A Comparative Study of Emergency Coverage on People’s Daily Newspaper and Its Sina Weibo Account – In the case of the “Tianjin Explosion”

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Abstract

In current society, social media play an increasingly important role. When emergencies occur, they exert great influence on the society, as well as on the traditional media. This research aims at contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the differences between the traditional mass media and the social media regarding the news coverage of social emergencies, in particular, the Chinese environment. The objects of this research are People’s Daily Newspaper—the most influential newspaper in China and its Sina Weibo account -- @People’s Daily. I chose Sina Weibo as one of the media platforms is because of it is the most popular microblogging portal in China and has great influence among Chinese people. In this thesis, crisis communication is used as the theoretical framework. Content analysis is used as the method to analyze the collected data. A specific event—“Tianjin Explosion” has been chosen to conduct the research. The result of the research indicates that there are some similarities and differences of the emergency coverage on People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily. Both media platforms focus on the crisis-stage and paid attention to the dissemination of the information about the emergency itself. However, People’s Daily Newspaper has stronger government control than @People’s Daily, and mostly speaking for the government, did not show much attention to the affected people and their families, whereas posts on Sina Weibo are more sympathetic and there are more critical posts on @People’s Daily. Another difference is that news on @People’s Daily is timelier than People’s Daily Newspaper. Furthermore, this thesis also provides some suggestions about how media should be improved in covering social emergencies in the future.

Keywords: People’s Daily, traditional media, social media, social emergency.
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1. Introduction

Ever since Web2.0 has become popular and important in people’s daily life in the 2000s, it has been playing an increasingly significant role in the ways of communication in the society. The development of social media, especially microblogging which allows users to share short texts, images, videos, and links, has greatly threatened the status of the traditional media (Tyson, 2012). People started to rely on social media to get information. Therefore, traditional media started to embrace social media and post news on different platforms. Sina Weibo—a Chinese microblog platform has experienced a rapid growth and become extremely popular in the last few years in China. Compared to traditional media, Weibo has brought a new way for the dissemination of news information, especially in relation to some current, unexpected, immediate “hot” social topics or social emergencies (Wichmann, 2012).

Firstly, it is important to define what “emergency” is. Generally speaking, an emergency is “a situation that poses an immediate risk to people’s life, health, property or environment” (Xue, 2012: 8). In China, in Emergency Response Law of the People’s Republic of China, an emergency is defined as:

\begin{quote}
For the purposes of this Law, emergencies include natural disasters, calamitous accidents, public health accidents and public security incidents, which occur abruptly and cause or may potentially cause serious social harm and for which measures for handling emergencies need to be adopted (Emergency Response Law of the People’s Republic of China2007).
\end{quote}

According to the definition above, the notion of emergency can be divided into two categories: natural emergencies and non-natural emergencies (Xue, 2012). Natural emergencies are natural disasters, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, tsunami, thunderstorms and so on. Non-natural emergencies are significant incidence caused by human beings which referring to social emergencies such as calamitous
accidents, public health events, social security incidents and so on (ibid.). In this thesis, the focus will be on social emergencies.

In recent years, although China has developed very fast, due to the deficiency of proper regulation systems towards companies and organizations, a lot of social emergencies such as man-made mining-, pollution-, and food safety accidents have frequently occurred (Du, 2011). The coverage of social emergencies has become a routine work for news media. It is not only related to the harmony of the society but also determines the media credibility. Therefore, it is important to study emergency coverage.

1.1 Purpose of the research

The aim of this thesis is to study the differences of the social emergency coverage between traditional media and social media. Traditional media are the mass media institutions that predominated prior to the Information Age; particularly print media, film studios, music studios, advertising agencies, radio broadcasting, and television (Logan, 2010). In this thesis, traditional media mainly stands for print media in the example of newspaper. Social media here are referring to “computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks” (Obar &Wildman, 2015: 745). In order to achieve the aim of the research, one of the most influential newspaper in China -- People’s Daily Newspaper has been chosen as the research object. There are a few reasons why I chose People’s Daily Newspaper as my research object. The first reason is that People’s Daily Newspaper has existed since 1946, and has a significant influence in China. It is also a newspaper that speaks for the government which means it has high authority. Secondly, People’s Daily leads the mainstream values of Chinese society and also has the responsibility of stabilizing the social order, promoting the development of social harmony. As a mouthpiece of the Communist Party and the Chinese government, People’s Daily Newspaper has played an essential role in Chinese society. Moreover, the characteristics of social
emergencies are different from other news events, the social emergencies have great effects on the society and will cause more serious damage. People's Daily Newspaper as one of the most authoritative and influential media outlets has the responsibility to objectively report the news and provide the authoritative interpretation of the events. It is also People’s Daily Newspaper’s duty to prevent the spread of rumors and negative public opinion, to mollify the public emotion and maintain the social stability. Hence, People’s Daily Newspaper can be seen as an appropriate representative for a group of traditional media in China.

As for social media, the focus will be on Sina Weibo, which is one of the most popular microblogging sites in China. Since Sina Weibo contain most of the features that social media platforms has, such as 1) it is an interactive Web 2.0 Internet-based application; 2) most of the content on Sina Weibo are user-generated content, such as text posts or comments, photos or videos; 3) it facilitate the development of online social networks by connecting a user’s profile with those of other individuals or groups. Therefore, it can be seen as a representative of social media platforms in general (Obar & Wildman, 2015). Weibo provides an efficient and open platform for the transmission of information when emergencies happen. Because of the authoritative source of information, strong influence and a great number of followers, the official account of traditional media on Sina Weibo play an important role during emergencies. At 22nd July 2012, People’s Daily posted the first news on its Sina Weibo account and opened up its social media era. The new media form of People’s Daily has caught great attention from the online users in China. Up to now (27th March 2017), @People’s Daily (People’s Daily Sina Weibo account) has got 51,093,268 followers and the number of posts is 72,164.

I chose People’s Daily as the research object for both traditional media and social media not only because of its great influence on both platforms but also to see if social media have influenced the way that traditional media frames the news. Thus, this research will provide an in-depth perspective on the comparison of the social
emergency coverage on People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily in China.

1.2 Main research questions
The main research questions of this study are “how is the Tianjin explosion event covered by People’s Daily on its newspaper and its Sina Weibo account? What are the differences and similarities in the news reports published in this event, in the two platforms?” To answer these questions, two steps will be taken.

Firstly, the previous research related to this field of study will be reviewed. By studying the previous literature about the coverage of emergencies on both traditional media and social media, the aim is to examine what has been achieved in this field and what still needs to be further investigated.

Secondly, content analysis will be used as the method to conduct the research. One social emergency event (天津爆炸事件“Tianjin explosions”) which is a series of explosions killed 173 people and injured hundreds of others at a container storage station at the Port of Tianjin was chosen as the case to compare the emergency coverage on People’s Daily newspaper and @People’s Daily. Content analysis helps to examine all the reports and posts related to the case that has been released by People’s Daily.

1.3 Significance of the research
Firstly, social emergencies happen frequently in China, causing a lot of social problems. Media play an essential role in disseminating the information. When an emergency happens, people who are exposed to external dangers require timely and accurate information from authoritative sources in order to make informed decisions to remain safe (Fu et al. 2011: 2). Therefore, it is crucial for mass media to report the news immediately and accurately. Studying the coverage of media during emergencies can help examine how media react during the emergencies and what should be improved when they cover emergencies in the future.
Furthermore, even though a great number of studies have been done to examine the coverage of emergencies on traditional media and social media, there are not much literature found to compare the differences and similarities between the coverage of emergencies on traditional media and social media. Since the second research question of this thesis is to compare the differences and similarities between the emergency coverage of People’s Daily on its newspaper and its Sina Weibo account, this thesis will provide a new perspective in the field of emergency coverage.

Moreover, the comparative study of People’s Daily newspaper and @People’s Daily can provide a scientific and systematic understanding of how the two platforms differ in terms of media coverage, and this study can also help to explore the potential reasons behind these differences.

1.4 Disposition
There are seven chapters in this thesis. Chapter 1 is the part of the introduction, which presents the aim of the research, main research question and the significance of the research. The structure of the thesis is also included in this chapter.

Chapter 2 provides readers with the necessary background information related to the topic of study. In this section, firstly, a brief introduction of Sina Weibo and its features will be provided. Secondly, the development of People’s Daily including its history, features and the related use of Sina Weibo will be explained. Thirdly, the selected case “Tianjin Explosion” will be introduced briefly.

Chapter 3 is a literature review which presents how previous studies examine and understand the coverage of emergencies on both traditional media and social media. It also provides a general perspective of social emergencies at the beginning of this chapter and points out the achievements and the current gaps in the field at the end of the chapter.
Chapter 4 explains the theoretical framework of this research. Crisis communication theory will be explained in this chapter. I will start with the definition of the theory. Then different models of crisis communication will be introduced as well as the role of media in crisis communication.

Chapter 5 presents the methodology of this study. It starts with the research design. Since content analysis is the only method that has been used in this thesis. The definition and components of content analysis will be specified in this chapter. Ethics, as well as the limitations of the research method, will also be explained at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 6 presents the analysis of the gathered data. The analysis will follow the five aspects that have been explained in Chapter 5. By contextualizing the results with the theories that have been chosen, answers to the research questions can be offered.

Chapter 7 is the last chapter which provides discussions and conclusions about this study. The main arguments of the thesis and answers to the research questions will be summarized in this chapter. The limitations of the study will also be outlined. Furthermore, different directions of future investigations will also be provided in this chapter.

2. Background

2.1 History of People’s Daily

People’s Daily was founded on 15th June 1946 and was published in Pingshan, Hebei, until its offices were moved to Beijing in March 1949. Ever since, People’s Daily has been under direct control of the Chinese government and published policies and viewpoints from the government (Wei, 2015). Besides its main Chinese-language edition, it has editions in English, Japanese, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Tibetan,
Kazakh, Uyghur, Zhuang, Mongolian, Korean and other minority languages in China (People’s Daily 2017).

People’s Daily has played an important role in Chinese history, especially during some significant historical periods, such as Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. For instance, During the Cultural Revolution, People’s Daily was one of the few sources that people could get to know about the government’s activities and plans. And the articles on People's Daily would be considered as an authoritative statement of the government policy (Tania Branigan in Beijing, 2009). Since July of 1985, People’s Daily has published the overseas edition. People’s Daily overseas edition is one of the most influential newspapers which plays an important role in enhancing the communication between the mainland and foreign countries. Except the domestic printing, the newspaper has been printed in more than ten foreign cities such as Tokyo, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and has been distributed in more than 80 countries and regions in the world (People’s Daily, 2017). On 1st January 1997, People’s Daily has created their website -- www. People.com.cn, which is a large-scale information interaction platform constructed by People’s Daily (People’s Daily Online). On the website, the news is published in the forms of text, picture, animation, audio, and videos. They also publish news on different platforms such as BBS (Bulletin Board System), blog, microblog, podcast, mobile phone, and webcast (ibid.). In order to follow the tide of digitalization and new media, People’s Daily is striving to build an interactive system based on web 2.0 technologies. In 2012, they launched a mobile phone App of People’s Daily newspaper which opened the era of palm reading (ibid.).

2.2 Features of People’s Daily

People’s Daily now have 24 pages of its newspaper from Monday to Friday and have eight pages on Saturday and Sunday. On the weekdays’ newspaper, content on pages 1-6 is about current important events, pages 9-15 are for domestic news, including economy, politics, culture, society, sports, etc. Pages 17-20 are special columns,
divided respectively into Economy, Party Construction, Democracy, Law, Science, and Education. Page 21 to 23 are for international news. In addition, page 7 is about theories of communism. Page 8 is for advertisements, page 16 is also for advertisements or special editions, and page 24 is the supplement. On Saturdays and Sundays, Pages 1-4 are current important issues, pages 5-7 are special columns, and page 8 is the supplement (Wei, 2015) (see Figure 1).

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**Figure 1: The content of People’s Daily on Weekdays and Weekends**

Researcher Xiang observed the content on People’s Daily newspaper, and found that the coverage of emergencies is mostly published on current important issues news pages, mainly on page 4. The content of the reports is mostly about the leaders visiting the disaster area, volunteer services, and social donations (Xiang, 2011).
2.3 Sina Weibo and its characteristic features

Sina Weibo is one of the most popular social media platforms in China now and was launched in 2010. After the July 2009 Ürümqi riots which was a series of violent riots involving more than 1,000 Uyghurs attacking mainly Han (ethnic Chinese) people in Ürümqi, the Chinese government shut down most of the domestic microblogging platforms and some popular non-China-based microblogging services such as Twitter, Facebook (Ramzy, 2011). The CEO of Sina Weibo considered this as a good opportunity and launched a test version of Sina Weibo on 14th August 2009 (Epstein, 2011). There are multiple microblog platforms in China, but Sina Weibo is still the most popular one. It has been developing rapidly in a short time. Before March 2011, the registered users were over 100 million, and three years after its launch, there were already 503 million register users (Chen et al. 2012, 1; Zhao et al. 2014, 613). In May 2016, the amount of monthly active users has achieved the number of 261 million. Over 100 million messages are posted by users every day (Koetse, 2016).

Weibo means “micro-blog” and is often considered as the Chinese Twitter, due to their similar functions. Users can post a 140-character limit content with pictures, videos or links. They can also follow people they are interested in without being followed back. Leaving comments on other people’s posts and talking directly to the users who comment on their posts is also one of Weibo’s functions. With various functions, Sina Weibo made itself one of the most successful social media platforms in China. According to Lu, Sina Weibo has the feature of 5A (Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime, Anything, Anyway), which made it accessible to everyone (Lu, 2012). Generally speaking, there are four basic features of Sina Weibo: 1) Everyone can be a blogger. Traditional blogs often have a high standard of writing ability of bloggers and require them to be more creative when they narrate things. With the function of 140-character limitation, it is easier for users to write and post on Sina Weibo. This function catered to the busy lifestyle in modern society and became the most popular way for people to share their lives and ideas. 2) Real time information. Without the limitation of time and place, people can use their mobile phone to post things
happening around them anytime and anywhere. This is the most important feature of new media. Whenever something happens, Weibo is always the “first news spokesman”. Users can also help upload information when there are emergencies which to some extent accelerate the development of citizen journalism creation on Sina Weibo. 3) The fragmentation of information. The limitation of 140 characters on Sina Weibo makes the content fragmented. It is hard to get the whole picture of an issue or an event by only looking at one post. Although Weibo has released a new function of Long-Weibo which allowed users to write more than 140 characters and put the whole text in a long picture, most of the users still haven’t got used to this function. The news usually stays at the superficial level, and it is hard for the public to get to know the whole event. 4) The way of communication has been changed. The traditional way of communication is one-way communication, people receiving news from newspaper, TV or other mass media. However, the communication of Sina Weibo is different. When a person publishes a post, other users can react to the post and share the post. The post can be shared to plenty of users at the same time, which greatly improved the speed and the scope of the dissemination of information (Lu, 2012).

Research conducted by Gao shows that there are some differences between how Weibo is used in China and Twitter is used in other countries. Users on Sina Weibo tend to publish more posts than users on Twitter, and the posts on Sina Weibo involve more personal information. Meanwhile, users on Weibo are more active in reacting to other people’s posts and sharing their opinions (Gao et al, 2012: 93). On the other hand, topics on Twitter are usually related to politics or institutions, while users on Sina Weibo often avoid talking about these (ibid.). Although there are some limitations of what can be posted and discussed on Sina Weibo, this platform does offer a stage for ordinary Chinese people to enjoy a relatively free online environment (Sullivan, 2012; Magistad, 2012). Online government regulations and censorship have not kept people silent, on the contrary, Chinese internet can be named as “one of the most vibrant economic and social cyberspaces in the world” (Yeo& Li, 2012: 56).
Users on Sina Weibo are highly active in discussing corrupt officials, food scandals and environment issues which is valuable for the government when dealing with social problems.

2.4 People’s Daily on Sina Weibo
In order to follow the tide of digitalization, People’s Daily created their Sina Weibo account on 22nd July 2012. With the existing visibility and influence, People’s Daily used Sina Weibo as a new platform to timely update news, interact with users, and try to reach a larger audience (Tian, 2013). Instead of directly copying the content from its newspaper, @People’s Daily has created their own style. For instance, every morning, @People’s Daily will upload a post on the topic “Today in the news history” to start a new day and then it will publish the daily news. Most of the content is the up-to-date information that is dug by journalists. The percentage of the original posts (posts that were written by People’s Daily instead of reposts from other accounts on Sina Weibo) are over 80%. It also has the topic of “微议录” (micro discussion), which selects and publishes hot comments left by the users from the news posts in order to enhance the interaction with audiences (ibid.).

@People’s Daily has 51,093,268 followers now (25/03/2017), which has the most followers among other newspaper’s Weibo accounts. People’s Daily has put a lot of effort on its official Sina Weibo account, not only did it establish an office especially for Sina Weibo and mobilized the sources from both domestic and foreign to work for Sina Weibo account, but it also tried out different ways of reporting before settling in a way that was most acceptable to the audience.

2.5 Introduction to the selected case
In this thesis, in order to better understand how People’s Daily newspaper and its Sina Weibo account report emergencies, I have chosen the event of the “Tianjin explosions” as the research case. It is a very typical social emergency case, it happened suddenly, caused huge damage and evoked a great attention in the society. Now I will present
the case in detail.

**Case: Tianjin Explosion**

This emergency occurred on 12th August 2015, a series of explosions happened at a container storage at the Port of Tianjin, 165 people were confirmed dead in the accident, 8 people still missing and hundreds of people got injured (China News Service). The first two explosions occurred within 30 seconds of each other at the facility, and the second explosion was much larger. The impact of the explosion was huge, people at some places in Tianjin and Hebei province could feel the aftershock. According to Beijing seismic station, the effect of the two explosions equivalent to 24 tons of Trinitrotoluene, a mushroom cloud could be seen when the explosion happened (The Beijing News). On February 5th, 2016, a report released by Tianjin explosion accident investigation team states that the accident was an extremely serious social emergency. The direct reason is the autoignition of nitrocellulose which caused the explosion of some dangerous chemicals such as ammonium nitrate (Xinhua News). The warehouse building was owned by Ruihai Logistics, safety regulations, requiring that public buildings and facilities should be at least one kilometer away from the inhabitants, were not followed. The investigation team concluded that Ruihai Company had seriously violated the rules of public security, and should be charged as the main responsible unit for the accident.

On 10th December 2015, the direct economic loss is over 6.86 billion CNY (Chinese’s currency) (the State Council of the People’s Republic of China). Centering on the bursting point, the buildings within the scope of 150 meters were totally destroyed, and the buildings within the scope of 8 kilometers were influenced by the explosion. The explosion also caused a serious pollution. On 16th August 2015, the first rain came after the explosion, along with white chemical foams covering the streets. People felt burning on their skin when they touched the rain droplets (Cai Xin news). At 20th August, a great number of dead fish were found on the bank six kilometers from the explosion site (Eastern Daily).
Due to the spreading of rumor, after the explosion, editors and reporters were banned by Tianjin authorities from sharing information about the explosion on Sina Weibo, WeChat and other social media platforms (Wertime, 2015). Social media users were warned by the internet police to use only official casualty figures (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation). Tianjin Television had not reported about the explosion until the next morning in the news at 7:00 am, for which they received a lot of criticism by citizens accusing the official TV channel of not having reported the news, nor kept updating on the event in a timely fashion (Cheung, 2015). A great deal of information about the explosion was firstly released on the social media sites. The news sources of mainstream media were also drawn heavily from social media sources.

There is no doubt that media played an important role in reporting the emergency. And the traditional mass media and social media might use different ways when covering the event. It is interesting to see how People’s Daily as one of the most influential media organization which also stands for the government is covering emergencies on both printed newspaper and social media platform Sina Weibo.

3. Literature review
3.1 Global crisis and media coverage
The world we are living now has become radically interconnected, interdependent and communicated in the flows of information and culture—including, importantly, news journalism (Cottle, 2009). According to Cottle, there are ten types of global crises in today’s world. They are climate change, major disasters and humanitarian emergencies, new forms of war, ‘military humanism’, new generation of weapons, world poverty and related health issues, new and increasingly transnational pandemics, the rise in world population and the increased flows of ‘forced migrants’, systematic and deliberate abuse of human rights, and global financial markets crises (Cottle,
“Global crises, from climate change to the global war on terror, from world poverty to humanitarian disasters, represent the dark side of a globalized planet and, increasingly, prompt awareness of our ‘civilizational community of fate’” (Beck, 2006: 13).

“In today’s globalization world, crises can be transnational in scope and impact, involve supranational levels of governance and become communicated in real time via global media” (Cottle, 2009: 2). Contemporary news media plays an essential role in the public definition and elaboration of global crises and usually do more than just communicate for their wider public recognition (ibid). In order to improve their symbolic and communicative power, the media today can put different kinds of pressure and influence on processes of public understanding and political response. In such ways, global crises become differently constituted within the news media as much as communicated by them (ibid.).

A study—News/Worthy, made by Bacon and Chris Nash provides some basic findings on how the news media cover disasters. Based on a systematic analysis of news output, selected cases studies of emergency reporting, six findings have been found in relation to the news media coverage of disasters.

1. The news media tend to focus on a few stories at any one time. Tightly focused, intensive coverage is the norm rather than the expectation.

2. Television concentrated even more intensively on a small number of stories than does radio or print. Saturation coverage of the biggest stories is becoming the norm, squeezing out coverage of other major stories.

3. Disaster stories are more prominent on television than in print and on radio, which reflects the television news preference for dramatic images.

4. The concentrated news agenda means that very few stories are covered at any one time.

5. Only a few major disasters receive any more than a passing mention in the media.

6. Even when a major disaster is covered, the role of human causes such as dam
construction, poor farming practices, pollution, underlying poverty and lack of resources are only occasionally mentioned, let alone examined in depth. (Bacon and Nash, 2002: 9-16)

3.2 Social emergencies in China

According to Cambridge Dictionary, an emergency can be defined as “something dangerous or serious, such as an accident that happens suddenly or unexpectedly and needs fast action in order to avoid harmful results”. Scholars such as Xu (2005) defines an emergency as something unexpected that happens suddenly and will greatly shock and influence the society. It will also become the focus of media and public in a very short time (Xu, 2005: 185). As I mentioned in the beginning, according to Emergency Response Law of the People’s Republic of China, emergencies can be also defined as events such as natural disasters, calamitous accidents, public health accidents and public security events that happen suddenly and cause or may cause serious social problems which need to be to dealt with immediately. In this paper, the focus will be social emergencies that include calamitous accidents, public health events, and public security issues and so on.

There are four main features of social emergencies: unexpected, destructive, urgent and newsworthy. It has been stated by Li that it is more frequently that emergencies will happen when the GDP per capita of a country or a region ranges from 500 dollars to 3000 dollars, which normally considered as developing countries, and China falls within this range (Li, 2011). In recent years, China has experienced plenty of social emergencies such as SARS virus, avian influenza, the train collision in Shandong, and so on. When emergencies happen, social problems such as economic imbalance, social disorder, and social panic will show up easily. Therefore, it is important that media take their responsibility to timely report the news in an accurate way and also to correctly lead the public opinion so that it is based on facts and not on rumors.
3.3 The coverage of social emergencies on traditional media

In China, traditional media often speak for the government. Therefore, it is their duty to cover the news properly and alleviate public anxiety when emergencies happen. Whether a social emergency can be successfully fixed largely depends on the coverage of news media (Hu & Hu, 2013). There are several features traditional media have when they are covering emergencies. 1) Trying to lead the public opinion. Traditional mass media plays an important role in releasing public panic when emergencies happen. Correctly leading the public opinion will greatly help to maintain the social stability. For example, in Fudan University poisoning case which is the case that a student in Fudan University was poisoned by his roommate, has been reported by several traditional media including CCTV (China Central Television), and they all reported this case along with other poisoning cases in universities and successfully widened the perspective to other cases than just the current one. By comparing with other poisoning cases and finding their similarities, the audience will be guided to think and discuss more in depth of the reason behind the case which to some extent might also help alleviate public anxiety. 2) Avoiding negative impact while reporting emergencies. Teenagers are easily influenced by media coverage, and imitating criminals on media has already become one of the criminal ways for young people (Wang, 2003). Hence, it is important for news media to report criminal news in a right way and avoid negative impact as much as possible. 3) Accuracy. Since traditional media usually stand for the authority, people tend to believe the news covered by traditional media. Therefore, it is an essential feature of the traditional media to keep telling the truth and making their report accurate. 4) In-depth reporting. For traditional media, when they are reporting emergencies, they usually investigate deeper into the issues, trying to find the explanations for the occurrence of the emergency and the influence that the emergency will have on the society. As a result, their reports are often very complete and include a lot of information (Wang, 2003).

However, there are also some limitations of traditional media when reporting emergencies. For instance, traditional media often lack in timeliness when covering
emergencies compared to social media. In the case of the stampede in Shanghai, the first information about this issue was posted on Sina Weibo twenty minutes after the stampede by a user named “铁炼钢” (Shen, 2016). After that, many traditional media started to investigate and report the issue. Newspapers such as Jiefang Daily and Xinmin Evening News can only report the news on their newspaper the day after the emergency, and there are a lot of newspapers such as The Beijing News, Southern Weekly that did not mention the stampede on their newspaper the day after (ibid.). One of the defining characteristics of online media is that it is more timely compared to traditional media when covering emergencies. The other problem with traditional media is that they usually focus on “positive news” and avoid reporting negative news. For example, in 2015 Tianjin explosions case, the mainstream media focus on admiring the brave action of the firefighters in this emergency instead of reporting about the investigation process of the responsible party for the accident.

3.4 The coverage of social emergencies on social media

With the development of Internet and social media, online media started to play an essential role in covering emergencies and reporting the news in their own characteristic ways. Firstly, online media report immediately when an emergency happens (Zhang, 2013). Newspapers usually have a long process of making news topics such as layout design, news selection, content edit and that often takes a long time (ibid.). But news on Sina Weibo can be posted immediately after emergencies happen and spread quickly in short time. For example, in Wenzhou train collision accident, most of the accident information was posted by passengers on the train. And even before the accident, there were some people posting on Weibo saying there might be an accident (ibid.). With the immediate information on Weibo, the rescuing operation was very timely (Qiang, 2016). For emergencies, especially for natural or accident disasters, time is very essential. Public, especially victims’ families are eager to be updated with the information immediately. Therefore, it is important that online media can report news timely when an emergency happens and spread the information to a lot of people with the help of Internet. Secondly, online media contain abundant
information (Zhang, 2013). Everyone can upload information online which is important for emergencies. People get to know the details of the issue by searching it online. Traditional media can also get information by those user-generated contents. Another feature of online media is the interaction. People can get together to talk about the issue online and express their opinions towards the issue which cannot be achieved by traditional media (ibid.). On Sina Weibo, users can also ask questions to the official account of some mainstream media and accelerate the investigation process. Moreover, with the various functions of online media such as text, photo, sound and video, the contents are usually more attractive.

Although online media have many advantages when reporting emergencies, there are also some problems with online media coverage. One of the biggest problems with online media is the authenticity of the news. Since there is no strict censorship of the news being posted online, some people post fake information in order to attract attention. And there are even some online editors using information that has not been confirmed. Meanwhile, since everyone can be the news producer in the digital age, the excess information also makes it difficult for the public to tell the authenticity of the news. China is now in the period of social transition, the gap between rich and poor is gradually widening. Due to the dissatisfaction with current social status, some people might be harmful to the society by spreading rumors (Yao, 2016). For some political purposes, it is also possible that some other countries spread rumors in China in order to disturb social order (ibid.). Once rumors are being spread, it is difficult to eliminate in a short time, and some rumors will cause serious social problems. Therefore, it is important for the government and authority media to make full use of their advantages and timely release of authoritative information, strengthen the guide of public opinion and eliminate the rumors. Another problem with online media is the fragmentation of information. Due to the 140-character limitation on Sina Weibo, it is hard to completely describe an event or issue in one or several posts. On the other hand, information on Sina Weibo can be spread very fast in a short time and it is hard to find the source of the news. In addition, when a message has been spread by several
people, it is difficult to keep its original state. Also, because of the enormous amount of information on Weibo, it is hard to find the right information. For instance, there exists a large amount of information related to the event of Malaysia Airline Crash on Weibo, but many of them are personal conjectures posted by individuals and lack of scientific basis and supporting facts. (Hua, 2015)

To sum up, the studies above have shown that a lot of research has been done in the field of emergency coverage on both traditional media and social media platforms. However, not much literature was found to compare the differences and similarities between the traditional media and social media. The aim of this research is to investigate how emergencies are covered by People’s Daily on its newspaper and its Sina Weibo account, in order to study the similarities and differences between the reports on the two platforms. Therefore, this research can help fill the gap in the field of emergency coverage research.

4 Theoretical framework

Since the focus of this thesis is to analyze how emergencies are covered on the different platforms, crisis communication will be used as the theory. For the following sections, it is important to understand what crisis and crisis communication are. Thus, I will start with the definitions and then move on to the different models of crisis communication as well as what role media plays in the different stages in the model.

4.1 Crisis communication

4.1.1 What is a crisis and what is crisis communications?

Since the crisis is a topic that exists in many fields, scholars have different definitions of crises. Crises such as the Japanese tsunami, Wenchuan earthquake, and the Challenger Shuttle disaster have three general attributes: they are generally unexpected, they threaten high priority goals (such as life, property, security, health and psychological stability), and they require immediate response to control and
reduce the harm (Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer, 2003). Therefore, a crisis can be defined as “a specific, unexpected, non-routine event or series of events that creates high levels of uncertainty and a significant or perceived threat to high priority goals” (Seeger, 2003: 56). This definition requires the crises to contain several specific parameters. Social emergencies can be included in this definition of crisis, but issues such as the energy crisis or environment problems would not meet this definition. Coombs defines crisis as “the perception of an unpredictable issue that has seriously impact on an organization’s performance and generates negative outcomes” (Coombs, 2012: 2). He describes crisis as a function of perception based on a violation of some strongly held expectation (Sellnow and Seeger, 2013). He also divided crises into different types such as natural disasters, malevolence, technical breakdowns, human breakdowns, challenges, mega damage, organizational misdeeds, workplace violence and rumor (Coombs, 2011). Another scholar Fearn-Banks defines crisis as “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name. A crisis interrupts the normal business transactions and can sometimes threaten the existence of an organization” (Fearn-Banks, 2007: 2).

Other scholars have offered more straightforward definitions for the crisis. For instance, Heath (1995:15) suggests that “a crisis is a risk manifested”. From this viewpoint, a risk occurs before a crisis and due to the lack of appropriate efforts to manage the risk, it eventually becomes a crisis. The perception of a risk incubating, developing unchecked along with interacting with other factors is one of the most common views of the trigger of a crisis (Sellnow and Seeger, 2013). Hence, the crisis is often related closely to the concept of risk.

In order to better understand crisis communication, it is important to have a clear notion of what communication is. Traditional and classical notions of communication emphasize more the role of the sender than receivers in the process of distributing messages (Sellnow and Seeger, 2013). Receivers are often considered passive
participants who are assumed to simply receive messages. However, with the
development of the field of communication, both senders and receivers are considered
active participants and play different roles in transacting and co-creating meaning
through the continuing and simultaneous exchange of various information using
multiple channels (ibid.). Other perspectives of communication focus on the different
aspects of the process, and many of these concepts can be directly applied to
communication in crisis situations. The process of communication is divided into four
stages: 1) A communicator sends a message to receivers. 2) The receiver receives the
message. 3) The receiver interprets the message. 4) The receiver sends feedback about
the messages back to the communicator (Walaski, 2013). Sellnow and Seeger state
that “communication is the explanation of the meaning and sharing some
interpretation or consensual understanding among senders/receivers, audiences,
publics, stakeholders or communities” (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013: 67).

As for crisis communication, a definition made by Zaremba states that “crisis
communication involves identifying internal and external receivers who must receive
information during times of crisis. Crisis communicators conceive, create, and
disseminate messages to these internal and external receivers, and prepare to receive
and respond feedback from these audiences” (Zaremba, 2010: 23). Walaski defines
crisis communication in another way, saying that “crisis communication are those
messages that are given to audiences during an emergency event that threatens them
either immediately or at some foreseeable point in the near future” (Walaski, 2013:56).
Yet another definition is made by Fearn-Banks states it as “the dialog between the
organization and its public(s) prior to, during, and after the negative occurrence. The
dialog details strategies and tactics designed to minimize damage to the image of the
organization” (Fearn-Banks, 2007:2).

The definition made by Zaremba about the crisis communication fits best in this thesis,
and the definition made by Seeger about the crisis completely matches the
interpretation of emergencies in the literature review part. Therefore, understanding
4.1.2 Different models of crisis communication

Crisis communication helps convey the information about the crisis to the public and minimize the damage caused by the crises. Scholars have come up with various crisis communication approaches to achieve this goal. There are several important crisis communication models such as Coombs’ three-stage model which has been employed by many crisis communication scholars (Coombs, 2012; Ray, 1999; Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer, 2001). This approach is generally used to analyze specific stage-related characteristics of crisis and relate them to particular communication strategies (Sellnow and Seeger, 2013). This three-phase model includes pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis (Coombs, 1999). During pre-crisis, there is a potential threat that develops and interacts with other aspects of a system. This process is often described as an incubation process where the magnitude of a threat is growing. In the crisis stage, it starts with a trigger event, and people start realizing that the crisis happened. The trigger events are usually something that happens suddenly and could cause great damage, such as earthquakes, floods, fires, explosions and transportation accidents. However, in other cases, the trigger event might not be very obvious and involve a slow realization. Health issues such as disease outbreaks from contaminated food usually have a long incubation period - there might be some indications during the pre-crisis, but people need time to realize the severity of the issue. During this process, it is important to counteract unjustified strong emotions based on unverified rumors, since this is a time of great emotional turmoil and confusion. The last stage, post-crisis is a process of evaluation and learning. It is the time to investigate and analyze what went wrong, why, how, and who should be responsible for it, and what should be done to prevent future crises. This process is for people to figure out what happened and make plausible interpretations for the crisis (Weick, 1979). This three-stage model has been used widely in crisis analysis as a basic conceptual framework. It contains the elemental structures for various events and can be used in
many different kinds of cases.

Another important model is Fink’s four-stage cycle. In his book, Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable, he define crisis as “a fluid, unstable, dynamic situation – just like an illness. And it must be the minister in the same way. With both an illness and a crisis, things are in a constant state of flux” (Fink, 1986: 20). Therefore, his approach divides crisis into four stages: prodromal, acute, chronic and resolution. Fink used the term “prodromal” from medicine because it is similar to a symptom that occurs before the outbreak of a disease. The prodromal stage is similar to the pre-crisis stages, but Fink distinguished them by arguing that pre-crisis only becomes evident after the crisis happens. Fick also noted that if the warnings in the prodromal process are obvious and can be properly interpreted, the crisis might be much easier to be managed at this stage (ibid.). The second stage, the acute stage, is when crisis already happened. It is an emergency process and actions need to be taken immediately. The chronic stage is the time for recovery and self-analysis. The length of this stage is indeterminate, can last for years or even decades (ibid.). The last stage is the resolution stage which implies at some point the crisis has been managed successfully. The effects of the crisis might still last for a while, but the immediate and most dangerous effects have been resolved (ibid.). The aim of crisis communication is to get to the resolution part as soon as possible. In rare situations, resolution can be reached quickly if the problems can be recognized and treated successfully in the first stage. In most cases, the second and third stages interact with each other and last for quite a long time (Sellnow and Seeger, 2013).

4.1.3 The various roles of the media in crisis communication

Media play an essential role during the process of crisis communication. As Frean-Banks states, “information about a crisis reaches public through the media more than through any other means” (Fearn-Banks, 2007: 22). In current society, the role of media is not simply to report the information to a larger group of the audience - their roles and responsibilities go far beyond that.
Lundgren (2004) suggests that there are four basic roles of media. 1) Reporting current information. This is a fundamental part of the media’s task. Media need to update the latest information to the public. 2) Influencing the way an issue is portrayed. Media have the right to decide the number of news published on a certain issue, the length of each news, and the placement of the news. Those are the important factors that can largely influence the audience’s knowledge towards an issue. 3) Determining independently about what story should be reported. The purpose of the news media is to report news that can attract people’s attention. Therefore, it is important for them to find and report the news that has the feature of “human interest”. 4) Proposing solutions to a crisis-related decision, including declaring their attitude towards the issue. Since media have a great influence in the society, it is important that media have a clear attitude towards certain issues and could give some reasonable advice for solving a crisis (Lundgren & McMakin, 2004).

To be more specific in the case of crises, media have different roles in each stage during the crisis communication. For instance, in Coombs’ three-stage model, media could be the information sources to help organizations find the warning signs of crises in the pre-crisis stage (Coombs, 2012). Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, and Microblogs usually contain a lot of information. Therefore, crisis coordinators need to make full use of the information on the social media platforms and carefully identify the social media most relevant to their concerns (ibid.). During the second stage, the crisis stage, the main role of media is to report the crisis, and the response made by organizations and other related information. Traditional media such as newspapers and TV have frequently been used as a channel for stakeholders to deliver their apologies to the public (ibid.). However, with the development of social media, the channels used to deliver the response to the crisis have become more diverse. News on social media spread faster than traditional media, and it is also easier to receive the feedbacks from the audiences. On the other hand, due to the lack of consistency monitoring on social media, it is easier for rumors to spread which could
make the situation even worse. Therefore, it is a challenge for crisis managers to use social media as a channel to response to the public. In the post-crisis stage, media report the evaluation and critique of the crisis and provide public with some instructing information.

There is no doubt that social media has emerged as a crucial tool during crisis management. A growing number of people have started to rely on social media platforms as the primary channel to search for crisis information (Jin and Liu, 2010; Powell et al., 2012). In the western world, social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube have already become the main sources for people to get information and take charge of “breaking the news” to the world about crises. At the same time, these social media platforms are open to user-generated content which enables different sources to provide real-time information in a rich, diversified and contextualized way (Nicola, 2011). For instance, in the Haiti earthquake crisis, Twitter was used as the first-hand information and immediately followed by Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Skype, traditional blogs and so on. Compared to traditional media, social media have some advantages which might be better matched to crisis communication. The technologies social media have allowed for rapid information production and free uploading as well as downloading the information (Macias et al., 2009; Palen et al., 2009).

Since the aim of this thesis is to analyze how emergencies are covered on two different media platforms—newspaper and Sina Weibo by People’s Daily in China, the models of crisis communication could be used as guides. Coombs’ three-stage model will be used in the analysis part. However, since social emergencies usually happen suddenly or unexpectedly, the pre-crisis stage is often missing in the coverage. Therefore, the focus of this research will be on the crisis stage and the post-crisis stage, which is to say the differences and similarities between the emergency coverage on People’s Daily Newspaper and its Sina Weibo account will be analyzed during and after the time when the “Tianjin Explosion” event happened. Since the research time
is only one month, and it is hard to find a clear timeline to distinguish crisis stage and post-crisis stage. Therefore, the distinction between crisis stage and post-crisis stage will based on the content of the news texts, more specifically, content such as dissemination of information, rescue actions etc. that fit the definition of the crisis stage will be attributed to the crisis stage, and content such as attribution of responsibility or evaluation of the crisis that fit the definition of the post-crisis will be attributed to post-crisis stage.

5 Methodology

In this chapter, I will talk about the research method I have used in my study. At the first step, I will present the research design of this thesis. Next, I will particularly introduce the method I have chosen—content analysis-- the reasons why I chose it and explain how I use it in my research. Moreover, I discuss the different aspects I will use in the analysis part.

5.1 Research design

The research contains two sections. Firstly, a previous research is included. According to Kuhn (1970), “studies are based on the accumulation of previous studies”. Therefore, it is important to research what have been done in the field of emergency coverage previously, as well as the related theories. Secondly, content analysis will be used as the main research method in this thesis. Since the aim of the thesis is to analyze how emergencies are covered in different platforms, and the content is the core of the analysis, content analysis is a very suitable method for this thesis. It can be used in both a qualitative and quantitative way. In this thesis, I chose quantitative content analysis as my method.

5.2 Content analysis

5.2.1 Introduction to content analysis

Content analysis is a highly flexible method that has been widely used in different
studies. According to Cole (1988), “content analysis is a research method for analyzing written, verbal or visual communication message”. Stempel suggested a broad view of content analysis which defined it as “a formal system for doing something we all do informally rather frequently—draw conclusions from observations of content” (Stempel, 2003: 209). Krippendorff emphasized reliability and validity: “content analysis is a research technique for making replicative and valid inferences from data to the context of their use” (Krippendorff, 1980: 21). The emphasis on data reminds readers that “quantitative content analysis is reductionist, with sampling and operational or measurement procedures that reduce communication phenomena to manageable data from which inferences may be drawn about the phenomena themselves” (Riffe, Lacy and Fico, n.d.). Each of the definitions is useful, sharing emphases on the systematic and objective nature of the quantitative content analysis.

Content analysis is designed for three distinct purposes (Cole, 1988), which allow researchers to make assumptions about the “characteristics of the text, the causes of antecedents of the message, and the effects of communication” (Holsti, 1969: 24). Each purpose has a corresponding element and question. As we can see from the figure below, the question “who” asked about the source of the message is to serve the purpose of the causes or antecedents of the message. The question “how” refers to the element of the channel and serves the purpose of characteristics of the message.
The aim of content analysis is to find the appropriate data from the message to solve the research question. Since the intent is for researchers to make inferences, the information has to come from the message itself. The obtained data will present the communication situation, which allows the researchers to make inferences instead of merely describe the situation (Cole, 1988). The forms of the communication message include written, verbal, or visual materials such as books, newspapers, magazines, journals, videos, voice records and so on. The materials used in this thesis are the reports on People’s Daily Newspaper and the posts on its Sina Weibo account.

5.2.2 Components of content analysis

According to Krippendorff, there are six components of content analysis that researchers need to follow in order to proceed from text to results. The first one is unitizing, which is the “systematic distinguishing of segments of text—images, voices, and other observables—that are of interest to an analysis” (Krippendorff, 1980: 82). The second one is sampling, which allows the researchers to economize on their research efforts by observing or investigating a small group of units that statistically or conceptually represent the set of all possible units. This largely relies on sampling.
plans. The third component is recording/coding. This is the process for researchers to interpret the situation through separate observations. It “bridges the gap between unitized texts and someone’s reading of them, between distinct images and what people see in them” (Krippendorff, 1980: 83.). Then it comes to the fourth component which is reducing data to manageable representation. Especially for large volumes of data, in order to improve the efficiency of research, it is important to reduce the diversity of text to what matters. The fifth component is abductively inferring contextual phenomena which narrow the gap between “descriptive accounts of texts and what they mean, refer to, entail, provoke, or cause” (Krippendorff, 1980: 84). The last one is narrating the answer to the research question. This step makes the results of analysts’ questions comprehensible to others (Krippendorff, 1980: 85).

The first four components can be together seen as the process of data making, which helps to create calculable data from original texts. The fifth component can be considered as the process of interpreting, data and the last component is to show the results and make the results comprehensible. In this thesis, I will use the six components of content analysis to analyze the content of both People’s Daily Newspaper and its Sina Weibo account.

**Step 1: Unitizing.**

There are different units of analysis, such as “sampling units, recording units, context units, units of measurement, and units of enumeration” (Krippendorff, 1980: 80). In this thesis, one set of data is from articles on People’s Daily Newspaper, including texts and images; one set of data is from posts from People’s Daily Sina Weibo account, including texts, images, audios, videos, and links. Both units are related to the selected case.

The data from People’s Daily Newspaper were gathered from a website called “人民日报图文数据库（1946-2017）”, which contains all the newspapers that People’s Daily has released from the beginning. The data from Sina Weibo was collected by
searching with keywords related to the emergency case, such as “天津” (Tianjin), “爆炸” (Explosion), “天津港” (Tianjin port), “8・12”, etc. The period of the data collection is one month from the day when the “Tianjin Explosion” event happened.

**Step 2: Sampling**

Since there are countless emergencies happening in China in recent years, it is impossible to analyze all of them. Therefore, choosing the indicative sample is a very efficient way to do the research. Ideally, a study of a whole population should come to the same conclusion as a study of an indicative sample (Krippendorff, 1980). In this thesis, I have chosen one typical social emergency event to analyze the differences and similarities between emergency coverage on People’s Daily Newspaper and its Sina Weibo content. The event is the “Tianjin explosions” which happened on 12 August 2015. This event is a typical social emergency event that caused a great number of casualties and aroused great attention in the whole society. Therefore, it is considered an indicative sample. The reason why I chose this case is because of the great attention that has been aroused by the emergency in the society during the time it happens.

*Figure 3: #Tianjin Explosion*#

One of the features of Sina Weibo is that users can create a page for a certain topic and discuss in the page. News can be post on this page as well as users’ discoveries and opinions, and people can leave their comments under the posts and discuss with
each other. As we can see from the figure above, the numbers to the lower right show how many times the page has been visited, the number of comments and the number of followers of the page. Figure 3 shows the emergency of “Tianjin Explosion”, with 330 million page visitors, 644 thousand comments, and 2697 followers. From these numbers, it is obvious that this case had aroused a great attention on the society. The case drew the attention of a great number of people, and also fulfilled the definition of “social emergency”. Therefore, “Tianjin Explosion” is chosen as the research case for my study.

**Step 3: Recording/coding**

According to Krippendorff (1980: 75), the purpose of this step is to “create durable records of otherwise transient phenomena” and to “transform unedited texts, original images, and/or untrusted sounds into analyzable representations. That is to say, the researchers should create their own system to analyze and interpret the data. In this thesis, five aspects of the content will be analyzed: the source, the themes of the reports, the quantity of the reports, the form of the reports, and the tone of the reports. The details of the five aspects studied will be explained later. The data collected from People’s Daily Newspaper and its Sina Weibo account will be recorded/coded and classified into the five aspects respectively.

**Step 4: Reducing data to manageable representations.**

The aim of this step is to reduce the diversity of text to the important issues related to the research questions. In this study, only the data related to the emergency case posted on People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily were collected. Also, the setting of a period is one month since the emergency happened which means the period of data collection of the case “Tianjin Explosion” is from 12th August 2015 till 12th September 2015. The setting of a period for the data collection made the research more manageable and efficient.
Step 5: Abductively inferring contextual phenomena.
This step can move an analysis outside the data (Krippendorff, 1980). “It points to an unobserved phenomenon in the context of interest to an analyst” (Krippendorff, 1980: 79.). During this step, the meaning of the descriptive information will be explained with the statistic warrants.

Step 6: Narrating the answer to the research question.
This is the last part of the content analysis, the result of the analysis needs to be made comprehensive to others. I will present the results of my analysis in the later chapter.

5.3 Aspects studied
When using content analysis as a research method, the most important thing is the selection and construction of aspects. The construction of aspects must be able to meet the requirements of the research questions and must conform to the architecture and the significance of the research questions (Lü, 2016). In this thesis, 88 news reports on People’s Daily Newspaper and 173 posts on @People’s Daily have been found related to the “Tianjin Explosion” crisis. The aspects are based on those reports and posts. In news coverage, there are two parts of media frame, one is the choice of news materials, which includes news sources and information sources; the second part is the construction of news materials, to which mainly refers to the theme of the reports, the contents and the number of the reports, layout, and the tone (Wang and Shen, 2009). Based on the media frame, the aspects are divided into five parts: the extent of coverage, news sources, themes of the reports, report forms, and the tone of the reports.

1. Extent of coverage
The number and the length of reports can reflect how much attention the media has paid to a particular event. Since Sina Weibo has the characteristic of 140-character limitation, the length of news reports will only be examined on People’s Daily Newspaper. By comparing the number of the reports related to the selected case on
People’s Daily newspaper and @People’s Daily, it is possible to figure out the degree of attention given to the event by the two media platforms.

2. News sources

According to Zang (1999: 32-44), the news sources are the competitors of social action.

In the field of journalism, a source is a person, publication, or other record or document that gives up-to-date information. In a broader field, sources are sometimes considered as “news sources” which include official records, publications or broadcast, officials in the government or business, organizations or companies, witnesses of crime, accidents or other events, and people involved with or affected by a news event (McQuail, 1994). Media organizations that have fast access to news sources will be able to get more timely information and have an advantage when narrating news.

In this thesis, the news sources of People’s Daily are divided into six parts; they are government, related departments, other news media organizations, experts, affected people and their families, and netizens/citizens. Government related source include the party, government, military and so on. Related departments source refers to the disaster-related departments such as fire station, sanitary bureau, public security bureau, environmental protection agency and so on. Other news media organizations related source includes other media news agencies such as Global Times, Xinhua News Agency, and Tianjin Daily and so on. Experts related source are the opinions or suggestions of the crisis that came from scholars or experts in the related field. Affected people and their families are also one of the sources which can provide information for People’s Daily. Since a lot of the information are provided by Sina Weibo users or citizens, netizens and citizens are also considered as one source.

Some of the sources are found indicated in the reports or posts, for instance, some of the news reports on People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily start with the
sentence “According to…” or “… states that…” and with the name of the source in the texts. Some other posts on People’s Daily have marked the source at the end of the texts. These sources are often clearly indicated in the reports or posts and easy to be found. Other sources need to be identified from the texts. For example, there is one report on People’s Daily Newspaper without clear identification of the source, but the content is about the instructions made by the government. Therefore, the source of this post will be attributed to the government. Also, since there can be several sources in one report, it is acceptable to put one report in different categories of the sources. By comparing the news sources, we can see if there is any difference in how the two media platforms get their information.

3. Themes of the reports

In content analysis, the analysis of the theme of the news report is the most common and widely used aspect (Lü, 2016). By comparing the number and the frequency of reports related to the same subject on different media platforms, researchers can find out the emphasis of the media coverage on different media platforms.

Coombs’ three-stage model that has been mentioned in the crisis communication theory part, will be used to categorize the data. Since in this case, the “Tianjin Explosion” happened suddenly, the information about the pre-crisis stage is limited. The focus will be the stages of crisis and post-crisis. According to Coombs (2012), during the stage of the crisis, the main role of media is to report the crisis, and the response made by organizations and other related information. Also, as I mentioned before, due to the deficiency of gatekeeping on social media, it is easier for rumors to spread during the stage of the crisis. Along with the definition of crisis stage and coding of the data, the themes of crisis stage will be divided into six types: dissemination of the information, leadership command, rescue action during the crisis, condolences and mourning, rumor warning, and disaster knowledge. Dissemination of the information includes the information about the event itself, information about the affected people and their relatives, and the environmental situation of the disaster area.
Leadership command contains the instructions from the government and leadership inspection. Rescue action during the crisis includes the information about rescues from the government, other organizations, and individuals. Condolence and mourning are from the government, organizations, and victims’ relatives and so on. Due to the fact that there are a lot of rumors during the crisis, rumor warning is also considered as one theme. Disaster knowledge such as explosives ingredients, self-rescue methods are also found in the posts during the coding process.

As for post-crisis, it is a process of evaluation and learning. It is the time to investigate and analyze what went wrong, why, how, who should be responsible for it, and what should be done to prevent the future crisis. This process is for people to figure out what happened and make plausible interpretations for the crisis (Weick, 1979). Therefore, the themes in this stage will be divided into four types: effects of the crisis, investigation of the crisis, interpretation of the crisis and evaluation of the crisis. Effects of the crisis include the economic consequences, environmental consequences and other consequences caused by the issue. Investigation of the crisis includes the information of the attribution of responsibility and the investigation process. Interpretation of the crisis contains the answers to the questions that publics have related to the crisis. Evaluation of the crisis includes the information of what should be learned from the crisis and what should be done to prevent the future crisis.

The aim of this analysis is to find out the number of posts related to each theme and to explore if there are any differences between the emphases towards emergency coverage of People’s Daily on its newspaper and @People’s Daily. The three-stage model of crisis communication is used as a direction for classifying the themes. Coding and analyzing the data are also used as a way to find relevant themes.

4. **Report forms**

According to Barnhurst and Nerone, “form is everything a newspaper does to present the look of the news… The form includes the way the medium imagines itself to be
and to act” (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001:3). The form contains a lot of elements, such as the design or layout of a newspaper, news genres, content themes, and sourcing techniques and so on (ibid). In this thesis, the focus will be the design or layout of the news. This element is different for different media platforms. For instance, traditional media such as newspaper can only use texts or texts with images, but they can use different layouts to highlight the key points. Social media have more various ways of reporting news, for example, on Sina Weibo, the forms of news coverage can be texts, texts with images, texts with videos, and so on.

The focus of People’s Daily Newspaper will be their layouts, mainly focus on which pages the news were posted. This is in order to find out how traditional media cover emergencies and how they use different layouts to emphasize the importance of the events. The focus of @People’s Daily will be the way they present news. It will be divided into six different forms—texts, texts with images, texts with videos, texts with links, texts with images and videos, texts with images and links. It helps to find out the preference of sources by the media on social media platforms. And this is also for the purpose of discovering the patterns of how media report emergencies on Sina Weibo.

5. **Tone of the reports**

The tone of the reports to a certain extent determines the attitude and the news coverage style of the media. The research of the tone is important in media coverage studies. In this paper, the analysis will focus on three categories of tone -- positive, neutral and negative. Positive tone refers to the text contents that show encouragement, praise, agreement, compassion and appreciation in their tone, opinions or emotions. Neutral tone refers to the contents that present an objective and fair stance, and without obvious tendency in the tone. The reports should also exclude the judgments from organizations or individuals. Negative tone refers to the contents that contain the opinions or emotions of opposition, accusation, complaint, moral criticism and so on.
5.4 Ethical issues and limitations of the study
All the data collected in this thesis were collected from People’s Daily online newspaper website and Sina Weibo which are all open sources for the public. Therefore, there are no ethical issues in this thesis in regards to data collection. As for the limitations of the study, since I have only chosen one emergency event for my research, it may not cover the variety of the social emergency phenomenon. Therefore, in the future studies, more events can be chosen as the research objects. Also, since the time period of the data collection was set to one month after the emergency happened, the information may be limited. Another limitation is that all the data collected were searched by keywords. Therefore, is it possible that there some data might be missing.

6. Analysis and results
This chapter aims to analyze the collected data and give answers to the research questions. The main research questions for this thesis are (1) how is the Tianjin explosion event covered by People’s Daily on its newspaper and its Sina Weibo account? (2) What are the differences and similarities in the news reports published in this event, in the two platforms?

The analysis part will go through the five aspects for both People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily. After sorting and analyzing the data collected from both media platforms, the next step is to find the similarities and differences between the coverage of the “Tianjin Explosion” event on People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily. Tables, line diagrams, bar charts and pie charts will be used to make the presentation of data more clear.

6.1 Analysis of the extent of coverage
The number of reports released by media towards a certain issue can show how much
attention media paid to the issue. If the issue is important, the number of reports will be large. From the data collection of all the articles and posts released by People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily in a month since the “Tianjin Explosion” event happened, it is clear that both media platforms paid much attention to this event, and released a lot of reports about the issue. The number of reports released by People’s Daily Newspaper is 88, and the number of posts released by @People’s Daily on Sina Weibo is 173. The figure 4 below shows the number of reports per day on the two media platforms during the month.

![Figure 4: News quantity of People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily](image)

The accident happened at 23:34 on 12th August 2015. The first post on Sina Weibo is at 00:43 on 13th August 2015, and the first report on People’s Daily Newspaper is also at 13th August 2015 at page 4. However, from the figure above, it is clear that on 13th August, there is only one report on People’s Daily Newspaper about the event, while the number of posts on Sina Weibo is 49. These figures explain that when the emergency happened, @People’s Daily could react immediately, and provided a great amount of timely information to the public. On the contrary, People’s Daily Newspaper only had one report on the day after the incident, which shows the
information delay of People’s Daily Newspaper.

From figure 4, we can also observe that most of the reports and posts were released during the first week after the emergency which is from 13th August 2015 until 19th August. During this time, the number of reports by People’s Daily Newspaper is 45, accounts for 51% of all reports. The number of posts by @People’s Daily is 135, accounts for 78% of the total posts. And after this week the number of reports is noticeable reduced. From 6th September, People’s Daily totally stopped reporting news about this event, while @People’s Daily still have a few posts until 12th of September.

Another way to examine if the media has paid a lot of attention to an issue is to analyze the length of the reports released by the media. However, due to the 140-character limitation of the Sina Weibo, the length of the posts on @People’s Daily will be less than 140 characters. Therefore, the focus of the length study will be on People’s Daily Newspaper. The figure below shows the length of the reports on People’s Daily Newspaper. There are three categories of the length, the reports of 0-500 characters are shorts reports, mainly focus on reporting the situation in the disaster area. Reports with 500-1500 characters are middle length reports, mainly focus on the interpretation of the events, the government instructions, and the investigation process and so on. Reports with over 1500 characters give audiences more in-depth information, including more detailed interpretation about the issue, the evaluation of the issue and so on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Number of reports</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-500</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-1500</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 1500</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5: Length of news reports on People’s Daily Newspaper.**
From figure 5, it is clear that the reports with 500-1500 characters account for the most percentage, half of the news reports are in this category. 20% of the new reports are with over 1500 characters, which explains that People’s Daily Newspaper focused on in-depth reports and provided audiences with detailed information.

Through the analysis of the extent of coverage for People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily, one noticeable result is that when it comes to the timeliness of news, social media have great advantages over traditional media. The first post by @People’s Daily was released less than one hour after the emergency happened, and on the next day, 49 posts were updated to make public aware what is going on with the emergency. Another point we can get from figure 4 is that both People’s Daily Newspaper and @People's Daily paid great attention to the issue in the beginning, and didn’t continually follow and report the news. Most of the news are released during the first week the emergency happened, even though @People’s Daily has some posts till 12th September, the number of the posts are very few. From the figures, we can also see that the two media platforms have different ways to put their attention towards the issue. According to the data, the number of news posts posted by @People’s Daily is almost twice as much as the reports released by People’s Daily Newspaper. However, when it comes to the extent of the in-depth of the news report, People’s Daily Newspaper had more advantages and did better.

6.2 Analysis of news sources
Following Gaye Tuchman’s (1978) work, the source of the news is the origin of constructing news. Zang (1999) also argued that sources are the identifiable individuals, organizations or entities that have been mentioned in the news quote. The explanation of the source of message helps indicate that the news is based on reality, which enhanced the credibility of the information. At the same time, choosing different sources also implied the media’s position and attitude.

In this thesis, according to the definition of news sources and the pilot test, six types
of sources of People’s Daily were identified, they are government, related
departments, other news media organizations, experts, affected people and their
families and netizens/citizens. Some posts or reports might have several news sources,
because of this there may be an overlap among the news sources. By analyzing the
collected data, we got the following specific data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News sources</th>
<th>People’s Daily newspaper (number of reports)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>@People’s Daily (number of posts)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related departments</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other news media organizations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affected people and their families</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netizens/ citizens</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6: News sources of People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily**

Due to the overlap of the news sources, the total number of the posts and reports are
more than the number of reports. From figure 6 we can see clear that the use of news
sources on the two media platforms have some similarities and differences. For
People’s Daily Newspaper, the majority of news sources came from the government,
accounts for 44%, while the majority of the news sources of @People’s Daily came
from other news media organizations, accounts for 27%.

After a detailed analysis of news sources of People’s Daily Newspaper, it is found that
there are many diverse perspectives of news sources on People’s Daily Newspaper. It has also been found that there are only a few articles came from the news sources such as other news media organizations, affected people and their families and citizens/citizens and account for a small part of the percentage. For instance, there are only seven articles that have the affected people and their families as source and only account for 7%.

Most of the news was came from the government, accounting for 44 percentage.

The news sources of @People’s Daily on reporting the emergency of the “Tianjin Explosion” are different from People’s Daily Newspaper. @People’s Daily mostly used the news came from other news media organizations which are the fewest used news source of People’s Daily Newspaper. The news sources on @People’s Daily are more even than People’s Daily Newspaper. The information from the government on @People’s Daily only account for 15% while on People’s Daily Newspaper the percentage of news came from government is 44%. On the other hand, the use of other new media organizations reached to the percentage of 27% and became the most used new source. Many posts released by People’s Daily on Sina Weibo are references to other mainstream media such as Xin Hua news agency, Tianjin Daily, CCTV, and so on. From figure 6, we can also see that the percentage of news came from affected people and their families and the news came from netizens/citizens are more than in People’s Daily Newspaper.

To sum up, People’s Daily Newspaper has a strong tendency towards using government sources. The news from the government has reached to 44 percent. @People’s Daily based on social media platform has more balanced news sources. Since @People’s Daily is the account of People’s Daily on Sina Weibo, with the interaction characteristic of social media, it is easier to interact with people and hearing the voice from people. The voice of netizens has been spread and expanded on @People’s Daily which can be considered an advantage compared to People’s Daily Newspaper. Also, since most of the news on @People’s Daily came from other
news media organizations, which explains that on social media platform, timeliness is more easily achieved.

**6.3 Analysis of the themes**

Analyzing the themes of the reports can help present the characteristics of the news coverage from a comprehensive perspective (Zang, 1999). In this thesis, the themes are divided by Coombs’ three-stage model of crisis communication, mainly focus on crisis stage and post-crisis stage. As we can see the table below:

| Crisis stage |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| **Themes**       | People’s Daily newspaper  | @People’s Daily (number of posts) | Percentage |
| **Dissemination of the information** | 16 | 75 | 18% | 43% |
| **Leadership command** | 19 | 13 | 21% | 8% |
| **Rescue action during the crisis** | 8 | 17 | 9% | 10% |
| **Condolence and mourning** | 6 | 24 | 7% | 14% |
| **Rumor warning** | 3 | 7 | 3% | 4% |
| **Disaster knowledge** | 1 | 4 | 1% | 2% |
| **Total** | 53 | 140 | 59% | 81% |
Among all the themes, we can see that on People’s Daily Newspaper, leadership command is the most used theme, account for 21%; and on @People’s Daily, dissemination of information is the most used theme with the account for 43%. These figures explain that People’s Daily Newspaper focuses more on presenting the information from the government, while @People’s Daily emphasizes more on covering information about the event and making people aware what is happening. Viewing the two stages (crisis stage and post-crisis stage) as a whole, we can see that both People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily paid more attention to the crisis stage, especially @People’s Daily, with 81 percent of the news coverage in total during crisis stage. Now, I will analyze the two stages separately.

During crisis stage, we can see both People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily paid much attention to the dissemination of information related to the crisis. However, it is clear that @People’s Daily emphasized more on the theme of dissemination of information. Since Sina Weibo is a platform that information can be timely updated, @People’s Daily could share the latest information to the public. Most of the posts in the theme of dissemination of information are the news about the event itself,
information about the affected people and their relatives, and the environmental situation of the disaster area. This is the information that people are most concerned about during the crisis.

As for the second theme—leadership command, it is clear that People’s Daily Newspaper has a higher percentage of reports on this theme, account for 21%, while @People’s Daily only has 8% of the posts in this theme. As I mentioned before, People’s Daily Newspaper is the mouth speaker for the government, and plays an important role on building a strong image of the government when an emergency happens. Therefore, news such as instructions from the government or leadership inspection has been reported a lot during the crisis. Even though @People’s Daily is a branch of People’s Daily news agency, based on the social media platform--Sina Weibo, @People’s Daily has its own ways of covering news. The government instructions are not the primary report object. Instead, @People’s Daily listens to people’s voice and report the news that people care about most.

The social emergencies often cause a great panic among people, proper rescue action is essential for the social stability, the report of rescue action is also been placed on an important position. From figure 7, it is clear that both media platforms had put a similar amount of work on the coverage of rescue action during the crisis, with 9% from People’s Daily Newspaper and 10% from @People's Daily. In emergency coverage, positive reports such as “disaster rescue” plays an important role in maintaining the stability of the society and encouraging people.

In the theme of condolence and mourning, from figure 7 we can see that People’s Daily Newspaper has 7% of news related to condolence and mourning and @People’s Daily has 14% of news related to this theme. With twice amount of percentage over People’s Daily Newspaper, it is clear that @People’s Daily focuses more on the human concern. The reported percentage of rumor warning and disaster knowledge of People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily are quite similar.
When an emergency happens, it is important to investigate and analyze what went wrong, why, how, who should be responsible for it, and what should be done to prevent future crises. Therefore, the post-crisis stage is an essential process. Figure 7 shows that People’s Daily Newspaper has 41% of the news in total in the post-crisis stage while @People’s Daily only has 19% of the news in this stage. It is obvious that People’s Daily Newspaper put more effort on post-crisis stage than @People’s Daily. Due to the 140-character limitation of Sina Weibo, it is hard for @People’s Daily to have a comprehensive interpretation or evaluation about the crisis.

For the first two themes “effects of the crisis” and “investigation of the crisis”, the coverage percentage of both media platforms are quite similar, with 10% and 8% for People’s Daily Newspaper for each theme and 7% and 6% for @People’s Daily. Both of them reported the economic consequences, environmental consequences and other consequences caused by the explosion, they have also raised a lot of questions towards the causes of the emergency, which help accelerate the investigation process of the emergency.

In the theme of “interpretation of the crisis”, the news of People’s Daily Newspaper accounts for 15%, while the posts of @People’s Daily only account for 2%. This theme is mainly focused on answering questions about the emergency. Most of the answers released on People’s Daily Newspaper are the interpretations from the government, experts or related departments. This helps reduce the confusions that people have towards the issue and also helps prevent rumors.

The last theme is the evaluation of the crisis. People’s Daily Newspaper has 8% of the news in this theme whereas @People’s Daily has 4% news in this theme. Evaluation of the crisis is an essential part of crisis management, news media should also take it into account and make public aware what went wrong in the crisis and what need to be done to prevent similar crises in the future. From the figure, it is clear that the
percentage of the crisis evaluation reports for People’s Daily Newspaper is twice as much as @People’s Daily, which means People’s Daily Newspaper put more efforts on showing the public the causes of the crisis and what should be learned from the crisis.

In summary, both media platforms have focused on the theme of dissemination of information. In crisis stage, the news coverage of rescue action, rumor warning, and disaster knowledge are quite similar on both People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily. However, for People’s Daily Newspaper, it emphasized more on the image building of the government and leadership, while @People’s Daily showed more human concern when it comes to condolence and mourning. During the post-crisis stage, People’s Daily Newspaper have more reports about the interpretation and evaluation of the issue and answered a lot of questions and concerns about the crisis. Both media platforms paid attention to the accident investigation and handling the results to the public as soon as possible.

### 6.4 Analysis of the news form

The form of news report can be varied, different media platforms use different forms to present the news. For traditional media such as newspapers, even though they can only use texts or images on their reports, they can put the news on different pages or use headlines to highlight the key points. For social media, there are more various ways of reporting news, for example, on Sina Weibo, the forms of news coverage can be texts, texts with images, texts with videos, and so on. These forms greatly increased reader’s visual perceptions and might also improve the interestingness of the news.

In this thesis, the focus of People’s Daily newspaper layouts will mainly be the different pages where news was posted, different headlines that People’s Daily Newspaper has used to highlight the news will also be analyzed. By analyzing the data, it is found that news related to the “Tianjin Explosion” case are posted on page 1,
2, 4, 5, 6, 11, 17, 18 and 19. As I mentioned before, page 1-6 are mainly about current important issues, page 11 is about domestic news, page 17-20 are special columns. Figure 8 below shows the number of reports on different pages.

![Number of Posts by People's Daily Newspaper](image)

**Figure 8: Number of posts by People’s Daily Newspaper**

As we can see from the table above, 93% of the news were posted on the first 6 pages which are for current important issues. 13 news were posted on page 1 which account for 15% of all the news, showing that People’s Daily Newspaper paid a great attention to this event. Most of the news were posted on page 4, which is the page for the details of current important issues. The picture below is the first page of People’s Daily Newspaper on 14th August, which is two days after the emergency happened. The content in the red square is the news about “Tianjin Explosion”. It occupied almost a quarter of the whole page with bold headlines and picture, which greatly shows the importance of the issue.
Figure 9: People’s Daily Newspaper page 1 (14th August 2015)

As for @People’s Daily, the focus will be the way it presents news. The analysis will be conducted in six categories—texts, texts with images, texts with videos, texts with
links, texts with images and videos, texts with images and links. Figure 10 shows how many posts @People’s Daily had posted for each category.

![Forms of news of @People's Daily](image)

**Figure 10: Forms of news of @People’s Daily**

From the bar chart, it is clear that @People’s Daily used various forms to report the news, which is a big advantage that traditional media do not have. Another prominent feature is that most of the posts are in the form of text with images, with the account for 89%, and there are no posts with only texts. The combination of pictures and texts can improve the visual experience for audience. Also, we can see that 12 posts in the form of text with image and link, account for 7% of all the posts. Those links are mostly the detailed reports about the issue, which can enriched the information, and met the demand of multiple reading experiences from audiences. There are also some posts with videos, which gave audiences a vivid visual experience of what is happening, but the number of this kind of posts is not as many as could be expected based on the opportunities available in the media format.

To sum up, People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily use different forms to report the news. People’s Daily Newspaper focused on the layouts of the news,
putting the news on the prominent position and using bold headlines to highlight the importance of the news. They also put the news in the first six pages to attract reader’s attention. @People’s Daily using various reporting forms instead. Pictures, videos, and links were used to enhance the richness of the content and to give audiences a visual experience of the issue.

6.5 Analysis of tone of the reports

In news coverage, the attitudes media have towards the issue will be reflected by their reports. Therefore, analyzing the tone of reports can help figure out the attitudes and values that People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily have towards the coverage of social emergencies. The tone is divided into three categories: positive-, neutral- and negative tone. The pie chart below shows the percentage of reports on the two media platforms of the three tones.

![Pie chart showing the percentage of reports on People's Daily Newspaper and @People's Daily](chart.png)

**Figure 11: Tone of the reports**

Through the analysis of the data, we can see that 85% of the news reports on People’s Daily Newspaper are with a neutral tone, 11% are positive reports, and 4% are negative reports. The majority of the reports are with a neutral tone which shows that People’s Daily Newspaper as one of the most influential newspaper in China could cover news in an objective way, and tries to avoid subjective opinions from reports or editors. The positive news is mainly about the leadership concern towards affected
people and their families, the government rescue actions and so on. Since People’s Daily Newspaper is the mouth speaker for the government, it is important for them to guide the public opinion in a positive way, and send out the voice from the official. Therefore, the positive reports are more than negative reports.

@People’s Daily also gave the reported priority to the neutral reports, accounting for 78%, keeping the news coverage with an objective and neutral attitude. The percentage of positive and negative reports are relatively equal, accounting respectively for 12% and 10%. Among them, the positive reports are mostly focused on rescuing injured people, assistances from the society, donations, encourage information and so on, showing a lot of human concern. Negative reports are mainly focused on the causes of the explosion, criticism of the inaccurate reports, accusing the responsible party and so on. Those negative reports may potentially play an important role in accelerating the investigation process by the relevant government departments.

In general, both People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily focus on neutral reports, which conform to the objective reporting requirement of news media coverage. The percentage of neutral reports of People’s Daily Newspaper is higher than @People’s Daily which explains that People’s Daily Newspaper as a traditional newspaper, follows more strictly to the rule of objective reporting in news media coverage. The lack of negative reports on People’s Daily Newspaper accords with its image of the mouth speaker for the government, and also in order to reduce the panic and positively lead the public opinion. The percentage of positive news and negative news are relatively balanced on @People’s Daily. With up to 10% of negative news, @People’s Daily plays a better role in speaking out public’s opinion and supervising the investigation process of the crisis.

6.6 Results
By analyzing the collected data, it is found that there are some features of social
emergency coverage on People’s Daily Newspaper. Firstly, from the analysis of the extent of the news report, we can see that People’s Daily Newspaper has paid a great attention to the “Tianjin Explosion” event. However, the news reports on People’s Daily Newspaper are not as timely as @People’s Daily. This is one of the limitations of newspaper comparing to social media. However, the length of the reports on People’s Daily Newspaper is much longer than the posts on @People’s Daily which could give readers more in-depth information. Secondly, from the analysis of news sources, it is clear that most of the news came from the government, which strongly shows that People’s Daily Newspaper is the mouth speaker for the government. It focuses on the originality of the news reports but not much news came from affected people and their families or netizens/citizens. Thirdly, from the themes of the reports, we can also see clear that People’s Daily Newspaper focused a lot on the government behaviors, such as reporting policies from the government, leadership condolences and so on, trying to build a positive image of the government in the process of disaster rescue. By the nature of the socialist country, the government is the main body of disaster rescue, news must emphasize the government rescue activities (Xiang, 2011). Fourthly, by analyzing the news form, it is found that People’s Daily Newspaper emphasized the importance of an event by using bold headlines and put it on the first page, using a lot of space of the whole page to report the news. Lastly, the analysis of tone showing that most of the news reports on People’s Daily Newspaper are the neutral tone, which conforms to the objective reporting requirement of the news media coverage. There is more positive news than negative news, showing that People’s Daily Newspaper as the representative of the government trying to lead the public opinion in a positive way during the crisis and maintain the stability of the society.

As for the news coverage of social emergency on @People’s Daily, by analyzing the extent of news coverage, it has been found that the information on @People’s Daily is very concentrated, 28% of the news were posted on the day after the crisis happened. This also shows the timeliness of the information on @People’s Daily. On the other
hand, the great number of posts on @People’s Daily also shows that online news media has the advantage in the quantity of news reporting and has started to play an important role in emergency coverage. From the analysis of news sources, we can see that @People’s Daily used a lot of information from other news media organizations which shows the characteristics of social media platforms—better timeliness of the information. Also, there is much information that came from affected people and their families as well as netizens/citizens which explains that @People’s Daily focused a lot on hearing the voice of people, and paid much attention in the interaction with people. From the analysis of themes, it is clear that @People’s Daily paid most attention to the dissemination of information, which explains that during a crisis, the most important thing for @People’s Daily is to report the issue itself, telling public what happened and what is going on. Information about leadership command only accounted for 8 percentage, showing that for @People’s Daily, the government instructions are not the coverage priority. Also, a lot of posts are found to report the condolence and mourning after the crisis, which presents a great human concern on @People’s Daily’s reports. Another point is that @People’s Daily does not have much information during the post-crisis stage, most of the reports are focused on crisis stage. The analysis of the news form shows that @people’s Daily tends to use the combination of images and texts to improve the vitality of the news. Videos and links are also used to increase the richness of the news content, but the amount is not as much as expected. As for the analysis of tone, we can see that neutral tone has been mostly used, which follows the rules of objective reporting of news coverage. The percentage of positive and negatives news report are similar which explains that @People’s Daily not only want to reduce the panic after the crisis but also helps to express the opinions from the public, accusing the responsible party and accelerating the investigation process.

There are many similarities and differences of the social emergency coverage between People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily. As for similarities, from the analysis part, we can firstly find that both People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily
focused on crisis stage rather than the post-crisis stage. During the crisis stage, the main role of media is to report the crisis, and the response made by organizations and other related information. During the stage of post-crisis, the role of media is to report the evaluation and critique of the crisis and provide public with some instructing information (Coombs, 2012). Both stages are essential during the crisis communication process, media should pay equal attention to both stages and avoid placing particular emphasis on the crisis stage. The second similarity is that both media paid attention to the dissemination of the information related to the crisis, which explains that timely information updating during emergencies is one of the highlights of the media coverage. Thirdly, for both People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily, the reports about the crisis are concentrated on the first week after the emergency happened. After that, the quantity of the reports has been substantially reduced. The last similarity is that both media tend to use neutral tone when covering emergencies, showing that both media follow the rule of news media coverage by reporting the news objectively.

There are also some differences in the social emergency coverage between People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily. Firstly, People’s Daily Newspaper highlights its political proximity, and @People’s Daily highlights its human concern. Although both People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily are parts of the same news organization, the focus of the two media platforms is different. This point can be seen from the news sources and the report themes. The government is the main news source People’s Daily Newspaper, and the leadership command accounts for the highest percentage among all the reporting themes. People’s Daily Newspaper was trying to create a positive image for the government and communist party during the crisis. On the other hand, @People’s Daily focused more on the voice of people. The percentage of the news came from affected people, and their families account for 18% of all the news sources and are more than twice as much as the news came from People’s Daily Newspaper, and it is the same as the news came from netizens/citizens. Also, the percentage of reports on @People’s Daily in the theme of condolence and
mourning are twice as much as on People’s Daily Newspaper, showing that @People’s Daily paid more attention to the people’s livelihood which presents its human concern as well.

Secondly, the prominence of People’s Daily Newspaper reports is the stability of the society, while @People’s Daily is freer when reporting the news. This differences can be seen from their reporting tone. Although the majority reports of both media platforms are in the neutral tone, the percentage of positive news and negative news are different. For People’s Daily Newspaper, the number of positive news is more than negatives news. There are more reports presented with the positive attitude and negative criticism is limited. Most of the positive reports are aim at building the government’s images. And the reports are enclosed, almost do not encourage the public to widely discuss the issue. Although this model is beneficial for maintaining the social stability in a short-term, and avoid the social dissent, in the long run, it will reduce the dynamic of the society (Song, 2014). It is understandable that People’s Daily Newspaper tries to maintain the social stability, however, there is also a question that if the order maintenance always best for the society? The main role of the media is to make the public aware of the facts, if the media focus too much on the maintenance of the society instead of reporting facts to the public, their priority will go wrong. The reporting freedom of @People’s Daily is mainly manifested in two aspects—the negative information and the open environment. The percentage of negative news on @People’s Daily are more than the negative news on People’s Daily Newspaper. @People’s Daily dares to question the investigation process and the responsible party, reporting the news that public mostly cares about. The open environment of @People’s Daily reflected in the way they present news. @People’s Daily is trying to engage the public in the discussion of the issue by creating different topics. For instance, in the “Tianjin Explosion” case, @People’s Daily has created a Weibo topic for public to express their own opinion. Moreover, in the reports of @People’s Daily, sentences such as “What do you think about it?” “Have you…?” have been used a lot to inspiring the audience to think and speak. In the comment area
below the posts, different opinions can be expressed.

The third difference is that @People’s Daily is focused more on the timeliness of the news. This can be seen from the quantity of the news report on both media platforms. Timeliness is the core value of news report. It contains two aspects—the news need to be spread from the source to the media quickly and efficiently, and the information needs to be spread from media to the audience quickly (Xue, 2012). Generally speaking, the more recent the issue, the more newsworthy it is. Comparing to People’s Daily Newspaper, @People’s Daily has superiority because of the characteristics of Sina Weibo. Sina Weibo is a social media platform, information can be gathered and spread quickly on this platform. We can see from the news sources that @People’s Daily used a lot of information from other news media organizations, which greatly improved the spreading speed of news from source to the media. From the analysis of the quantity of the reports, we can see that on the next day of the emergency happened, 43 posted were updated, while People’s Daily Newspaper only one report had been released. On the other hand, with more than 50 million followers on @People’s Daily, once the posts been updated on the platform, the information can be spread immediately. The system of Sina Weibo provides @People’s Daily with an easy form of communication that enables users to share information quickly, which is an irreplaceable advantage compare to the newspaper (ibid.).

7. Discussion and further research

The coverage of social emergency has always been an important task for news media. From the analysis above, it is clear that both People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily have advantages and disadvantages when they are reporting social emergencies. For the disadvantages, it is important for them to take actions and improve their report in the future news coverages. There are some common points that both media platforms need to revise in their future social emergency coverage. For instance, in both People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily reports, it is found
that the information during pre-crisis and post-crisis stage are deficient.

From the report themes, it is clear that both People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily lack the information of pre-crisis stage. The reports about post-crisis stage are also insufficient. Most of the reports focus on the crisis stage, reporting the information about the disaster and rescue actions. As social emergencies repeatedly occur in recent years, the ability of news media coverage about the social emergencies has also been improved. However, in order to effectively prevent the occurrence of social emergencies, reduce casualties and lower the damage caused by social emergencies, it is important for media to work on the pre-crisis stage and timely post the warning information. At the same time, since the government contains a lot of authority forewarning information, People’s Daily should form a cooperation mechanism with the government, make full use of its characteristic of the government mouth speaker, and perfect the forewarning system in constant cooperation.

On the other hand, in the process of post-crisis, People’s Daily should take the responsibility to supervise and timely report the investigation process. It is also important for it to criticize and evaluate the issue, giving the public more comprehensive reports about the issue. From the figure of report theme, it is clear that @People’s Daily only has 19% of the news in the post-crisis stage, the investigation and evaluation of the crisis are seriously deficient. The reports of attribution of responsibility are also quite a few. Media should not only play the role of reporting news, but it is also their responsibility to help accelerate the investigation process and find out the truth. Therefore, it is important for People’s Daily to enhance the media coverage of post-crisis stage. If the media want to comprehensively report an issue, it is essential for them to evaluate the issue, find out the causes of the issue and the problems in disaster rescue and rehabilitation. This can prevent social emergencies in the future, it can also help the government improve the ways of disaster rescue.

There are also some problems that People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily
have respectively when they are reporting the news. For People Daily Newspaper, there are three points that can be improved in the future social emergency coverage:

1. Establish and improve the emergency reporting system
Since social emergencies often happen suddenly and unpredictable, news media do not have enough time to prepare the reports which impede the timely coverage of the emergencies. Therefore, it is important for People’s Daily to establish a comprehensive system to conduct news report when emergency occur. A set of comprehensive, high maneuverability emergency reporting system can not only improve the speed that media react towards the issue, it can also make the reporting content more thoroughly. Journalists should rush to the location where the accident happened to get the latest information and send the information back to the media workshops. People in the media workshop should formulate macro projects and effectively guide the journalists to get the most useful information (Dong, 2014). At present, the timeliness of People’s Daily Newspaper is very deficient, in “Tianjin Explosion” case, there was only one report been released the day after the emergency happened. People’s Daily Newspaper as one of the most influential newspaper in China, should take their responsibilities, and deliver the news to the public as soon as possible.

2. The affinity of report needs to be improved
As the mouth speaker for the government, People’s Daily Newspaper has the responsibility to propagate the government policies, guide the public opinion, lead the mainstream values and so on. Therefore, whether in emergency coverage or other types of report, People’s Daily Newspaper always has a serious and rigorous attitude. However, from the news coverage of “Tianjin Explosion” case by People’s Daily Newspaper, it is found that the reports are full of seriousness and lack of affinity. For instance, in the themes of the report, the percentage of condolence and mourning accounts for only 7%. When facing emergencies, it is important to comfort and calm public’s emotions. Therefore, if the reports cannot relate to ordinary people in details,
and language style cannot be used to comfort people, it will be hard to give public the sense of belonging and the resonance in emotions, which will ultimately affect the communication effect of the incident (Dong, 2014).

3. The balance of the report needs to be improved.
From the news source, we can see that @People’s Daily has clear tendency towards the news came from the government. 46% of the news came from the government which will greatly influence the balance of the report. More news should be collected from affected People and their families as well as netizens/citizens. Only in this way, the voice of public will be heard. From the news themes, we can also see that the theme of leadership command accounts for the most, which explains that People’s Daily Newspaper focused a lot on the government image building. People’s Daily Newspaper as one of the most influential newspaper in China should be more objective and fair and be able to speak for the voices come from different parts of the society.

For @People’s Daily, there are also some parts of their emergency coverage that can be improved.
1. The news coverage should avoid homogenization
Since 28 percent of the new came from news media organizations, it will cause the problem that many official Sina Weibo accounts of traditional media reporting the issue in the similar angle and reporting the similar content. One post might be reposted by many different accounts which made high homogeneity of the information. Thus, each media might lose its own characteristics. It is understandable that @People’s Daily wanted to post the news timely, but it should also pay attention to the originality of the news, making @People’s Daily differentiate from other news organizations. Each mainstream media should have their own strong professional team and should be creative about the content and angles of the news coverage, avoiding homogeneity news and improving the competitiveness.
2. The role of “gatekeeper” should be improved

Since Sina Weibo is a social media platform that everyone holds a microphone, and everybody is the disseminator of the information. A huge amount of information can be updated when an emergency happens, and rumors can easily generate from that information. For instance, if some people release incendiary, demagogic information during the time emergency happens, it can easily cause social unrest. Therefore, it is important for the media to play the role of “gatekeeper”, and to see the most valuable news from the vast amounts of information and disseminate them to the public. Also, if the rumor already spread, it is important for the media to stand out and clarify the facts to the public. In the case of “Tianjin Explosion”, there are a lot of rumors saying that the dead people are over 1000, causing a great social unrest (Guo, 2015). Although @People’s Daily had some posts about the rumor warning, the posts are not updated immediately after the rumor appeared (ibid). @People’s Daily should make full use of the great influence and take the responsibility of maintaining the social stability when an emergency happens. As the same time, it should also improve the accuracy of their news coverage and counteract rumors in the beginning.

3. Enhance the content of the report

Due to the 140-character limitation of Sina Weibo, the posts on @People’s Daily are usually very short, and lack of in-depth reporting. Most of the posts are just news about the emergency situation, there are not much comment or evaluation about the issue. This can be improved by putting the link on the post and lead the audiences to read deeper information related to the issue. The forms of the @People’s Daily, showed us there are only 13 posts out of 173 posts that have links in the posts. The number of this kind of posts needs to be increased. On the other hand, from the figure 10—the forms of news of @People’s Daily, we can also notice that most of the posts are in the form of text with images. Although this pictures can be used to improve the audiences’ visual experience, other forms such as video should also be used more to enhance the content of the news coverage. The form of the news coverage should be more comprehensive and diversified.
All of the problems above should be taken into consideration when news media are reporting social emergencies. Trying to make full use of their advantages and avoid disadvantages. Making their report more comprehensive, balanced and timely.

**Future Research**

The aim of this research is to find out how social emergencies are covered on People’s Daily Newspaper and @People’s Daily and to find out the similarities and the differences between their coverage. Therefore, the focus of this thesis is the report contents itself. The important role of audiences on Sina Weibo is out of research, this should be included in future studies.

There are also some limitations of this study that should be taken into consideration in the future research. In my study, I have only chosen one emergency event which may not cover the variety of the social emergency phenomenon. Therefore, in the future studies, more events can be chosen as research objects. Moreover, since the time period of the data collection was set to one month after the emergency happened, the information may be limited. Hence, in a future study, the time period can be set longer to observe a more comprehensive variation of the reports. Another limitation is that all the data collected were searched by keywords. Therefore, is it possible that some data might be missing. These limitations are expected to be improved in further research. On the other hand, it will be interesting to analyze how social media influence the way traditional media report news. Since the news posted on traditional media and social media are very different, and since social media grow very fast and account for and important role in the media communication, it would be an interesting topic to analyze the long-term impact that social media have on traditional media coverage.
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