Kong 01_, and _Post 852_.

Policy Issues Discussed in News Postings

In terms of the **policy issues**, the two most frequent policy issues covered by media organizations are election and Hong Kong. About 64% of all the postings were about election. About 17% were about Hong Kong. Other issues were covered as well including; other (5%), crime (3%), China (3%), cross-border law enforcement (3%), police (3%), education (2%), art and culture (1%), and finance (< 1%).

Results showed that 64% of all the Facebook posts were about election. _Stand News_ had 71% of all of its stories related to election, _Hong Kong 01_ had 35% related to election, and _Post 852_ had 90% related to election. _Hong Kong 01_ had significantly fewer election-related posts than _Stand News_, meanwhile, _Post 852_ had significantly more election-related posts than _Stand News_ ($x^2 = 87.976$, $df = 18$, $p < .001$).

Hong Kong

Results showed that 17% of all the Facebook posts were about Hong Kong. _Stand News_ had 13% of all of its stories related to Hong Kong, _Hong Kong 01_ had 35% related to Hong Kong, and _Post 852_ had 0% related to Hong Kong. _Hong Kong 01_ had significantly more Hong Kong-related posts than _Stand News_. Meanwhile, _Post 852_ had significantly fewer Hong Kong-related posts than _Stand News_ ($x^2 = 87.976$, $df = 18$, $p < .001$).

Other Issues

Results showed that only 5% of all the Facebook posts were identified as other. _Stand News_ had 3% of all of its stories identified as other, _Hong Kong 01_ had 8% identified as other, and _Post 852_ had 5% identified as other. There is no significant difference in the number of posts identified as other among _Stand News_, _Hong Kong 01_, and _Post 852_.

China

Result showed that only 5% of all the Facebook posts were about China. _Stand News_ had 3% of all of its stories related to China, _Hong Kong 01_ had 5% related to

China, and *Post 852* had 0% related to China. There is no significant difference in the number of China-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

<u>*Cross-border Law Enforcement*</u>

Results showed that only 3% of all the Facebook posts were about cross-border law enforcement. *Stand News* and *Hong Kong 01* both had 3% of all of its stories related to cross-border law enforcement, and *Post 852* had 1% related to cross-border law enforcement. There is no significant difference in the number of cross-border law enforcement-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

<u>*Police*</u>

Results showed that only 3% of all the Facebook posts were about police. *Stand News* had 4% of all of its stories related to police, *Hong Kong 01* had 1% related to police, and *Post 852* had 3% related to police. There is no significant difference in the number of police-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

<u>*Police*</u>

Results showed that only 3% of all the Facebook posts were about police. *Stand News* had 4% of all of its stories related to police, *Hong Kong 01* had 1% related to police, and *Post 852* had 3% related to police. There is no significant difference in the number of police-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

<u>*Education*</u>

Results showed that only 2% of all the Facebook posts were about education. *Stand News* had 2% of all of its stories related to education, *Hong Kong 01* had 3% related to education, and *Post 852* had 1% related to education. There is no significant

difference in the number of education-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

<u>*Art and culture*</u>

Results showed that only 1% of all the Facebook posts were about art and culture. *Stand News* had 2% of all of its stories related to art and culture, *Hong Kong 01* and *Post 852* both had 0% related to art and culture. There is no significant difference in the number of art and culture-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

<u>*Finance*</u>

Results showed that only less than 1% of all the Facebook posts were about finance. *Hong Kong 01* had 1% of all of its stories related to finance, *Stand News* and *Post 852* both had 0% related to finance. There is no significant difference in the number of finance-related posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Tone Towards Policy Issues

In terms of **tone**, the most frequent tone used by media organizations is critical. About 49% of all the postings were critical, about 41% were neutral, and about 10% were supportive.

<u>*Critical*</u>

Results showed that 49% of all the Facebook posts were identified as critical. *Stand News* had 39% of all of its stories identified as critical, *Hong Kong 01* had 55% identified as critical, and *Post 852* had 53% identified as critical. There is no significant difference in the number of critical posts among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Results showed that 41% of all the Facebook posts were identified as neutral. *Stand News* had 51% of all of its stories identified as neutral, *Hong Kong 01* had 28% identified as neutral, and *Post 852* had 44% identified as neutral. *Stand News* had significantly more neutral posts than *Hong Kong 01* and *Post 852.* Meanwhile, *Hong Kong 01* had significantly fewer neutral posts than *Stand News,* but *Post 852* showed no significant difference in the number of neutral posts from either *Stand News* or *Hong Kong 01* ($x^2 = 17.453$, $df = 4$, $p < .005$).

Supportive

Results showed that 10% of all the Facebook posts were identified as supportive. *Stand News* had 10% of all of its stories identified as supportive, *Hong Kong 01* had 17% identified as supportive, and *Post 852* had 4% identified as supportive. *Hong Kong 01* had significantly more supportive posts than *Stand News* and *Post 852* ($x^2 = 17.453$, $df = 4$, $p < .005$).

How many points of view were presented in news posts?

In terms of **number of point of views**, the most frequent number of point of view used by media organizations is one. About 88% of all the postings had one point of view only. About 7% had two points of view, and about 5% had three or more points of view.

Persuasion elements in news posts

In terms of **persuasion approach**, the most frequent approach used by media organizations is logos. About 28% of all the postings used logos. About 26% used pathos. About 7% used ethos, and about 39% of all the postings were identified as not applicable.

Logos

Results showed that 28% of all the Facebook posts used logos. *Stand News* had

31% of all of its stories using logos, *Hong Kong 01* had 21% using logos, and *Post 852*

had 34% using logos. There is no significant difference in the number of posts using

logos among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Pathos

Results showed that 26% of all the Facebook posts used pathos. *Stand News* had

16% of all of its stories used pathos, *Hong Kong 01* had 49% using pathos, and *Post 852*

had 11% using pathos. *Hong Kong 01* had significantly more posts using pathos than

Stand News and *Post 852* (x^2 = 42.070, df = 6, p < .001).

Ethos

Results showed that only 7% of all the Facebook posts used ethos. *Stand News*

and *Hong Kong 01* both had 6% of all their stories using ethos, and *Post 852* had 10%

using ethos. There is no significant difference in the number of posts using ethos among

Stand News, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Not Applicable

Results showed that 39% of all the Facebook posts were identified as not

applicable. *Stand News* had 47% of all of its stories identified as not applicable, *Hong

Kong 01* had 25% identified as not applicable, and *Post 852* had 45% identified as not

applicable. *Stand News* and *Post 852* had significantly more posts identified as not

applicable than *Hong Kong 01* (x^2 = 42.070, df = 6, p < .001).

Visual Strategy in News Posts

In terms of **visual strategy**, the one most frequently used by media organizations is image. About 60% of all the postings used image. About 33% used video. About 4% used emoji. About 3% used infographic. About 1% used voting.

Image

Results showed that 60% of all the Facebook posts used image. *Stand News* had 88% of all of its stories using image, *Hong Kong 01* had 80% using image, and *Post 852* had 0% using image. *Stand News* and *Hong Kong 01* had significantly more posts using image than *Post 852* (x^2 = 249.674, *df* = 8, *p* < .001).

Video

Results showed that 33% of all the Facebook posts used video. *Stand News* had 6% of all of its stories using video, *Hong Kong 01* had 7% using video, and *Post 852* had 100% using video. *Post 852* had significantly more posts using video than *Stand News* and *Hong Kong 01* (x^2 = 249.674, *df* = 8, *p* < .001).

Emoji

Results showed that only 4% of all the Facebook posts used emoji. *Hong Kong 01* had 10% of all of its stories using emoji. *Stand News* and *Post 852* both had 0% using emoji. *Stand News* and *Post 852* had significantly fewer posts using emoji than *Hong Kong 01* (x^2 = 249.674, *df* = 8, *p* < .001).

Infograph

Results showed that only 3% of all the Facebook posts used infograph. *Stand News* had 6% of all of its stories using infograph, *Hong Kong 01* had 1% using

infographic, and *Post 852* had 0% using infograph. There is no significant difference in the number of posts using infographic among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Voting

Results showed that only 1% of all the Facebook posts used voting. *Stand News* had 1% of all of its stories using voting, *Hong Kong 01* had 2% using voting, and *Post 852* had 0% using voting. There is no significant difference of the number in posts using voting among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Results of Research Question 2

RQ2 asked how polarized and civil are the user comments on the top online news media organizations covering the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. In order to answer this question, I analyzed the (1) civility, (2) politeness, (3) frames, (4) subjectivity, (5) tone, (6) number of point of views, (7) persuasion approach, and (8) visual strategy present in the comments by readers of media organizations.

Civility

Results showed that 84% of all the Facebook comments were identified as civil. *Stand News* had 73% of all of its comments identified as civil, *Hong Kong 01* had 91% identified as civil, and *Post 852* had 86% identified as civil. *Stand News* had significantly more uncivil comments than *Hong Kong 01* and *Post 852* ($x^2 = 32.027$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$).

Politeness

Results showed that 59% of all the Facebook comments were identified as polite. *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01,* and *Post 852* all had 59% of all their comments identified as

polite. There is no significant difference of the number in polite comments among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

In terms of the **framing**, the top three most frequent frames used by readers are human interest frame, conflict frame, and responsibility frame. About 39% of all the comments used the human interest frame. About 31% used the conflict frame. And about 30% used the responsibility frame. Also, many comments use no frame at all. The average number of frames per comment is 1.32 frames (*sd* = 1.341). While 39% of all comments use no frame at all, and 20% use only one frame, the remaining 41% use two or more frames. The analysis shows that 21% use two frames, 13% use three frames, 7% use four frames, and 1% use five frames at once.
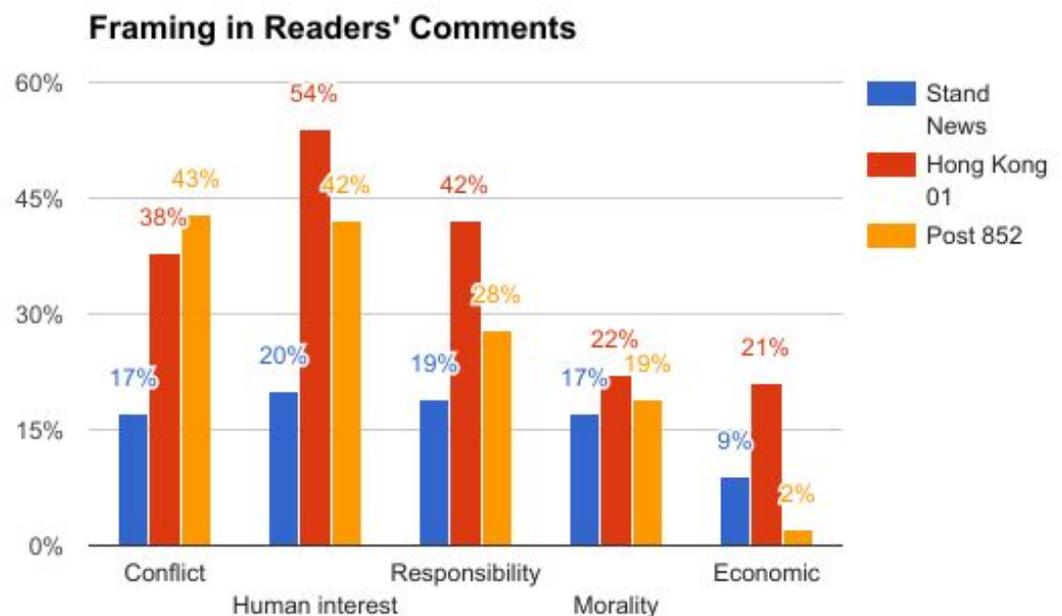
Figure 4. *Frame use by the readers from the three studied media pages.*

Human Interest Frame

Results showed that 39% of all the Facebook comments were placed into the human interest frame. This is the most popular frame for all three media organizations analyzed. *Stand News* had 20% of all of its comments framed as human interest, *Hong Kong 01* had 54% framed as human interest, and *Post 852* had 42% framed as human interest. *Hong Kong 01* and *Post 852* had significantly more human interest-framed comments than *Stand News* ($x^2 = 68.993$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$).

Another finding is that the human interest frame is rarely used alone. Out of 277 comments, about 20% of all the postings contain only this frame and no other frames. About 39% contain a second frame, 21% contain three frames, 17% contain four frames, and 3% contain five frames. The most popular combination is human interest and conflict, present in 48% of all human interest stories. Human interest and responsibility appear in 44% of all human interest stories. Human interest and morality account for 31% of all human interest stories, and human interest and the economic frame comprises 21% of all human interest stories.

Conflict Frame

Results showed that 31% of all the Facebook comments were placed into the conflict frame. This is the second most popular frame for all three media organizations analyzed. *Stand News* had 17% of all its comments framed as conflict, *Hong Kong 01* had 38% framed as conflict, and *Post 852* had 43% framed as conflict. *Hong Kong 01* and *Post 852* had significantly more conflict-framed comments than *Stand News* ($x^2 = 41.200$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$).

The conflict frame is also used in connection with other frames. Out of 224 comments using this frame, only 13% use only conflict. About 33% contain a second frame, 30% contain three frames, 21% contain four frames, and 3% contain five frames. About 59% of all conflict-framed comments also use the responsibility frame, and 59% use the human interest frame. The combination of conflict and morality accounts for 42% of all conflict frames, and conflict and economic frames comprises just 11% of all conflict frames.

Responsibility Frame

Results showed that 30% of all the Facebook comments were placed into the responsibility frame. This is the third most popular frame for all three media organizations analyzed. *Stand News* had 19% of all of its comments framed as responsibility, *Hong Kong 01* had 42% framed as responsibility, and *Post 852* had 28% framed as responsibility. *Hong Kong 01* had significantly more responsibility-framed comments than *Stand News* and *Post 852* ($x^2 = 36.327$, *df* = 2, *p* < .001).

The responsibility frame is seldom used alone. Out of 218 comments, 13% use just responsibility. About 25% of all responsibility-framed postings contained a second frame, 36% contained three frames, 22% contained four frames, and 4% contain five frames. The most popular combinations of frames are responsibility and conflict (in 61% of all responsibility postings), and responsibility and human interest (in 56% of all responsibility frames). About 47% of responsibility frames discussed were associated with morality frames, and 13% also included economic frames.

Morality Frame

Results showed that only 19% of all the Facebook comments were placed into the morality frame. This is the second least popular frame for all three media organizations analyzed. *Stand News* had 17% of all its comments framed as morality, *Hong Kong 01* had 22% framed as morality, and *Post 852* had 19% framed as morality. There is no significant difference in the number of morality-framed comments among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Economic Frame

Results showed that only 13% of all the Facebook comments were placed into the economic frame. This is the least popular frame for all three media organizations analyzed. *Stand News* had 9% of all of its comments framed as economic, *Hong Kong 01* had 21% framed as economic, and *Post 852* had 2% framed as economic. There is no significant difference in the number of morality-framed comments among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

In terms of **subjectivity**, the most frequent form of subjectivity used by readers is opinion. About 81% of all the comments were opinion. About 13% were hybrid. About 6% were descriptive reporting.
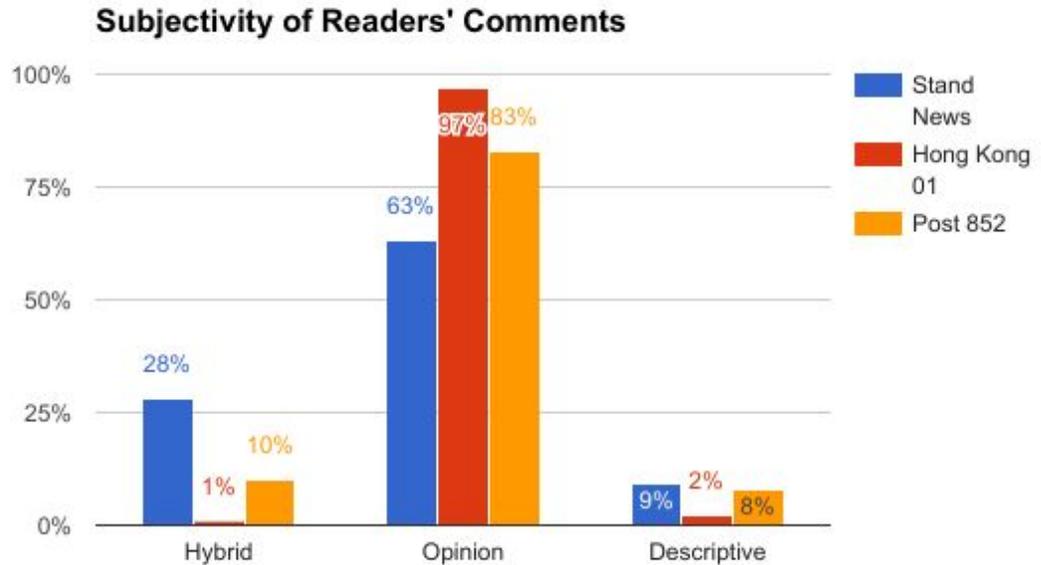
Figure 5. *Subjectivity use by the readers from the three studied media pages.*

<u>*Opinion*</u>

Results showed that 81% of all the Facebook comments were opinion. *Stand News* had 63% of all of its comments identified as opinion, *Hong Kong 01* had 97% identified as opinion, and *Post 852* had 83% identified as opinion. *Hong Kong 01* had significantly more opinionated comments than *Post 852*. Meanwhile, *Stand News* had significantly fewer opinionated comments than *Post 852* ($x^2 = 116.709$, $df = 6$, $p < .001$).

<u>*Hybrid*</u>

Results showed that 13% of all the Facebook comments were hybrid. *Stand News* had 28% of all of its comments identified as hybrid, *Hong Kong 01* had 1% identified as hybrid, and *Post 852* had 10% identified as hybrid. *Stand News* had significantly more

hybrid comments than *Post 852*. Meanwhile, *Hong Kong 01* had significantly fewer

hybrid comments than *Post 852* (x^2 = 116.709, *df* = 6, *p* < .001).

Descriptive

Results showed that only 6% of all the Facebook comments were descriptive.

Stand News had 9% of all of its comments identified as descriptive, *Hong Kong 01* had

2% identified as descriptive, and *Post 852* had 8% identified as descriptive. *Hong Kong*

01 had significantly fewer descriptive comments than *Stand News* and *Post 852* (x^2 =

116.709, *df* = 6, *p* < .001).

In terms of **political stance**, most of the comments by readers had a consistent

stance regarding the pro-democracy movement. About 57% of all the comments were

consistent. About 3% were contrary. And about 40% were neutral.
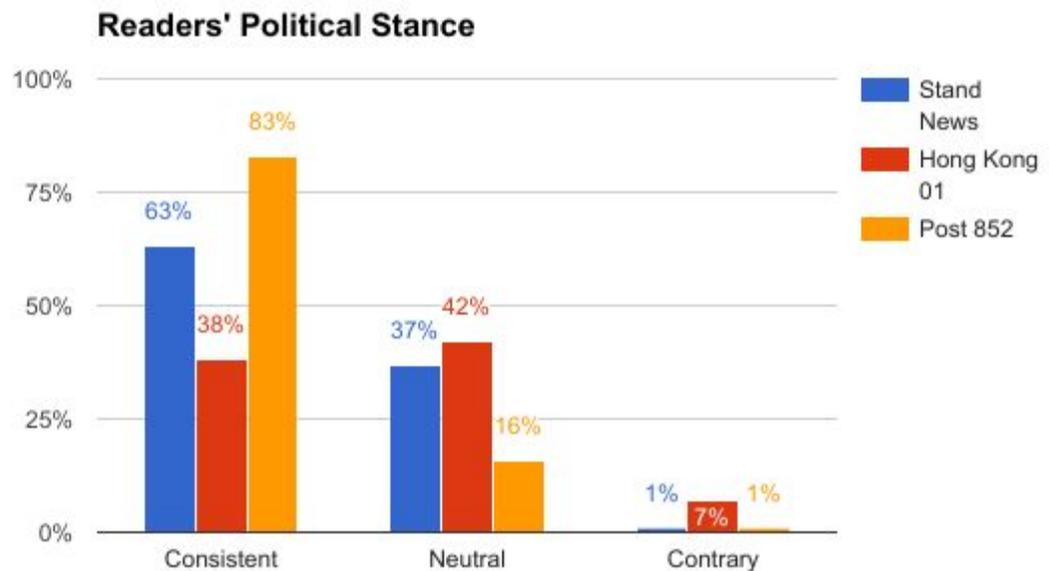
Figure 6. *Political stance use by the readers from the three studied media pages.*

Consistent

Results showed that 57% of all the Facebook comments were consistent. _Stand News_ had 63% of all of its comments consistent, _Hong Kong 01_ had 38% consistent, and _Post 852_ had 83% consistent. _Post 852_ had significantly more consistent comments than _Stand News_. Meanwhile, _Hong Kong 01_ had significantly fewer consistent comments than _Stand News_ (x^2 = 92.548, _df_ = 4, _p_ < .001).

Neutral

Results showed that 40% of all the Facebook comments were neutral. _Stand News_ had 37% of all of its comments neutral, _Hong Kong 01_ had 42% neutral, and _Post 852_ had 16% neutral. _Hong Kong 01_ had significantly more neutral comments than _Stand News_. Meanwhile, _Post 852_ had significantly fewer neutral comments than _Stand News_ (x^2 = 92.548, _df_ = 4, _p_ < .001).

Contrary

Results showed that only 3% of all the Facebook comments were contrary. _Stand News_ had 1% of all of its stories as contrary, _Hong Kong 01_ had 7% contrary, and _Post 852_ had 1% contrary. _Hong Kong 01_ had significantly more contrary comments than _Stand News_ and _Post 852_ (x^2 = 92.548, _df_ = 4, _p_ < .001).

In terms of **tone**, the most frequent tone used by readers is critical. About 54% of all the comments were critical. About 25% were supportive. And about 21% were neutral.

Results showed that 54% of all the Facebook comments were identified as critical. *Stand News* had 35% of all of its comments identified as critical, *Hong Kong 01* had 72% identified as critical, and *Post 852* had 55% identified as critical. *Hong Kong 01* had significantly more critical comments than *Post 852*. Meanwhile, *Stand News* had significantly fewer critical comments than *Post 852* (x^2 = 93.813, *df* = 4, *p* < .001).

Supportive

Results showed that 25% of all the Facebook comments were identified as supportive. *Stand News* had 33% of all of its comments identified as supportive, *Hong Kong 01* had 13% identified as supportive, and *Post 852* had 34% identified as supportive. There is no significant difference in the number of supportive comments among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Neutral

Results showed that 21% of all the Facebook comments were identified as neutral. *Stand News* had 33% of all of its comments identified as neutral, *Hong Kong 01* had 15% identified as neutral, and *Post 852* had 11% identified as neutral. *Stand News* had significantly more neutral comments than *Hong Kong 01* and *Post 852* (x^2 = 93.813, *df* = 4, *p* < .001).

In terms of the **number of point of views**, the most frequent number of point of views used by readers is one. About 83% of all the postings had only one point of view. About 10% had two points of view. And about 8% had three or more points of view.

In terms of **persuasion approach**, the most frequent approach used by readers is logos. About 34% of all the comments used logos. About 27% used pathos. About 1% used ethos. And about 38% of all the comments were identified as not applicable.

Logos

Results showed that 34% of all the Facebook comments used logos. *Stand News* had 33% of all of its comments using logos, *Hong Kong 01* had 36% using logos, and *Post 852* had 28% using logos. There is no significant difference in the number of comments using logos among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

Pathos

Results showed that 26% of all the Facebook comments used pathos. *Stand News* had 35% of all of its comments using pathos, *Hong Kong 01* had 19% using pathos, and *Post 852* had 28% using pathos. *Hong Kong 01* had significantly more comments using pathos than *Stand News* and *Post 852* ($x^2 = 42.070$, $df = 6$, $p < .001$).

Ethos

Results showed that only 1% of all the Facebook comments used ethos. *Stand News* and *Hong Kong 01* both had 1% of all of their comments using ethos, and *Post 852* had 4% using ethos. There is no significant difference in the number of comments used ethos among *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*.

No Explicit Persuasion

Results showed that 38% of all the Facebook comments did not contain an explicit persuasion element. *Stand News* had 31% such comments, *Hong Kong 01* had

44%, and *Post 852* had 41%. *Stand News* and *Post 852* had significantly more comments without an explicit persuasion attempt than *Hong Kong 01* (x^2 = 42.070, *df* = 6, *p* < .001).

Visual Strategy in Readers' Comments

In terms of **visual strategy**, the most frequent strategy is the use of text only. About 86% of all the comments used text only. About 7% used emoji. About 6% used image. About 1% used link. And 0% used video.

Text only

Results showed that 86% of all the Facebook comments used text only. *Stand News* had 94% of all of its comments using text only, *Hong Kong 01* had 75% using text only, and *Post 852* had 92% using text only. *Stand News* and *Post 852* had significantly more comments using text only than *Hong Kong 01* (x^2 = 78.441, *df* = 8, *p* < .001).

Emoji

Results showed that only 7% of all the Facebook comments used emojis. *Stand News* had 4% of all of its comments using emojis. *Hong Kong 01* had 9% using emojis, and *Post 852* had 7% using emojis. *Stand News* and *Post 852* had significantly fewer comments using emojis than *Hong Kong 01* (x^2 = 78.441, *df* = 8, *p* < .001).

Image

Results showed that only 6% of all the Facebook comments used images. *Stand News* had 0% of all of its comments using images, *Hong Kong 01* had 15% using images, and *Post 852* had 1% using images. *Hong Kong 01* had significantly more posts using images than *Stand News* and *Post 852* (x^2 = 78.441, *df* = 8, *p* < .001).

Link

Results showed that only 1% of all the Facebook comments used links. Only readers of *Stand News* posted links, and they appeared in only 8 counts or 2% of all its comments. The readers posting on the other two sites did not post links at all.

Video

Results showed that 0% of all the Facebook comments used videos. None of the people posting on *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01,* and *Post 852* posted any videos at all in the comments section.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

RQ1 looked into how the three most popular online news organizations on Facebook in Hong Kong frame their political news posts.

This study noticed that *Stand News, Hong Kong 01,* and *Post 852* had several mutual features. First, the three media frequently used more than one news frame when covering local political news. A conflict perspective, combined with either a human interest angle or a responsibility angle is the most widely adopted. Basically, the conflict, human interest, and responsibility angles were used interchangeably, as well as together, in the studied news posts. This practice is common and similar for all three media organizations studied here. There were no significant differences in the popularity or frequency of all five news frames used by the three media, except that *Post 852* showed significantly fewer uses of the human interest angle in their posts. Second, the media studied shared a similar proportion of different political stances among all the studied posts. Most of the posts were consistent with the media's political orientation. Third, all the studied posts from the three media only proffered one point of view. These mutual features suggest that <u>*Stand News, Hong Kong 01,* and *Post 852* tend to embed partisan, pro-democracy perspectives in their news posts.</u>

Meanwhile, this study observed some distinctive features among *Stand News, Hong Kong 01,* and *Post 852.* First, in terms of post subjectivity, while hybrid was the most used form among the three media, *Hong Kong 01* had significantly more hybrid posts and significantly fewer purely opinionated or descriptive news posts than *Stand News* and *Post 852*. This suggests that *Hong Kong 01* tends to produce *affective news* as

an audience engagement strategy. Papacharissi (2014) defined *affective news* as "news collaboratively constructed out of subjective experience, opinion, and emotion." It is driven by reports of events that are in the making and thus frequently communicates a predisposition to frame the developing story (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2013). In that sense, producing *affective news* as an audience engagement strategy would also be one possible explanation as to why *Hong Kong 01* and *Stand News* had significantly more human interest-framed posts than *Post 852*. The second example of *Hong Kong 01* producing *affective news* as an audience engagement strategy is its use of tone. While *Hong Kong 01* had the similar records of a high use of critical tone, as did with *Stand News* and *Post 852*, the interesting finding is that *Hong Kong 01* had significantly fewer neutral posts and significantly more supportive posts than the other two. This suggests that *Hong Kong 01* tends to use more expressive tones (either critical or supportive) and less neutral tones in its news posts. The third example that points to *Hong Kong 01*'s producing *affective news* as an audience engagement strategy is its persuasion approach. While *Hong Kong 01* had a similar level of the use of *logos* mode (to convince an audience by use of logic or reason), as *Stand News* and *Post 852,* it had significantly more *pathos* posts (to convince an audience by appealing to their emotions) than the other two. The last example of *Hong Kong 01* producing *affective news* as an audience engagement strategy is its visual strategy. Some might argue that both *Stand News* and *Hong Kong 01* showed a significant high use of images in their posts. However, *Hong Kong 01* is considered as the media outlet with a consistent pattern of producing affective news among the three examined media. This is because *Hong Kong 01* also had a

significantly high use of emoji symbols. To be precise, both *Stand News* and *Post 852*

had no record of using emojis in the examined posts. Again, these four examples

indicated that <u>*Hong Kong 01* tend to produce *affective news* as an audience engagement</u>

<u>strategy.</u>

The second distinctive feature among the three online news media is that *Post 852*

tends to produce election-centric critics in video form. First, in terms of policy issues,

Post 852 had an exceedingly high record of coverage of Hong Kong's Chief Executive

(CE) Election here. Despite the fact that both the "CE Election" and "Hong Kong-issues"

are the top two topics covered by the three media studied, *Post 852* covered the Election

more significantly and covered other HK-issues less. In contrast, *Hong Kong 01* covered

the Election less and other Hong Kong-issues more; *Stand News* showed a moderate

balance between the two popular topics. Secondly, *Post 852* used of the human

interest-frame less; and had a high use of the two conflict subframes (one is about two

sides of the problem or issue; another refers to winners and losers) than *Hong Kong 01*

and *Stand News*. Lastly, all examined (100%) posts of *Post 852* were video. It is the only

examined media with a consistent, single format for its entire visual strategy. These three

findings indicated that <u>*Post 852* tends to produce election-centric critics in video form.</u>

RQ2 looked into how polarized and civil the user comments were on the top

online news media organizations' sites covering the political news in Hong Kong.

This study found that the readers of *Stand News, Hong Kong 01,* and *Post 852*

shared several mutual features. First, <u>incivility and impoliteness did not dominate the</u>

<u>online political discourse.</u> Readers from the three examined media were generally (84%)

civil but sometimes (59%) impolite. Papacharissi (2004) depicted messages that "deny

others rights, threaten democracy, or use antagonistic stereotypes (p. 279)" as *uncivil*. She

also specified messages that include "name-calling, aspersions, synonyms for liar,

hyperbole, words that indicated, pejorative speak, or vulgarity occurred (p. 274)" as

impolite. Santana (2014) argued that non-anonymous comments would be more civil than

anonymous comments. With the introduction of Facebook commenting, anonymous

commenting is no longer an option. Reader (2012) suggested that if anonymous

comments are disallowed on news sites, the comments will more closely approximate the

journalistic quality of the news media on which they are posted. These similar views may

explain the overall civil nature of comments in this study. Yet, users could still choose to

post offensive comments under their real name. This is potentially why this study found

comments that were occasionally uncivil; for instance, *Stand News* had significantly more

uncivil comments than *Hong Kong 01* and *Post 852*. Nonetheless, the readers from the

three media shared a similar rate in terms of politeness.

The second feature that the readers of *Stand News, Hong Kong 01,* and *Post 852*

shared is that <u>readers from the three media frequently used one or no news frame when</u>

<u>commenting on local political news.</u> Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) provided a

metaphor that vividly captures the core of what framing theory tries to do:

"Artists know that the frame placed around a painting can affect

how viewers interpret and react to the painting itself. As a result, some

artists take great care in how they present their work, choosing a frame

that they hope will help audiences see the image in just the right way.

Journalists – often subconsciously – engage in essentially the same

process when they decide how to describe the political world. They

choose images and words that have the power to influence how audiences

interpret and evaluate issues and policies. "(Tewksbury & Scheufele,

2009)

I argue that, unlike journalists, most readers are not expected to have a conscious and professional use of news frames. Sometimes, readers might not be aware of, nor understand, the existence of news frames. This could explain why the examined readers often used no frame or one frame when expressing their views, while the examined media mostly used two or more frames in their news posts. In fact, when readers framed their views on the news posts, the human interest-frame was the most popular one. It simultaneously affirms that most examined readers might not have experience on using various news frames to express their viewpoints. Thus, the human interest-frame was the most intuitive and direct option for those readers bring wishing to their personal emotion into a story.

Third, all the studied comments from the three media only had one point of view.

Meanwhile, this study observed some distinctive features among *Stand News, Hong Kong 01,* and *Post 852.* First, *Hong Kong 01* had the most opinionated readers among the three media. In terms of comment subjectivity, its readers had significantly more opinionated comments; significantly fewer hybrid and descriptive comments than from the readers of *Stand News* and *Post 852.* Second, readers of *Hong Kong 01* also shared the most diverse political views. In terms of political stance, its readers had the

lowest number of comments with a consistent view with the media; and the highest

number of comments whether a neutral or a contrary view to the media when compared

with the readers from *Stand News* and *Post 852*. Third, readers of *Hong Kong 01* also

used a more critical tone when compared against those from the two other media. Last, in

terms of visual strategy, readers of *Hong Kong 01* seldom relied on text in their

comments; rather, they used more emojis and images than readers from *Stand News* and

Post 852. These four examples indicate that <u>Hong Kong 01 had most opinionated,</u>

<u>critical, visual, and politically diverse readers in this study.</u>

What can we learn beyond the specific context of this research that could be

generalized and/or studied in a different context?

This study illustrates how we can understand both the news coverage patterns and

the public opinion formation in the social media sphere in post-handover Hong Kong.

The measures of polarization used in this content analysis are universal and have been

used for studying media content in numerous countries such as the United States, Great

Britain, and France. The measures of civility and politeness have also been applied to

political discussion in the United States and Greece, among other countries. As prior

research showed, we can use these to understand political polarization in any context, be

it Hong Kong or another country.

There is no question that the results in this research are unique to Hong Kong.

However, if we care to think in more abstract terms, the case of Hong Kong should serve

as a more general reference. The relationship between Hong Kong and Beijing, for

instance, can be connected to the tension between central and local authorities or between

a small region and a giant neighbor. The issues covered in this research, including the

impact of editorial stance, the landscape of online media news, and the

counter-hegemonic force posed by media discourse and public opinion, are shared by

many other societies.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This research investigated the content and quality of political discourse generated by online news media's Facebook pages in Hong Kong. First, it examined how Hong Kong's online news media frame the political relationship between Hong Kong and China by analyzing the news postings on the Facebook pages of the top three online news media organizations in Hong Kong. The three online news media being analyzed were *Stand News*, *Post 852*, and *Hong Kong 01*. This study suggests that online news media have a tendency to embed partisan, pro-democracy perspectives in their news posts via social media. The findings also point out the use of *affective news* as an audience engagement strategy by some online news media.

Second, the present study also explored polarization, civility and politeness among readers' posts and how readers themselves view the current political situation by analyzing the Facebook user comments on the news postings from the three selected organizations. The findings show that incivility and impoliteness did not dominate online political discourse, yet readers can be rude and abusive with their messages sometimes. This aligns with Parachaissi's (2004) study. She discovered that most messages posted on political newsgroups were civil and further suggested that because of the absence of face-to-face communication fosters more heated discussions, cyberspace might actually promote Lyotard's vision of democratic emancipation through disagreement and anarchy (Lyotard, 1984). Hence, this study supports the social media's potential to revive the public sphere, provided that greater diversity and volume of discussion is present.

Moreover, readers who used visuals to comment were identified as highly

opinionated, critical and politically diverse in this study. Interestingly, this group of

readers came from the same media that produced highly *affective news* on social media.

Although this study did not further examine the direct relationship between the polarized

newsroom and polarized readers, the above observations have shed some light on the

issue.

Limitations and future studies

Although this study made contributions to the field of communication, it is not

without flaws. One limitation is the representation of the readers of the three studied

online news media when comparing to the Hong Kong Facebook population at large. The

average subscribing user rate of the three studied media were 4% (*Stand News*), 5%

(*Hong Kong 01*), and 2% (*Post 852*). However, the rate in the present study is still

considerably meaningful, when compared to the popular political news shows on cable

television in the U.S. Both *The O'Reilly Factor* on *Fox News Channel* and *The Rachel

Maddow Show* on *MSNBC* rated 3% of the U.S. household television audience, as the top

two rated political news shows in a week in March 2017 (Nielsen, 2017).

Another limitation is the lack of demographic data of the readers. In this study,

social characteristics, such as gender, age, education level, and origin (Hong Kong or

China), could not be identified. Future studies should consider adding these demographic

factors into analysis, as well as measuring user polarization with more direct measures,

perhaps through survey data.

A different limitation is the slightly overlapped Facebook followers among the studied media. When comparing the readers' discourse on the three websites, I assumed no overlap in comments and that all the comments came from unique individuals. Ideally, there should be three populations of readers divided by the media they subscribed to and commented on. In that case, the study could differentiate three exclusive reader groups more precisely. Nonetheless, the present study did not account for possible overlap between users' comments. At the end of the coding process, I calculated a mild overlap between Facebook followers of the three pages, with an average overlap rate of about 6% among the followers of *Stand News*, *Hong Kong 01*, and *Post 852*. However, I could not determine the overlap rate of the comments across the three media pages, if any.

NOTES

1. Facebook enables users to change the sort order of comments based on 3 options with Chronological the default setting: (1) Top Comments: The most relevant comments appear at the top; (2) Chronological: All comments, including spam and comments in other languages, with newest comments at the bottom; and (3) Top Comments (unfiltered): All comments, including spam and comments in other languages, with most relevant comments at the top. Retrived from http://lostpr.es/facebook/facebook-comments-allow-sorting/

2. Alexa.com by *Alexa Internet, Inc.* is a California-based company that provides commercial web traffic data and analytics. It is a fully owned subsidiary of Amazon.com.

3. Two months before the Umbrella Movement brought about mass demonstrations demanding free and fair elections in Hong Kong, Tony Tsoi shuttered his popular alternative news site, *House News*. At the time, Tsoi claimed was terrified by Hong Kong's political environment.

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